

The Influence of Sustainable Development on Retail Store Image

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Abstract

This article explores young consumers' perceptions of the sustainable development (SD) initiatives of French food retailers and evaluates their impact on the brand image of the retailers and their relationships with consumers. The methodology incorporated the analysis of the websites of the main French food retailers, a press review, eight in-depth interviews and a face-to-face survey. The findings highlight that young consumers tend to link SD more to ecology and less to social and economic issues. When a retailer's SD actions are perceived and valued, young consumers show an emotional connection that is translated into positive attitudes, purchasing intentions and a willingness to recommend the retailer. When young consumers are not sensitive to SD actions, they continue to choose their retailer on the basis of geographical proximity. Five key dimensions seem to best describe brand image in relation to SD actions: Sympathy, Innovativeness, Human Touch, Responsibility and Opportunistic Behaviour. This last dimension is the only one with a negative connotation. This is because for some consumers, investments in SD are considered to be mostly driven by profit-seeking.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainable Development, Retailing, Brand Image, France

1. Introduction

Sustainable Development (SD) initially appears in the context of worldwide awareness on the harmful consequences of human activity for the future of our planet. Unfortunately, many companies began to feel concerned about SD only when their reputations suffered through non-performance or a negative rumour. An illustration of this is the collapse of Nike's sales in 1998 when the whole world discovered that its well-known sport shoes were made by exploited Asian children. Other brands, such as Coca Cola, Wal-Mart and Gap, have also been criticized for their lack of commitment to social responsibility (www.marketingweek.co.uk).

This is a strategic topic, since we know that consumers are assigning increasing importance to the responsible behaviour of brands. In France, 65% of French citizens said they prefer brands with an ethical commitment (Ethicity-Ademe, 2006). Consequently, communication about SD has become a strategic issue for many companies when they wish to emphasize their sense of ethics and social responsibility. When such brands fail to do so, public opinion may penalize their irresponsible corporate behaviour by damaging the relationships that brands have with their consumers.

In the case of Nike, the brand was able to correct the situation only by revising the nature of the housing of its workers and communicating its strategy changes to the media. However, these episodes can irreversibly harm a brand's image and change consumers' perceptions and behaviour concerning the brand (Louppe, 2006).

Nowadays, assessing how SD activities could affect consumers' perceptions and their relationships with retailers is an important issue to consider in the retailing sector. Nevertheless, most research initiatives tend to adopt a corporate perspective (Konrad, Steurer, Langer & Martinuzzi, 2006; Gupta & Pirsch, 2008) rather than a consumer perspective. Among the studies undertaken from a consumer perspective, Gupta and Pirsch have examined the effectiveness of corporate social responsibility programmes in influencing store image. These authors conclude that: "*a retailer's ability to offer up-to-date products and relevant selections in conjunction with their ability to do so in a socially responsible manner are both important in determining consumer's retail store image and contributing to the consumer's overall level of satisfaction and loyalty toward the store*".

This research is a first attempt to examine how the incorporation of SD into a retailer's corporate strategy may affect the bonds between the consumer and the retailer's brand. Accordingly, the objectives of this investigative research in the French market are:

To explore how consumers perceive the notion of SD;

To understand how actions perceived as supporting SD could affect brand associations and relationships in the French food retailing sector.

2. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework is built around two main themes. The first theme covers the literature on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and incorporates Sustainable Development (SD) as one of its key aspects. The second theme includes an examination of consumer-brand relationships, brand image and brand associations.

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

In 2001, the European Commission defined CSR as “*a concept whereby companies decide voluntarily to contribute to a better society and a cleaner environment*” (cited in Hartman, Rubin & Dhanda, 2007). It implies that a company, after identifying its stakeholder groups, e.g., investors, employees, customers, suppliers, and public organisations, should integrate its needs and values into its strategic and operational decision-making process. Those supporting a CSR approach should therefore go beyond a simple quest for profit maximization (an economic goal) and also look at corporate social performance (a non-economic goal). Achieving both types of goals, economic and non-economic, will enable the survival and success of the corporation. In this perspective, SD is positioned as a key facet of CSR (Férone, Debas & Genin, 2004; Blowfield & Murray, 2008).

