Managing Sustainable Consumption: Shaping the Customer Journey with a Focus on Sustainability in the Food Industry

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Abstract

As consumer awareness surrounding impacts of the climate crisis continues to be a notable threat, businesses are searching for new models to make their sustainability profile even better. As a result, the implementation of a company's sustainability vision following the SDGs has to be linked closely to the integration of customers into strategic action. One success factor is the management of customers over their entire life cycle. The Customer Journey serves as a model to systematise this approach, by designing touchpoints throughout the purchasing process in order to motivate consumers to act sustainably. Based on behaviour models, the authors develop recommendations for the food industry to design a sustainable Customer Journey that helps to reduce the percentage of consumers reporting positive attitudes to sustainable products while not exhibiting corresponding behaviour.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the topics of sustainable management and corporate social responsibility have become increasingly important for corporate action in business, politics, and society – and thus for the future success of a company. The challenges are numerous, i.e., pandemics, climate change, human rights violations in the supply chain, loss of biodiversity, to name just a few but they, nevertheless, have a firm grip on corporate activity. Therefore, in this context, dealing with all relevant stakeholders, from suppliers to investors and management to the end consumer, is becoming the focus of economic and scientific debate (Tennert, 2019).

This paper adopts the results of the study by Ebner and Baumgartner (2008) in order to omit a detailed definition and historical development of the terms sustainable development (SD) and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The authors tested four different clusters – SD: based on the definition of the Brundtland Comission or the triple bottom line, CSR as the social strand/stakeholder approach, SD as the basis for CSR, and SD and CSR used synonymously. "Cluster four represents 16 out of 43 articles, which indicates that the terms SD and CSR … can be used synonymously. … It reflects some kind of trend as more and more companies define their social and environmental commitment as CSR" (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2008, p. 9). These findings are in line with the argumentation also proposed by Amjad et al. (2021).

The collective perspective is often what comes to mind first when thinking about how to make changes at the global scale. This mindset, however, focuses on the destination, not the journey. What many tend to disregard is the significance of the individual as part of the bigger picture. Only by shifting consumer perceptions and habits first can a collective impact be achieved. The food industry represents one such area, where individual behaviours can have dramatic global effects. On the one hand, this presents a promising opportunity for sustainable development. However, in its current form, food production, consumption, and waste are among the most harmful contributors to environmental degradation.

As consumers have understood that through their behaviour they can counteract ecological and social problems, and thus the negative consequences for life as a whole, the question arises as to what different behaviours this changed understanding of consumer responsibility could lead (Balderjahn, 2021). In general, three different options can be distinguished:

- *Sufficiency option*: consumption of a particular product is reduced or completely abandoned.
- *Efficiency option*: consumed are products that cause the least possible damage to the environment or can be used more sustainably. An example of the first would be biodegradable packaging materials compared to traditional petroleum-based plastic packaging. In another example, LED light bulbs allow for their more sustainable use.
- *Recycling option*: here, preference is given to products that can be returned into the economic cycle or recycled. The collection of waste glass and paper, or collection campaigns run by various clothing companies, are examples of this option.

Against this backdrop, one might assume that there has never been a better time to place sustainable products or service offerings in the food market. Consumers – especially Millennials – are increasingly asking for sustainable brands. Purpose, as a meaningful benefit for ecological, ethical, or social action, is the decisive product feature. Consumer studies have shown that product categories with a high claim to sustainability often show twice the growth as traditional product variants. Nevertheless, it is important to address a yet unresolved paradox when discussing sustainable consumption: only a small percentage of consumers who report a positive attitude to environmentally-friendly products and services exhibit corresponding purchasing behaviour. In a recent study, 65 per cent of the respondents said they preferred sustainable brands, but only about 26 per cent actually went on to buy them (White et al., 2019a).

The so-called intention-behaviour gap has been intensively examined in the previous literature regarding green consumption in general or focussing on a single ethical issue, such as sweatshop clothing, fair trade, e-waste recycling, or organic

products (Casais & Faria, 2022). So far, the link between the motives of sustainable behaviour and customer management in the food industry to overcome the intention-behaviour gap has not been examined intensively yet. In order to close this gap, we attempt herein to combine findings from sustainable consumer behaviour studies in the food industry with those on the Customer Journey. On the basis of this theoretical foundation, this article answers the following two questions with the help of the factual-analytical research strategy:

- Which aspects are the most relevant for shifting consumer buying behaviour towards sustainability in the food industry?
- How can the Customer Journey be designed accordingly to enhance sustainable consumption in the food industry, in order to close (or at least significantly reduce) the still currently existing intention-behaviour gap?

