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Integrating Sustainability into B2B Marketing Strategies: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The sustainability benefits offered by suppliers through their products or services in business-to-business (B2B) industries are increasingly recognized as crucial factors influencing organizational success of buyers. Within B2B interactions, positioning of sustainability offerings by supplier significantly impacts buyer performance. However, there is lack of sufficient research or evidence on the relationship between sustainability values offered by suppliers and buyers' performance metrics. This study aims to investigate the impact of suppliers' sustainability positioning and their sustainability offerings on various aspects of buyers' performance in B2B relationships. A comprehensive review of previous research through a literature review and online surveys are carried out in this research to explore the relationship between suppliers' sustainability offerings and for buyers' performance metrics such as brand image, cost saving, regulatory compliance, premium pricing, customer satisfaction, competitive advantage, etc. Further, this research helps to understand the perception of industry professionals about importance of communicating and demonstrating commitment to sustainability principles and practices in B2B chemical or associated industries. By examining the linkages between supplier sustainability value additions and buyer performance outcomes, this study provides valuable insights for both suppliers and buyers in optimizing their B2B relationships with adoption to sustainability principles. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on sustainable business practices and offer practical inputs for enhancing sustainability positioning strategies in B2B contexts.

Keywords: Sustainability, B2B Relationships, Performance Metrics, Marketing, Sustainability Positioning

Introduction

In today's contemporary business setting, sustainability has become an essential requirement for growth (Eccles et al., 2014). As the global community grapples with environmental challenges and economic uncertainties, the need for sustainable practices in the business-to-business (B2B) sector has become more pressing than ever before (Brown et al., 2021). B2B enterprises are progressively recognizing the importance of aligning their marketing strategies with sustainable objectives. This approach not only contributes to a healthier planet but also resonates with customers who prioritize environmental consciousness. It is crucial to delve into the significance of integrating sustainable goals into B2B marketing strategies and how this alignment can pave the way for a greener and more prosperous future for all stakeholders. By integrating sustainability into marketing strategy, a company can demonstrate its commitment to fulfilling sustainability expectations and establishing trust with its customers. Further, customers, NGOs, and governments encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices through legal regulations and the provision of incentives.

The B2B sector encompassing transactions between businesses rather than directly with consumers, plays a pivotal role in the global economy. From manufacturing and supply chain management to technology and services, B2B industries serve as the backbone of numerous value chains, driving innovation, productivity, and economic growth. However, these industrial activities often come at a significant environmental cost, contributing to resource depletion, pollution, and climate change (Vesal et al., 2021).

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Sustainability entails a deliberate endeavour to meet current needs without compromising the needs of future generations (United Nations, 1987). There are various types industries in B2B set-up impacts sustainability and related factors. In these, chemical industry plays critical roles across multiple facets of human life, particularly in driving forward sustainability initiatives. Currently, chemicals industries contribute the production of over 96% of the world's manufactured goods (Coşkun et al., 2022). However, chemical risks such as the presence of potential toxic or hazardous chemicals in manufactured goods pose threats to both professional users and consumers. Various government authorities across various countries have framed various acts and regulations to regulate such harmful effects of chemicals and protect the human health and environment (Guney et al., 2020). Take an example of Europe where European Commission (EC) has imposed various actions related product recall, rejection of imports for products or chemicals causing risks (European Commission, 2020).

However, there is gap in terms of understanding if chemical or related field supplier's sustainability offerings affect the buyer's brand image, cost saving, regulatory compliance, premium pricing, competitiveness, customer satisfaction etc. Additionally, there is a need for better clarity on why supplier's sustainability offerings or solutions need to communicated effectively to influences buyers. Therefore, in this research we will try to find out the impact of supplier's sustainability offerings or solutions on buyer's metrics based on detailed literature search and quantitative research through surveys. This will help to understand if the sustainability innovations will help both chemical suppliers and buyers offer an opportunity to collaborate together.

Research Questions

Below mentioned are research questions:

- In business-to-business (B2B) relationships, is it important for suppliers to communicate and demonstrate their commitment to environmental sustainability principles, practices and offerings to influence buyers?
- What is the impact of sustainability offerings by suppliers in B2B relationships on buyers' performance metrics such as brand image, cost saving, regulatory compliance, pricing, customer satisfaction, competitive advantage, etc.?