2.2 Sustainable Development

Although it has been discussed by economists since the 1950s, the definition of the SD concept continues to evolve according to developments in the management sciences (Binninger & Robert, 2005, Blowfield & Murray, 2008). The SD term was used by the *Brundtland Commission* which stated what has become the most often-quoted definition of SD as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations, 1987). Though often reduced to its ecological dimension alone, SD really refers to an overall approach, which states that long-term development is feasible only if we reconcile the following three aspects:

- 1) Respect for the environment;
- 2) Social equity;
- 3) Economic profitability.

Specifically, SD requires the maintenance or improvement of the quality of the natural environment to ensure the permanence of resources, to reduce differences in the quality of life among the populations of the world, to promote self-sufficiency among communities and to respect human rights, making it possible to transfer know-how and wealth (including natural resources) from one generation to the next. It is, therefore, the material representation of a close correlation between what it is known as the 3 Ps: *People, Planet and Profits* (Elkington, 1994).

The SD concept includes concerns for equity and social cohesion, as well as the need to avoid threats against the common good of humanity (Gabriel, 2003). Transposed to the corporate view, SD is based on the concept of overall quality at the human level. It leads management to ask itself questions about the foundations of the company, the corporate values, the use of manufactured products (in time and in space) and also the entire manufacturing and commercialization process.

SD is seen as a development process that reconciles economic, ecologic, and social aspects, establishing a virtuous circle between these three poles. This is ecologically sustainable development that is socially equitable but also economically feasible. In others words, the main objectives of the company may still be to minimize risks and generate returns for its shareholders. Yet, the company refocuses more on its workers and less on its profits. Thus defined, SD is not just applied to one aspect of the company; it should also be cross-functional. All functions of the company are affected and contribute at their own level to an overall policy of social responsibility.

For example, since 1990, the trading group *Monoprix* has undertaken an SD strategy that has become a true priority for the company’s 19,000 employees, with fifteen people carrying out SD projects. This is the only trading group that not only has a mascot, “the penguin”, to symbolize SD, but also has a true communication campaign on the subject aimed at the general public, claiming that “*The company thinks, buys and sells in a responsible way*”.

In 2002, the trading group began marketing the *Alter Eco* brand of fair-trade products, killing two birds with one stone, since this is what saved the young company from bankruptcy. The firm also launched its own “SD products” such as *Monoprix Bio* (organic products) in 1994 and *Monoprix Vert* (products stemming from plant chemistry) in 2005.

Monoprix is also concerned with the environment, and in 2000 launched its transparent carrier bags, which use less ink and solvents and are thus less polluting. The shops are concerned with savings on their energy and water consumption, sorting their waste and recycling it and using, among other items, recycled paper. The trading group also selects its suppliers in a way that allows it to ensure that its logistics are environmentally-friendly.

In fact, SD does not involve companies alone, but also investors and consumers. These three players can find simultaneous satisfaction in a policy guided by SD. As shown in Figure 1, the interaction of these key players is heavily influenced by ethical issues that are profitable for all of them.

INSERT FIGURE 1

2.3 Retailing, SD and brand image

Previous research has shown that a corporation’s involvement in SD actions could enhance its corporate image among consumers (Blumenthal & Bergstrom, 2003). However, Gupta and Pirsch (2008) point out that in the retailing literature, the constructs of “store image” or “store personality”, referring here to brand image or brand personality, do not take into account the role of CSR or SD actions. A retailer’s brand image is defined herein by considering only aspects such as geographic location, merchandising, customer service, prices, advertising, personal selling, sales incentives, loyalty programmes and the affective inferences arising from the store’s attributes. This omission in the evaluation of the retailer’s brand image is astonishing because these companies spend a lot of time and money on communicating about their SD commitments and therefore expect an improved valuation in terms of consumer attitudes and relational proximity. According to Lavorata and Pierre (2006), retailers should choose an SD policy since they know that such a decision would help them build a positive and responsible image.

Even though the notion of brand image is widespread in consumer research literature, both the overuse and the misuse of this construct have been the subject of some criticisms (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). According to Reynolds and Gutman (1984), the way in which a brand image is defined determines the nature of the research questions, the methodology and how the findings are expressed. Based on this, it seems wise to clarify its conceptualization. Dobni and Zinkhan’s brand image foundation analysis (1990) offers a clear picture of the meaning and structure of the construct:

concept of the brand perceived by the consumer;

subjective and perceptual phenomenon formed through consumer interpretation, whether reasoned or emotional;

not inherent in the technical, functional or physical aspects of the product but rather affected and shaped by marketing activities, by context variables and by the characteristics of the perceiver;

perception of reality is more important than the reality itself.