The chosen studies discussing sustainable consumption in the food industry focus on the consumer perspective.

Methodology

The lack of a scientific approach to managing sustainable consumption through a sustainable Customer Journey first requires the generation and integration of new insights into the research process, in order to verify them in a further step. In doing so, the present work, appropriate to the purpose of the investigation, makes use of the factual-analytical research strategy according to Grochla, which is "… oriented towards the penetration of complex contexts and the development of bases for action…" (Grochla, 1978). With the help of the factual-analytical approach, the elements of a frame of reference can be continuously specified and supplemented without first having to be empirically verified. The methodology is based on a constant process that starts from the known variables of underlying studies and analyses and extends them to arrive at new variables and assumptions about potential cause-effect relationships. This allows models to be developed that simplify and transparently visualise complex relationships by formalising them (Grochla, 1978). The "search for new relevant quantities and for new statements about the relationships between [the] different quantities" (Grochla, 1978) forms the central pillar of the method employed in this study.

The following methodological procedure for gaining new insights underlies the remarks made here. After a brief definition of the concept of the Customer Journey, with a focus on explaining individual touchpoints, the authors use an empirically tested model of sustainable consumption, the SHIFT model, which is relevant herein, as a starting point for discussing the sustainable behavioural factors relating

to consumers in the food industry. In the first step, the SHIFT model is examined in terms of the determinants and drivers of sustainable behaviour with respect to the food industry. In the second step, the results are then transferred to the sustainable Customer Journey and the existing correlations are shown. The aim is to derive a framework for sustainable consumer management for future-oriented companies in this important sector.

Sustainability in the food industry

Considering the business perspective first, the global food and grocery retail market was worth $ 11.7 trillion in 2019 and is expected to grow at a 5% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) between 2020 and 2027 (Grand View Research, 2020). According to the the same research, this growth rate can be explained by an increase in consumer disposable income. At the same time, consumers, particularly among the working population, are seeking more and more convenience in their food purchasing and consumption habits. This is reflected in global revenues of over 40% deriving from packaged goods such as processed meat, cheeses, yogurt, and frozen groceries (Grand View Research, 2020). From a macro-economic perspective, economic development and natural resource-use have a prominent inverse relationship. Countless studies confirm that the food industry contributes significantly to environmental degradation throughout the entire consumption process (UNEP, 2010).

Simultaneously, the industry is highly dependent on the prosperity of the environment and the availability of natural resources. An EU study, using a lifecycle assessment-based approach, revealed that the environmental burden from food accounts for 20%–30% of total consumption (Notarnicola et al., 2017). Within this category, meat and dairy products were determined to be the most harmful food groups (Notarnicola et al., 2017). Ernstoff et al. (2019) provide similar evidence in their study about the impact of animal products. Surprisingly, beef is not the highest consumed meat product in terms of quantity, and yet it has the greatest environmental impact per kilogramme (Notarnicola et al., 2017). Dairy, on the other hand, has a relatively low impact, but it is counterbalanced by a high annual consumption rate per capita (Notarnicola et al., 2017). These results suggest that the environmental burden of both meat and dairy can be improved by reducing the rate of consumption.

Plastic packaging is another pressing issue that has detrimental effects on the environment. Since its introduction in 1950, global production has skyrocketed to 380 million tons in 2015 (Geyer et al., 2017). In addition, half of all plastics have ever been produced since 2005 (Gavigan et al., 2020). Since plastic is not a biodegradable

material, it eventually breaks down into smaller pieces known as 'microplastics' (United Nations, 2018), which are then deposited into the ocean, threatening many of its important ecosystems. Not only does this lead to negative atmospheric effects, but it also threatens one of the world's major food sources (Costa, 2020). Statistics provided by the World Economic Forum (2016) reveal that by 2050 oceans are expected to contain, by weight, more plastic than fish. These figures are certain to continue if nothing is done to stop it. In order to respond effectively to this crisis, several approaches can be considered. First, change can come from the plastics manufacturers themselves, through the so-called 'polluter principle'. In short, the polluter principle is a concrete measure for making plastics manufactures take responsibility for their negative environmental impacts (Seht & Ott, 2000). In addition, restaurants and businesses can focus on eliminating single-use plastics – a measure that companies like IKEA, Unilever, and McDonald's have already implemented (Costa, 2020). The individual consumer can also make positive contributions by focusing on their consumption habits; reusable bags and containers, for example, could offer an easy start in this regard (United Nations, 2018). These insights suggest that the responsibility for reducing plastic production and waste must be distributed equally between the collective and the individual. Through thoughtful, targeted measures at the political level as well as conscious efforts made by the consumer, there is tremendous potential to make improvements in this area.