Literature Review

A critical literature review provides a comprehensive survey of existing research related to the research topic. It identifies, evaluates, and synthesizes relevant theories, methods, and findings from previous studies.

Sustainability in B2B Chemical Industry

Concerns about sustainability have emerged due to the increased pollution and resource consumption by industries across all sectors, coupled with the pressures of climate change (Gupta et al., 2018; Sarkis, 2021). Sustainability in business involves reducing pollution and waste, promoting gender equality, decreasing energy consumption, decreasing raw material consumption to minimize negative impact on environmental, etc. (Bag et al., 2018; Narayan & Tidström, 2020). Therefore, B2B companies should take conscious steps and continually enhance their sustainability performance to bolster their positioning in the sustainability realm. This can be achieved through setting ambitious sustainability goals, monitoring progress, and transparently reporting on accomplishments (Gogia et al., 2024).

Environmental Sustainability in B2B industries

As current thesis topic primarily focus on environmental sustainability, it is important to collect and review the available literature. Environmental sustainability implies that current resource consumption practices do not jeopardize the ability of future generations to meet their needs (United Nations, 1987; Development, 1987). There are two sides of environmental sustainability according to this definition which include, first one relates to remediation and the second one targets economic efficiency (Vesal et al., 2021). Environmental remediation is related to improving the type of raw materials included in production and diminishing and treating production waste. On the other hand, economic efficiency is more concerned with using the natural resources in a more efficient way, improving the production to avoid lost and waste. Through economic efficiency, companies can optimize their costs and create a competitive advantage.

Fig. 1: The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2024)

Also, sustainable chemical suppliers are often at the forefront of innovation, developing new technologies and processes that reduce environmental impact.

Sustainability Positioning

Sustainability positioning is a strategic approach adopted by corporations to showcase their dedication to sustainability and differentiate themselves from competitors (Kapitan et al., 2019). Also, it is the strategy which involves integrating sustainability into a company's fundamental operations, strategies, and communication with stakeholders. Prior research has shown that incorporating sustainability practices, particularly focusing on environmental and social aspects like pollution prevention and gender equality, can lead firms to enhance their communication about their sustainability efforts. This is just another way to define or justify the concept of sustainability positioning (Gogia et al., 2024). Sustainability positioning is crucial in marketplaces as it signals product qualities, characteristics, and the expected buyer-seller interaction (Kapitan et al., 2019). The current literature on B2B sustainability positioning mainly focuses on examining its effects on buyer behaviour and financial performance, and on how businesses can successfully incorporate sustainability into their strategies and operations (Kapitan et al., 2019). For firms aiming to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers and make a positive impact on society and the environment, effective sustainability positioning is essential (Karim & Rabiul, 2022). Sustainability positioning is expected to grow in importance as a strategic imperative for firms aiming to stay competitive and garner stakeholder support. As sustainability becomes increasingly relevant for both businesses and society, this strategy becomes essential (Kapitan et al., 2019; Gogia et al., 2024).

Impact of Sustainability on Buyer's Performance Metrics

Recent scholarly discussions in business and marketing advocate for redefining the purpose of business by expanding its objectives beyond mere profitability to encompass broader societal outcomes. This includes shifting focus from solely maximizing shareholder value to equally prioritizing the interests of consumers, suppliers, employees, and the wider community (RRBM, 2017; Voola et al., 2022b). Recent research has highlighted the significant benefits that sustainability offerings by chemical suppliers provide to buyer performance in the B2B industry. Key studies have focused on various aspects, including sustainable supplier management practices, knowledge transfer activities, and environmental investments. One study examined the multidimensional relationships between sustainable supplier management practices and buyer-supplier performance. The findings indicate that sustainable supplier development and collaboration positively impact supplier performance and buyer-supplier relationships (Yang & Zhang, 2017). In next sections, details from literature research about relationship between sustainability solutions offerings by suppliers and various buyers' performance metrics like brand image, cost saving, regulatory compliance, premium pricing, competitive advantage, customer satisfaction, etc are covered.