The literature review on brand image management, SD policy and retailing allowed the authors to retain some elements for the assessment of the retailer’s image that concern not only the physical attributes of the store, e.g., space, temperature and neatness, but also the more affective attributes such as the “*fit with store personnel*” or even some kind of “*love for the retailer itself*”. Therefore, evaluating the image of the retailer is, in fact, assessing what “attitude” the consumer develops toward the retailer, considering the three components of this attitude: cognitive, affective and behavioral.

2.4 Associations and relationships

The associative network memory theory defines brand image as “*perceptions about a brand reflected by the cluster of associations that consumers connect to the brand name in memory*” (Del Rio, Vazquez & Iglesias, 2001). Brand associations are conceptualized here as multi-dimensional constructs including brand image, perceived quality and brand attitudes (Low & Lamb, 2000). In this perspective, consumers develop stronger memory structures for familiar and well-known brands. Their familiarity with the retailer develops through proximity and the consumers’ frequent shopping experiences. Retailer knowledge will emerge as a result of this familiarity and will be reinforced by the retailer’s communication efforts. This implies that retailers who succeed in communicating their SD commitment will benefit from stronger and more positive brand associations.

Another possible explanation is given by the brand-relationship theory. This theory suggests that consumers develop ties with brands, not only for utilitarian or functional motives, such as geographical proximity, price,

product quality and sales incentives, but also for more emotional and identity-fostering reasons, for example, matching values such as empathy, honesty, trust and solidarity (Fournier, 1998; Roberts, 2005; Cacho-Elizondo, 2006; Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006).

When consumers identify themselves with the values that the brand supports, they will be more willing to establish stronger bonds. Previous research has found that positive brand attitudes, consumer satisfaction and purchasing intentions increase as the congruence between self-image and brand image increases (Graeff, 1996; 1997; Park & Lee, 2005).

3. Study context and research question

In France, food retailers are communicating more and more about their SD strategies through their corporate websites and other traditional media. This trend emerged in the 1990s as a result of societal and governmental pressure and has continued to advance in recent years. The question that arises here is whether SD initiatives are really noticed by consumers, and if they are, how they influence the way in which consumers interrelate with retailers. A first step in the research project was to look at consumers' associations with the brands of food retailers, based on perceived SD actions. A second step in the project was to analyze how these brand associations contribute to a reinforcement of the consumer-brand link.

4. Methodology

The research methodology covered three stages. The first stage covered an analysis of the websites of the main French food retailers and a review of the press. The objective in this phase was to identify the way in which French food retailers communicate their SD actions and whether their SD concern was explicitly linked to their corporate core values. The corporate websites of six French food retailers were evaluated: Auchan, Carrefour, Casino, Cora, Leclerc and Les Mousquetaires. Most of these retailing groups seem to regard their core values as being connected to their SD commitment.

In the second stage, eight in-depth interviews were conducted. Here, the aim was to explore how young consumers perceive SD actions as well as the potential associations that emerge from this perception. The sample used represents the number of respondents that were necessary to achieve a position in which each of the emergent categories and relationships was saturated (Glaser, 1978). This form of theoretical sampling ensures that the emergent theory is fully developed or is not lacking in density or precision (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The sample was composed of male and female undergraduates, from eighteen to twenty-five years old, who voluntarily participated in the study without receiving any kind of financial compensation. All the interviews took place in a Paris business school. They lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes each and were audio-recorded and transcribed using word-processing software. Two researchers conducted the interviews, one of them directing the interview and the other taking notes and asking questions when necessary.

The interview guideline covered three main topics (see Appendix 2). The first topic examined how consumers perceive or interpret the SD concept. The second explored the perceived SD actions implemented by French food retailers. The third focused on specific retailers selected by the interviewee, and analyzed brand associations linked to the perceived SD actions and their impact on the relationship with this specific retailer. These selected retailers are the ones most associated with SD by the interviewee. For the data analysis, a classical content analysis was performed: sorting, categorizing and naming the main emerging themes. SD perception was categorized based on the three dimensions previously mentioned in the conceptual framework (ecologic/social/economic). Brand associations were separated into verbs, adjectives and nouns.