Another challenge in the food industry is the issue of food waste. On top of the environmental burden caused by agricultural practices, studies gathered by the UN estimate that over 30% of the food produced each year, an equivalent of 1.3 billion tons, is either lost or wasted. This is equal to a financial loss of $1 trillion on an annual basis (United Nations, 2018). The problem can arise in several stages in the supply chain, including harvesting, transportation, storage, and processing (United Nations, 2020). Not only does this demonstrate the poor management of natural resources, but it also represents a great injustice for developing countries who struggle with food security. In addition, the UN predicts that the materials needed for consumption and production will triple by 2050 if current trends continue (United Nations, 2018). Referring back to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, SDG12 aims to tackle the issue of food waste by improving resource efficiency in consumption and production (United Nations, 2020). Achieving this goal would bring positive changes to the food industry, both environmentally and economically. In addition, SDG12 addresses human well-being in the hope of improving food security and nutrition in underdeveloped countries (United Nations, 2018).
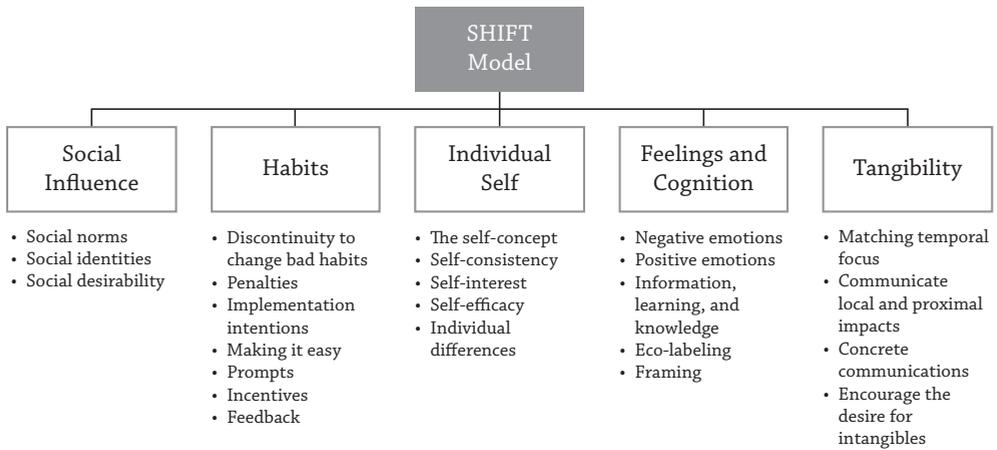
The SHIFT model

A number of studies on sustainable consumer behaviour already exist in the literature, and they consider different influencing factors or differ in terms of how deeply they analyse relevant dimensions (Tennert, 2019; Thøgersen, 2014). However, these models have one thing in common: the value-belief-norm theory (Stern, 2000) – a theoretical foundation providing a framework for investigating normative factors that promote sustainable attitudes and behaviour. The following 'orientations' are distinguished in this theory:

- *Egoistic orientation*: Through sustainable consumption the consumer addresses his or her own benefit.
- *Altruistic orientation*: The well-being of (fellow) humans guides sustainable consumer behaviour.
- *Biospheric orientation*: Sustainable consumption benefits the environment and the species living in it.

The three different orientations help to understand why the consumer does or does not act sustainably, and environmentally-conscious behaviour is thus dependent on the consumer's own activated norms. This is accompanied with a sense of responsibility for the implications of one's own behaviour as well as the presumed consequences of 'not acting'. For example, if a consumer has identified environmental pollution as a problem, he or she must also feel morally obliged to act accordingly. Product abandonment or the willingness to pay higher prices for more sustainable products are possible consequences of action. These behavioural patterns, based on Schwartz's (1977) norm-activation model, offer explanations for the decision-making dilemma, in which consumers are often caught. Ultimately, they prevent organic products from being consumed and provide another reason why the previously mentioned 'behaviour gap' exists. These two models underpin the chosen research question. After all, if the intention-behaviour gap cannot be closed, it will be nearly impossible to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (United Nations, 2020).

The most comprehensive – and also most up-to-date – model of sustainable consumption is the so-called SHIFT model. SHIFT stands for social influence, habit formation, the individual self, feelings and cognition, and tangibility (White et al., 2019b). Figure 1 provides an overview of the influencing factors for sustainable consumer behaviour.

Figure 1. The SHIFT model

SHIFT Model				
Social Influence	**Habits**	**Individual Self**	**Feelings and Cognition**	**Tangibility**
• Social norms • Social identities • Social desirability	• Discontinuity to change bad habits • Penalties • Implementation intentions • Making it easy • Prompts • Incentives • Feedback	• The self-concept • Self-consistency • Self-interest • Self-efficacy • Individual differences	• Negative emotions • Positive emotions • Information, learning, and knowledge • Eco-labeling • Framing	• Matching temporal focus • Communicate local and proximal impacts • Concrete communications • Encourage the desire for intangibles

Source: White et al., 2019b.

In this model, sustainable consumer behaviour is defined as the behaviour that leads to a reduction in negative impacts on the environment, as well as the reduced use of natural resources throughout the life cycle of a given product or service. Although the focus of this definition is on environmental improvements, in a holistic approach such as the SHIFT model, both dimensions of sustainability, namely ecological and social, are addressed (White et al., 2019b). The SHIFT model consolidates all data and findings in the area of sustainable consumer behaviour that have been empirically collected and published in previous studies. Using a clear model structure, the five categories used in Figure 2 describe the most common concepts and summarise the literature on sustainable behaviour change in an integrative manner.

Drivers of sustainable behaviour

This part provides a brief explanation of the five SHIFT model dimensions, the contents of which are taken from the paper by White et al. (2019b).

- Consumers are influenced by their social surroundings (Abrahamse & Steg, 2013). Their action can be driven by a number of factors, including what the individual believes to be socially appropriate, the feeling of belonging to a social group or the perceptions of others around them. As described by White et al. (2019), these behaviours are part of social norms, social identity, and social desirability. SHIFT specifies that *social influence* is highly applicable to sustainable food consumption. As with many other behaviours, sustainable food choices present an opportunity

for consumers to fulfil ethical and moral obligations (Dowd & Burke, 2013). People buy sustainably sourced food because it gives them the feeling of 'doing the right thing'. These perceptions are largely shaped by society as acceptable or correct behaviours.

- *Habit formation* is a particularly complex obstacle to overcome since it involves two separate challenges. First, there is the issue of unsustainable habits, which, like normal habits, become habitual over time through regularly encountered contexts (Kurz et al., 2015). They might be broken by applying penalties. Due to the possibility of receiving a negative response, White et al. (2019) see such routes as less desirable in contrast to positive behaviour change strategies. Creating new habits represents the second challenge in tackling the SHIFT framework's concept of habit formation. The long-term effectiveness of this strategy is dependent on old habits being disrupted and replaced with new, more sustainable ones. Instead of illustrating this concept as an abrupt change for the consumer, White et al. (2019) believe it should be framed as an easy transition. The food industry is a perfect application for habit formation, as it demands more from consumers than a simple one-time action or change.

- Sustainability can appear much more attractive when personal benefits such as health or product quality are highlighted. Especially in situations where sustainable behaviours are seen as a trade-off, the SHIFT framework suggests highlighting how the outcome benefits the *individual self*, i.e., emphasising self-efficacy with the idea of prioritising one's own needs and wants, which can also be related to individual beliefs and value systems. Meat consumption, for example, is the point for many consumers at which individual preferences can overpower all other factors, including values relating to protecting the environment. This makes sustainability initiatives particularly difficult to implement, since the behaviour change threatens the self (Murtagh, 2015). A study by Peattie found that the best scenario for motivating consumers to choose sustainable options is when the consumer compromise for the product is low, and the confidence that the behaviour will make a difference is high (Peattie, 2001). White et al. (2019) refer to this scenario as a matter of self-efficacy, in that consumers want to feel like their behaviours have a positive impact.

- In consumer decision-making, the SHIFT framework refers to *feelings and cognition* as an 'either/or' scenario. These two concepts are presented together, representing the two routes consumers can take to effect action: one that is either feelings- or cognition-dominated (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). The term 'feelings' in this context involves the positive and negative emotions associated with sustainable behaviour. 'Cognition', on the other hand, plays a role in sustainable actions when the consumer considers aspects such as information and learning,

eco-labelling, and framing (White et al., 2019). White et al. are dubious about recommending evoking negative emotions such as fear, guilt, and sadness, as these can often become too intense and lead to opposite effects. Positive emotions, in contrast, have been shown to be effective motivators for getting consumers to take action (White et al., 2019).

- The *tangibility* component of the SHIFT framework discusses sustainable actions in terms of their proximity to the self. Getting consumers to behave sustainably often requires them to put aside their own immediate interests and prioritise the needs of others. This is fairly difficult to do when sustainability activities seem abstract or immeasurable to the consumer. Weber (2010) notes that the abstract nature of sustainability efforts and their impacts comes from a general difficulty in tracking and measuring their changes. In addition, progress occurs slowly over time, which contradicts consumers' present-focused tendencies.