In the third stage, a face-to-face survey was conducted with 97 respondents. Participants were undergraduates from a Paris business school, eighteen to twenty-five years old. The procedure was as follows: first, respondents were given the list of associations linked to retailers that are carrying out SD actions as they emerged in the interviews (see Table 3); second, they were asked to pick out the three main ideas that, in their opinion, were the most relevant. The aim was to validate and grade the main brand associations that had appeared in the second stage of the research.

5. Main results

5.1 *Evolving corporate values connected to SD*

Table 1 presents a summary of the retailers' core values as they appeared at the time the research was conducted (See Appendix 1 for the full table). The values that are most closely related to the retailer's SD commitment are: responsibility (Carrefour), solidarity and equity (Casino), social utility (E. Leclerc), trust (Auchan and Les Mousquetaires) and respect (Cora). However, the words "social responsibility" or "sustainable development commitment" have not yet appeared as part of their message about their corporate values. Nevertheless, it is

important to highlight that retailers seem to be moving in this direction progressively (Lai, Cheng & Tang, 2010). Further longitudinal research could screen this trend in the retailing sector.

INSERT TABLE 1

5.2 Consumers' perceptions of the SD concept

The authors have found a misunderstanding of the SD concept. SD is mainly associated with ecology, environment, nature, pollution, and the use of energy and recycling. That is, the mental association that appears spontaneously is the ecological aspect of SD. The social and economic aspects appear only when an additional recall of information is requested (Loussaïef, 2007). The terms associated with the economic aspect do not refer to the profitability of SD but to overall development: *long-term development, third-world countries, continuous development and new technologies* (see Table 2).

There is, however, a general concern for the future of the planet as the following quotations from participants testify: “*think of tomorrow*” and “*make the effort to leave a better life to future generations*”.

INSERT TABLE 2

5.3 Linking retailing and SD

The weaker accessibility of the social and economic aspects of SD in young people's minds could be explained by the fact that they still have problems in thinking about SD at a corporate level. For them, SD is more easily understood outside the business world. Although some sectors are more naturally associated with SD, such as industry and agriculture, the association is less clear for service sectors like retailing. One explanation is that the retailing-SD relationship is still weak.

Why should retailers be concerned about engaging in SD? As some participants stated: “*just to make more money*”, but they also mentioned: “*I don't think they do anything about SD but it would be a worthwhile thing if they did it*”.

In the French food retailing sector, the only SD-oriented action that interviewees recalled spontaneously was the elimination of plastic bags. When asked to think more deeply, they also mentioned other SD actions performed by retailers: *help small producers in developing countries, provide better working conditions, offer low prices, encourage recycling, care about family, and promote economies of energy, water and paper*. However, the identification of SD actions taken by retailers was not straightforward.

Even though some interviewees recognized that French food retailers make an effort to communicate about their SD engagement, they complained about the lack of visibility of these efforts. Furthermore, interviewees found it difficult to imagine other innovative SD projects that retailers could implement in the future, indicating a lack of knowledge of this topic. Another explanation could be that they do not easily make the retailing-SD link or that they do not feel a need to take a more active role in proposing SD actions to those companies. It is important to note that SD actions were considered in broad terms but not related to a specific programme. On the other hand, authors like Lai, Cheng and Tang (2010) have stated that retailers are more and more expected to embrace green practices for improving their value chain.

5.4 Impact of SD efforts on store image

Although young consumers did not seem to be fully aware of retailers' efforts concerning SD, when they were asked to describe retailers' engagement in SD, the associations emerged effortlessly. The first associations usually came in the form of descriptive adjectives rather than active verbs or nouns. These associations have a positive connotation, which implies reinforcement of brand-image.

However, SD was also associated with higher prices and therefore perceived, paradoxically, as jeopardizing low-income customers. Also, companies communicating about SD were perceived as caring about their brand image. Interviewees that manifested a lower concern for SD were less prone to suggest brand associations (positive or negative) than those that showed a higher concern for SD. Unexpectedly, trust did not appear to be related to SD. The authors premise was that SD in retailing could be associated to greater consumer trust toward the retailer; this link was not clearly established for young consumers. Nevertheless, other studies have found that corporate social responsibility could impact consumer trust (Swaen & Chumpitaz, 2008).