Main aspects involved in shifting consumer behaviour towards sustainability in the food industry

This section determines which components in the SHIFT framework are considered most important (most frequently discussed) to the food industry by research papers. This was done by coding the SHIFT model's drivers of sustainable behaviour in order to make connections between the studies on the textual level. The coding system then revealed how frequently the topics were carried over to further studies. Figure 2 shows the SHIFT framework codes as a percentage distribution.

Figure 2. Main aspects involved in shifting consumer behaviour towards sustainability in the food industry (%)
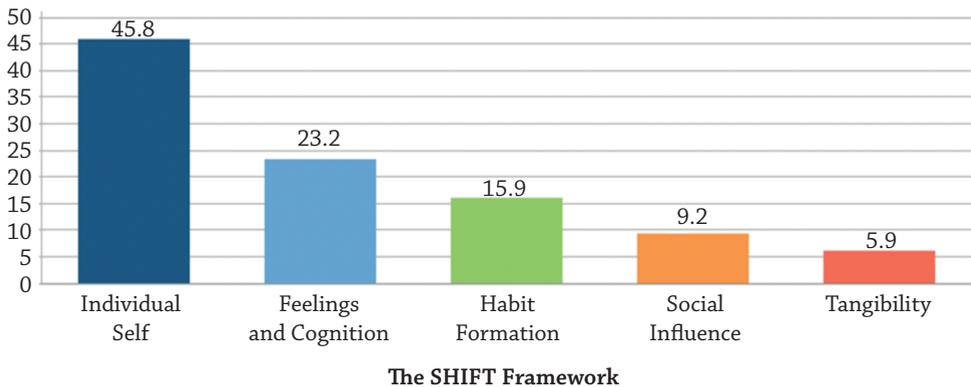
Source: own illustration.

As shown above, the percentages for the SHIFT framework codes range from 45.8% to 5.9%, with the 'individual self' the most present in the literature and 'tangibility' the least. The 'individual self' was an interesting outlier, with 170 coded segments found in the literature. Not only did this topic represent the highest proportion out of all five SHIFT elements, but it also received the highest percentages when looking at the eight articles individually. In general, 'feelings and cognition' and 'habit formation' were consistently present, appearing in 23.2% and 15.9% of the literature, respectively. Less frequently discussed were 'social influence' and 'tangibility'. The fact that tangibility was the least discussed among the eight articles was surprising, since White et al. (2019) emphasise its close connection with the individual self, which, as already mentioned, was the most frequently occurring topic. Lastly, although only appearing in fewer than 25% of the articles analysed, 'feelings and cognition' is nonetheless a current topic of discussion in the food industry.
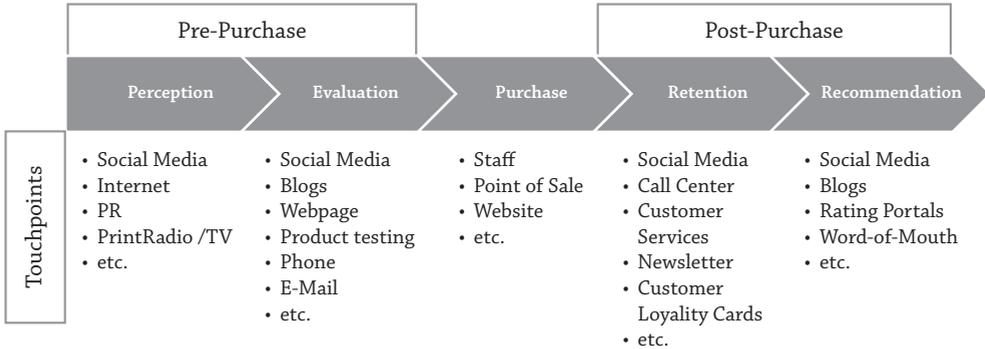
The Customer Journey

The structure of the Customer Journey

Basically, a Customer Journey can be defined via a diagram illustrating the steps a customer goes through when engaging with a company, whether it be in relation to a product, an online or retail experience, a service, or any combination thereof, while learning about, purchasing, or otherwise interacting with it (Dey, 2017). Thus, the Customer Journey encompasses all points of contact, such as places, people, products, or other marketing actions at which customers interact with a (corporate) brand before, during and after a product purchase (Keller, 2017). These points of interaction are called 'touchpoints', and depending on the target group to be addressed, they must be designed individually.

Figure 3 shows the structure of the Customer Journey based on the purchase decision process. In an early work on the Customer Journey, Lemon and Verhoef divided its individual phases into pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). However, based on this basic structure, a five-stage process is considered standard nowadays, as it further details the pre-purchase and post-purchase phases (Engel and Spiegel, 2015). Following this structure, the phases of the Customer Journey are divided as follows: perception, evaluation, purchase, retention, and recommendation.

Figure 3. The structure of a Customer Journey

	Pre-Purchase			Post-Purchase	
	Perception	Evaluation	Purchase	Retention	Recommendation
Touchpoints	• Social Media • Internet • PR • PrintRadio /TV • etc.	• Social Media • Blogs • Webpage • Product testing • Phone • E-Mail • etc.	• Staff • Point of Sale • Website • etc.	• Social Media • Call Center • Customer Services • Newsletter • Customer Loyalty Cards • etc.	• Social Media • Blogs • Rating Portals • Word-of-Mouth • etc.

Source: own illustration.

It must be pointed out that the course of a Customer Journey does not necessarily have to follow the buying behaviour process in a linear way. There can be jumps back and/or shortenings, or even interruptions to the buying process. The individual phases are described briefly below.

- The *perception phase* is the first in the Customer Journey. The consumer does not yet have a specific purchase intention, and they come into contact with a brand or a company at the first touchpoints. The goal for companies must, therefore, be to generate attention and interest among consumers in their own product. In doing so, it is often possible to overcome the consumer's attention threshold, primarily through an emotional appeal (Engel & Spiegel, 2015). The aim of this phase is to trigger a need in the consumer.
- In the following phase (*evaluation*), the consumer analyses the existing offer by means of which the identified need can be met. A weighing up of possible offers takes place (Engel & Spiegel, 2015). The customer compares alternatives, obtains opinions from third parties and forms an evoked opinion in order to decide on a purchase alternative then.
- In the *purchase phase*, the consumer deals with purchase conditions. Prices are compared and the best possible conditions are determined.
- The phase following the purchase is called *retention*. Here, the service concept plays a particularly important role, as the goal for companies is to turn a one-time buyer into a regular customer. The necessary basis of trust can be created, for example, through automated or personal advice and support.
- *Recommendation* is the fifth – and thus final – phase of the Customer Journey. Customers should be motivated to act as ambassadors for the company. Through the active creation of content, word-of-mouth recommendations, writing of reviews, etc., various touchpoints can be identified here as well.

Based on varying customer needs, large numbers of different touchpoints are created at which consumers can come into contact with a company through its products or branding (Grunert, 2019). It is, therefore, expedient to systematise touchpoints according to the objectives into owned, paid, and earned touchpoints (Esch & Knörle, 2016; Allison & Jones, 2021). *Owned touchpoints* refer to those contact points that are under the direct control of a company, such as its own website, existing salesrooms, employees, etc., and thus, which can also be controlled directly in terms of image-building. At the same time, companies must consider that such direct control through owned touchpoints usually requires a high level of resources. In addition to owned touchpoints, *paid touchpoints* can also be identified on the Customer Journey. Paid touchpoints include all paid measures whereby companies buy a medium for their marketing action, and therefore, they are not directly owned by companies but are designed by them, depending on the desired reach. An example is communication via various media outlets, such as TV, radio, or the Internet. *Earned touchpoints* make up the third category and include all measures that are designed and distributed by third parties without a direct order from the company, for example direct word-of-mouth advertising or customer product reviews on digital platforms (Baxendale, Macdonald, & Wilson, 2015).

Customer Journey mapping

Since companies have different business models and goals, each Customer Journey has to be designed individually. This is known as Customer Journey mapping (Bjornen, 2021), whereby individual customer experiences are visualised as a specific journey along various touchpoints (Stöckle, 2015) and linked on the basis of the interactions between consumers and companies. This provides companies with an opportunity to design services from the customer's perspective. Thus, Customer Journey mapping has been summed up as "a well-known customer-oriented technique used to document and understand a customer's emotional responses to a product/service on an individual journey for improving the overall experience" (Dey, 2019).

The touchpoints and channels that the customer passes through are drawn out on a Customer Journey map. Additional information on the respective touchpoints, as well as the reactions and expectations of customers in relation to the experiences at the touchpoints, supplement the depicted customer view. Thus, for example, strengths and weaknesses as well as feelings can also be recorded (Sünkel & Weber, 2017). Depending on how many different target groups a company may have, an individual Customer Journey has to be developed for each group then, in order to link their experience with it.

Building on the SHIFT categories of sustainable behaviour change, companies must first address which level of personal involvement in sustainability each target group provides to integrate that aspect into their marketing communication. As a rule, the higher the level of interest in sustainable products, the greater the customer's identification with such products – and thus the greater the willingness to engage with sustainable communication messages (Zhao et al., 2018). In principle, the more holistically the company's own understanding of sustainability is lived and communicated, the easier it will be to satisfy the customer throughout all stages of his or her journey – and thereby, to bind him/her to the company in the long term.