INSERT TABLE 3

5.5 The impact of SD initiatives on consumers' relationships with retailers

The effects of SD on consumers' relationships with retailers were identified through the three facets presented below:

• *The development of an affective bond between the consumer and the retailer*

Two views are noted. On the one hand, some consumers may feel an emotional connection with the company's perceived efficiency in its SD actions. This link is more or less strong and can range from simple sympathy for the retailer to a more complete identification. On the other hand, consumers may remain indifferent to SD efforts and argue that they feel no emotional connection with the retailer, only a functional one. For these consumers, "a supermarket is just a supermarket". Although this affective bond could be associated with various variables, the authors argue that one source of affective attachment could be related to the socially-conscious profile of the individual. A clear example of this attachment is given by "La vie claire", a French high-end retailer specialized in organic products and the identification that its "fan customers" have with the company. However, this retailer did not appear in our interviews. The students talked about organic products only in general terms.

• *The willingness to go, or to go more often to the retailer*

Consumer perceptions were moderated here by their sensitivity to the SD issue. For those not sensitive to SD efforts, there is no reason to go, or to go more often to retailers making SD efforts. For those who are more sensitive to SD actions, awareness of such actions becomes a motivation to do their shopping in these stores, whatever the constraints. However, willingness to go to SD-engaged retailers could also be limited by some practical constraints, in particular by geographic proximity, which remains a fundamental criterion for choosing a retailer.

• *The desire to recommend the retailer*

Two possibilities were observed: some consumers would be willing to encourage family and friends to go shopping in "SD retailers" while others would simply not do it, claiming that this is not relevant for a supermarket. One interpretation of these findings is to question how sensitive and "educated" the consumer is concerning this SD approach. Some participants declared that this sensitivity was encouraged mainly at home and not at school.

For others, this sensitivity comes from previous internships in which they worked for a retailer. However, most participants agreed that if they were more informed about SD actions, they would be more willing to recommend those companies. However, price remains a major issue, especially for students. The preference for a specific retailer is based firstly on price, secondly on geographic proximity and thirdly on "image".

5.6 Main brand associations linked with sustainable development

Table 4 presents a hierarchy of brand associations proposed by young consumers to describe retailers engaged in SD by ranking adjectives, verbs and nouns. "Proximity" and "Offer lower price" are excluded because they are not necessarily linked to SD actions. In this, it can be observed the variety of ideas most frequently associated with retailers perceived as engaged in SD. From the "Pleasant" to "Responsible", from "Human" to "Get close to customers", the consumers perceived retailers involved in SD in a largely positive way. However, some consumers (35 respondents out of 97) think that retailers' actions are not always driven by a philanthropic vision. Image improvement is also a reason why retailers choose to implement SD actions.

INSERT TABLE 4

6. Discussion

One of the main findings of this research is the hierarchy of brand associations brought about by SD actions. Store image is certainly affected by the influence of perceived SD actions. Analysing the associations that are mostly chosen by young consumers, authors explain this influence through five dimensions. On the one hand, there are four positive dimensions: Sympathy, Responsibility, Humanity, and Innovativeness. On the other hand, there is the Opportunistic dimension, which is related to the retailer's willingness to improve its image.

Figure 2 summarizes the five dimensions driving store image on the basis of SD actions.

INSERT FIGURE 2

Description of the five key dimensions explaining the influence of perceived SD actions:

Sympathy Dimension covers:

- Pleasant aspect
- Empathy

Responsibility Dimension is composed of these five facets:

- Responsible
- Citizen, socially aware
- Select SD-engaged suppliers

- Concerned
- Ambition for tomorrow

Human Dimension breaks down into:

- Non-discriminatory
- Care about family wellness
- Human

Innovative Dimension includes the three following aspects:

- Dynamic
- Innovative
- Different

Opportunistic Dimension is the one that involves a negative perception, i.e., seeking:

- Better image
- Profits

7. Limitations and future research

Among the limitations of this research, the authors may mention the qualitative and exploratory nature of the second stage, based on only eight interviews. However, one of the researchers had already conducted previous projects in this research area. Another limitation is that the research has not highlighted the potential effect of moderators such as consumer sensitivity to SD actions, the awareness of SD communication campaigns, the specific effects of the communication instrument used and the level of visibility of communication actions.

The specific nature of each type of French food retailer was not fully taken into account. Further research should test the proposed findings more deeply (qualitatively and quantitatively) by reference to a proposed theory, as well as the impact of possible moderators. It would also be relevant to explore the axes of SD differentiation that retailers should use in their communication strategies. Finally, it would be useful to apply these findings to a particular retailer, using its database of loyal clients and examine the impact of a specific programme on store image.