Shaping the Customer Journey towards sustainable buying behaviour in the food industry

The following explanations have a general logic that needs to be developed company-specifically in a further step. Each company can use the gathered results to come up with its individual way to shape a sustainable Customer Journey.

Figure 4. A framework for building a sustainable Customer Journey in the food industry
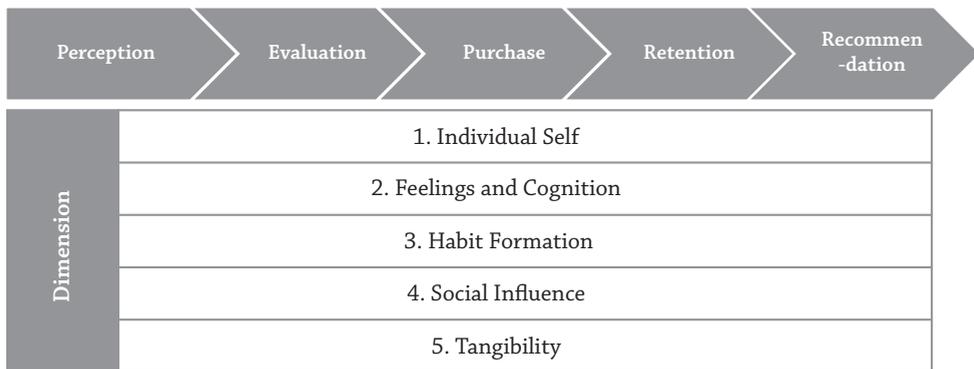
Source: own illustration.

Figure 4 illustrates the dimensions of the SHIFT model, each of which has to be addressed in the Customer Journey in the order of their relevance in terms of managing sustainable behaviour in the food industry. It is evident that the communication activities of companies have to be integrated across all phases of the Customer Journey and be directed by each dimension considered. In doing so, companies face the challenge of realigning previous activities in the sense of

integrated holistic communication. Due to the fact that the initial aim is to build up a structure and an action grid, the following section will refrain from going into more detail on individual touchpoints. These should be built up in a company-specific way, following basic logic, and therefore, not be the focus of further consideration. In the subsequent discussion, the focus will be on the consideration of the behavioural dimensions required for shaping sustainable customer behaviour in every phase of a company-specific Customer Journey.

The approaches taken by companies in the food sector to date have tended to focus on the first three dimensions and are not yet very well developed in terms of social influence and tangibility. Some central aspects will be taken up as examples for further illustration below.

The *individual self* has been identified as the most important influencing factor in the sustainable management of consumers. This aspect is also of central importance throughout the entire Customer Journey. Its relevance is particularly evident in the phase of perception and evaluation, in that the more successfully the product can be portrayed as being in the customer's own sustainable and, in particular, long-term interest, the greater the probability of overcoming their perception threshold. Above all, making people aware of what they or their own descendants might lose through non-sustainable behaviour is an important aspect of the perception phase. Food industry examples in this regard are manifold. Regional – and thus also seasonal marketing – activities of various food retailers can be highlighted here. The customer is convinced that buying regional products makes a relevant contribution to safeguarding his/her own well-being and that of his/her family. A higher vitamin content, healthier and fresher products, and the promotion of the local economy are arguments that directly target the consumer's personal environment (Elle Republic, 2015). Thus, product perception is inextricably linked to the individual's desire for health and well-being, as health benefits are a strong motivator to behave sustainably (Exner & Strüve, 2020). When weighing up the alternatives in the evaluation phase, labels help to underline consumers' personal interests. Spreading health-related information is more effective in shifting consumer behaviour than focusing on sustainability messages (Morren et al., 2020), a good example of which is the labelling of meat with the husbandry form label. This provides comprehensive information about the husbandry of farm animals and thus about the use of antibiotics used in rearing the animals. The fact that consumers named animal welfare as the most important decision criterion when buying sustainable food (YouGov, 2021) underpins the relevance to the food industry of the individual self in shaping the perception phase of a sustainable Customer Journey. Success stories and product reports promulgated by influencers via social media, for example, which can be transferred to the individual's own actions or

person, manifest the decisions for sustainable products in the retention phase and promote repurchases in the recommendation phase.

In addition to the individual self, the *feelings and cognition* aspect is particularly relevant for shaping consumer behaviour. Emotions are becoming increasingly important in marketing, and this also applies to sustainability. Nowadays, this no longer has anything to do with abandonment or a guilty conscience; quite the opposite is valid: sustainability is fun, aesthetic, and pleasure-oriented (Henkel, 2015). The Tony's Chocoloney company offers one such example. Supported by the slogan 'Crazy about chocolate, serious about people', the company wants to make '100 percent produced slave-free' the norm for chocolate (Tony's Chocolonely, 2021), thus taking the social aspect of sustainability into account above all else. The product and communication concept built up since 2005 is young, cheeky, and colourful, and the following applies to shaping a sustainable Customer Journey: as long as customers are taught that they are doing something good for the environment, they are also doing something good for themselves. And they do it even better if they enjoy it.

In order to market sustainable food successfully, it is important to pay attention not only to the 'individual self' and 'feelings and cognition', but also the dimension of *habit formation*. One example is the Hej Natural company, which started in 2016 with the launch of a protein bar that was lower in sugar and higher in fibre and protein than competing products at that time. Since then, Hej Natural has steadily expanded its own line of bars and other snacks. The company's goal is not only to bring fun to healthy eating for consumers, but also, more importantly, to make healthy eating as easy as possible (Life Verde, 2021). This helps consumers strengthen their decision to eat healthily, especially in situations that are actually rather unhealthy. Snacking easily becomes clean-eating, and in doing so the company helps consumers turn bad habits into good habits in terms of sustainability.

With reference to *social influence*, the following discusses the design of the Customer Journey in the food sector. Consumers are often guided by what is socially expected, on the one hand, and what has been proven and found to be good by experts, on the other. With a focus on guiding customers through the evaluation and purchase phase, Beyond Meat, for example, relies on the best product evaluation experts in the world, namely children. The company provides information to its consumers that the Beyond Chicken product is a 'child-approved chicken tender taste' (Beyond Meat, 2021) and that the burgers are also considered good by meat-eaters. Thus, depending on what status someone occupies in a peer or aspirational group, he/she acts as an opinion leader, with influence on other people's consumption habits. In addition, customers in general also want to leave a positive impression on others; therefore, they react in a way that is socially desired. Taking the example of Innocent, which provides consumers with a transparent insight into its supply chain, the company

works exclusively with suppliers whose beliefs around human rights are in line with its own values (Innocent, 2021). In doing so, the company goes beyond basic auditing standards by significantly improving the lives of people in its supply chain and protecting their rights. As information on sustainable products and the necessity to promote sustainable consumption for the benefit of all is communicated to the market, primarily in the retention and recommendation phase, new consumption standards are set and social pressure on sustainable consumption for the market is consolidated.

Even if *tangibility* is not regarded as important as the other dimensions in influencing consumer buying behaviour in the food sector, it cannot be completely neglected. Especially with a topic as global as sustainability, it is difficult for consumers to understand fully its complexity. As a successful example of implementing tangibility in corporate behaviour, Danone is considered herein, because the business meets, according to the Benefit Corporation, "the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose" (BCorporation, 2021). The Benefit Corporation is an international certification programme through which the non-profit organisation B Lab awards companies for their social and ecological impact. It is not awarded or assigned to products or divisions; instead, it measures the company's overall social, environmental, and economic performance, focusing, above all, on public transparency and legal accountability (BCorporation, 2021). Danone is building a more inclusive and sustainable economy, as more than 30% of its businesses through subsidiaries have already been certified. This transparency makes sustainable action tangible for consumers and helps to attract their attention, especially in the perception and retention phase.

Conclusion

Understanding and managing the complexity of human behaviour remains one of the greatest obstacles to sustainability. In order to create sustainable habits, consumers should first prioritise information according to how they define right and wrong in line with personal values. As this research has demonstrated, environmental motivations are usually secondary to motivations pertaining to self-interest.

In this respect, it seemed necessary to focus the empirical results relating to the most relevant aspects for shifting consumer buying behaviour toward sustainability in a specific industry. The individual self is the strongest driver of sustainable consumer buying behaviour. The idea of doing something good for one's body, e.g., through vitamin-rich food, brings sustainable products into the evoked set of

the consumer. At the same time, sustainable consumer buying behaviour must be fun and meet aesthetic demands (feelings and cognition). Habit formation requests a 'simple' consumption experience. To meet all these needs, a higher degree of transparency in the supply chain is necessary. Labels can help, but so can opinion leaders who convey trustworthily the information needed to establish this sustainable consumption experience.

As a result, a framework for action was developed and illustrated initial insights into the design of the Customer Journey in the context of sustainability in the food industry. Further questions can be derived from the empirical results. For example, it would certainly be worth analysing how touchpoints can be specifically designed to nudge the behaviour of consumers with different personal values and different levels of knowledge in the direction of sustainability, or even more sustainability.

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