8. Conclusion

Retailers' corporate values should more directly reflect the CSR commitment of the corporation with respect to the expectations of all types of stakeholders. Although some retailers seem increasingly committed to implementing and promoting SD actions, they fail to establish a clear association between retailing and SD. One reason for this is a lack of an effective communication of their CSR programmes. Another reason is that the retailing-SD connection is not easily made in the minds of the consumers. For them, SD is more closely related to other sectors such as the production and use of power or agriculture.

If retailers want to be identified as socially responsible, they must create the "right" associations to reshape their new brand image. With this in mind, awareness of CSR efforts is an essential attribute in the systematic assessment of their brand image. By developing a social responsibility facet in their image-building programmes, retailers will better meet the expectations of an increasing number of socially-conscious consumers.

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Appendix 1: Corporate Values of Major French Food Retailers

Retailer Group	Food Retailer Brands	Corporate Values	Website
Carrefour	Carrefour Franprix Shopi Dia Ed Champion 8 à huit Ooshop (on line)	Freedom Responsibility Sharing Respect Integrity Solidarity Progress	Carrefour.com
Auchan	Auchan Les Halles d'Auchan Atac Simply Market Easymarché Fredy Eurobounta Auchandirect (on line)	Trust Sharing Progress	Groupe-auchan.com
E.Leclerc	E.Leclerc Système U	Independence Social utility	e-leclerc.com
Les Mousquetaires	Intermarché Ecomarché Netto	Engagement Trust Proximity	Mousquetaires.com
Cora	Cora Match Profi Houra.fr	Respect Honesty Cordiality Trust	Cora.fr
Casino	Géant Casino Super Casino Monoprix Monop' Inno Petit Casino Petit Casino 24h Vival Spar Leader Price	Quality Proximity & Adaptability Solidarity & Equity Dialogue Exchange & Listening	Groupe-casino.fr

Appendix 2: Interview Guideline**Topic 1: SD perception**

What does SD mean to you?

Could you please mention some other words to which you link SD?

If you need to transpose the SD concept to the corporate level, how would you translate/understand/define/describe it?

More precisely, could you give us some examples of actions that a company might undertake in order to subscribe to SD?

Topic 2: Retailer – SD link

Let's talk about retailers now. Do you think that there are retailers that are really committed to SD actions? Which retailers? What actions have they carried out?

If we now talk about the mass distribution of food (if the interviewee has not mentioned food retailers), do you think that there are some food retailers to which you could link SD actions?

Do you know these other food retailers? (Food retailers that have not been mentioned in the previous question). If yes, do you know whether they have implemented SD actions?

How did you hear about these SD actions by mass food retailers? (e.g., website, newspaper, TV, booklet, school, friends, family, etc.)

Topic 3: SD effect on consumers' brand associations and relationships

Is there a food retailer that you particularly think about when we discuss SD? Why?

If you take this food retailer, which nouns, verbs, or adjectives would you associate with it?

How have SD actions affected your relationship with the retailer?

Table 1. Corporate Values of the Main French Food Retailers

Retailer	Corporate Values
Carrefour	Freedom / Responsibility / Sharing / Respect / Integrity / Solidarity / Progress
Auchan	Trust / Sharing / Progress
E. Leclerc	Independence / Social Utility
Les Mousquetaires	Engagement / Trust / Proximity
Cora	Respect / Honesty/ Cordiality / Trust
Casino	Quality / Proximity & Adaptability / Solidarity & Equity / Dialogue / Exchange & Listening

Table 2. Perception of the Sustainable Development Concept

Ecologic	Social	Economic
Environmental protection	Equality of opportunity	Long-term development
Worldwide focus	Harmony	Third-world countries
Energy economy	Workforce diversity	Continuous development
Pollution reduction	Better working conditions	Fair commerce
Recycling	Human-factor oriented	Subcontracting
Energy companies	Equity among countries	New technologies
Water treatment	Sharing among generations	
Green political parties	Justice	
Planet, without frontiers	Respect for people	
New materials		
Waste sorting		
Biological products		

Table 3. Main Brand Associations mentioned to describe Retailers engaged in SD

Adjectives	Verbs	Nouns
Citizen, socially aware	Think about employees	Proximity
Responsible	Provide better working conditions	Affective proximity
Visionary	Select SD-engaged suppliers	Sympathy
Innovative	Care about family wellness	Protection
Non-discriminatory	Look at the future	Ambition for tomorrow
Different	Offer low prices	
Empathetic	Have social conscience	
Pleasant	Get close to consumers	
Human	Belong to the SD company’s world	
Provident	Pay attention to others	
Concerned	Leave a better world	
Dynamic	Help others to be aware of SD	
Sharing	Look for a better image	
Building		
Protective		

Table 4. Hierarchy of Brand Associations mentioned to describe Retailers engaged in SD

Adjectives	n	Verbs	n	Nouns	n
Pleasant	49	Offer low prices	60	Proximity	59
Dynamic	44	Look for a better image	35	Sympathy	23
Innovative	38	Select SD-engaged suppliers	21	Ambition for tomorrow	21
Citizen, socially aware	30	Get close to consumers	21	Protection	12
Responsible	30	Care about family wellness	20	Affective proximity	9
Different	25	Look at the future	17		
Non-discriminatory	24	Think about employees	14		
Concerned	22	Provide better working conditions	10		
Protective	21	Leave a better world	10		
Human	20	Have social conscience	7		
Sharing	15	Help others to be aware of SD	6		
Building	14	Pay attention to others	5		
Visionary	12	Belong to the SD company's world	3		
Provident	8				
Empathetic	6				

n = number of observations; N= 97 respondents

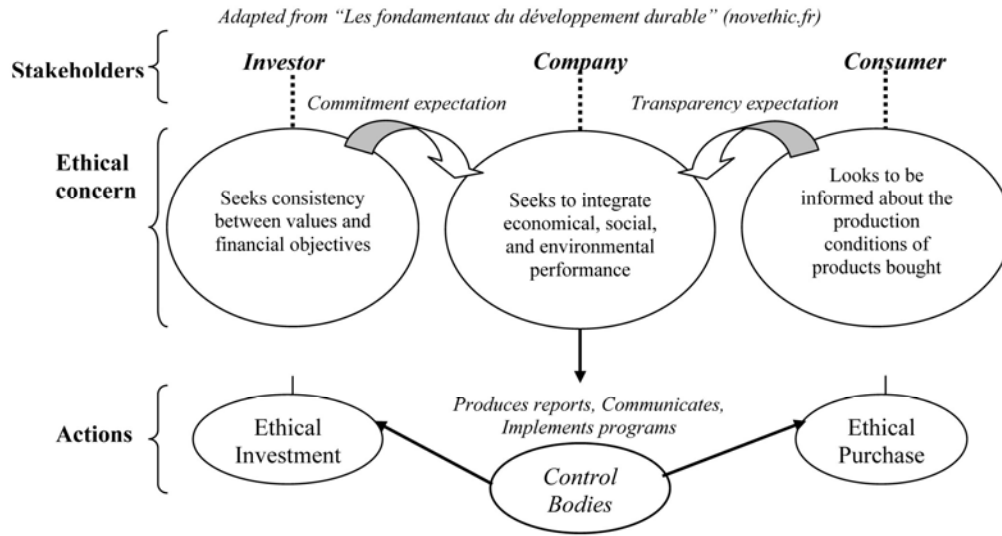


Figure 1. Sustainable Development & Stakeholders' Ethical Concerns

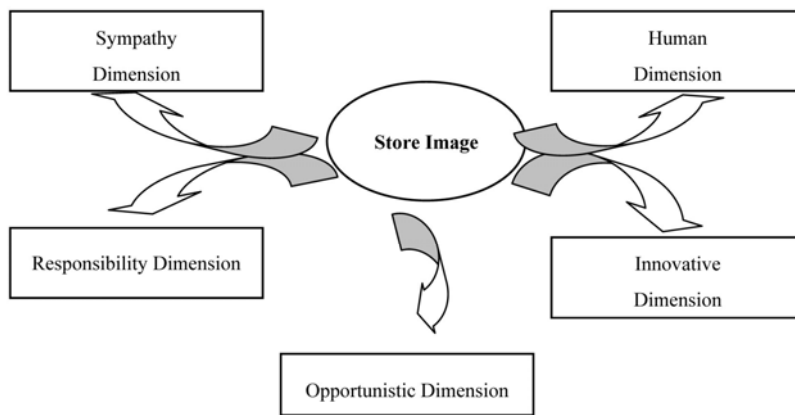


Figure 2. Impact of Sustainable development on key brand image dimensions