Impact on Brand Image

Recent studies indicate that sustainability positioning by suppliers can enhance brand image (Gogia et al., 2024). Companies that have robust sustainability reporting systems tend to have stronger reputations and are more likely to attract and retain stakeholders compared to others who are not active in sustainability reporting (Goel, 2018). Upon examining specifically about environmental sustainability practices within B2B contexts, it became evident that manufacturing firms displaying positive environmental attitudes can cultivate a favorable brand image and achieve enhanced market performance. Thus, sustainability positioning emerges as a crucial component of the overall marketing strategy for B2B firms seeking to align with SDGs (Vesal et al., 2021). Some studies have demonstrated that sustainability positioning can result in positive, negative, and sometimes complementary brand images (Ben Youssef et al., 2018). Further, previous research focused on B2B markets has shown that strong brands command a price premium, lower information costs and risks, increase recommendations among B2B customers, and positively impact new product launches (Bendixen et al., 2004; Persson, 2010). Therefore, because of position impact on brand perception, sustainability will also have positive impact on other business performance metrics through improved brand image. While covering details about B2B chemical industry, sourcing chemicals from sustainable suppliers enhances the buyer's brand reputation. Demonstrating a commitment to sustainability is increasingly important to stakeholders, including customers, investors, and the public. This positive perception can lead to increased customer loyalty and market share (Dowling, 2004). Implementing sustainable practices enhances a firm's brand image, which can lead to increased market performance and customer loyalty (Frempong et al., 2021).

Cost Saving

There is potential for innovation by considering sustainability in B2B markets for creating new value by optimizing resource utilization and minimizing waste (Ranta et al., 2020). The performance of suppliers impacts both downstream enterprises and the production and operational performance of purchasers. Therefore, enhancing business performance hinges on making strategic decisions such as acquiring green and sustainable supplier selection (SSS) within supply chains (Govindan et al., 2013).

Impact on Regulatory Compliance

Governmental bodies and environmental organizations increasingly highlight the critical role businesses must play in addressing environmental and social challenges. They stress the urgency for companies to adopt sustainable practices and socially responsible policies to mitigate negative impacts on the planet and society. These entities advocate for corporate strategies that integrate environmental stewardship and social equity, urging businesses to contribute to a sustainable future through proactive engagement and innovation. The emphasis is on the necessity for firms to not only comply with regulations but also to lead in sustainability efforts, thereby fostering a more resilient and inclusive global economy (Gupta et al., 2018; Sarkis, 2021). The United Nations' 17 SDGs offer B2B marketing scholars a valuable framework for conducting research that addresses real-world challenges with societal impact and relevance beyond academia (Voola et al., 2022a). With the rising global awareness of environmental and sustainability issues, governments are becoming more focused, and communities are becoming more informed (Kannan, 2018). Sometimes, firms have been compelled to implement sustainable supply chains due to pressure from regulations and policies, consumers, non-governmental organizations, and market competitors. This multi-faceted pressure necessitates that businesses not only comply with legal requirements but also meet the growing demand for corporate social responsibility. Consequently, companies are integrating sustainability into their supply chains to reduce environmental impact, enhance social welfare, and maintain a competitive edge in the marketplace. These efforts are driven by the need to align with evolving industry standards and stakeholder expectations, ensuring long-term viability and brand reputation (Lin et al., 2015). Complying with environmental regulations is essential for firms to avoid fines and legal complications. Adhering to these regulations ensures that businesses operate within the legal framework set by authorities, thereby mitigating the risk of financial penalties and legal disputes (Frempong et al., 2021).

Impact on Premium Pricing

Innovations and new product development represent a critical focus in B2B research and have emerged as a prominent theme in recent reviews. This area of study, particularly innovations aimed at enhancing sustainability, aligns with SDG 9, which emphasizes the need for industry, innovation, and infrastructure upgrades to promote sustainable technologies. For example, research exploring innovations in integrating green marketing with supply chain management has shown that sustainability-driven innovations enhance overall business performance across the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit (Mora Cortez & Johnston, 2017). Previous research focused on B2B markets has shown that strong brands with brand reputation command a price premium, lower information costs and risks, increase recommendations among B2B customers, and positively impact new product launches (Bendixen et al., 2004; Persson, 2010).

Impact on Competitive Advantage

The globalization of markets and the continuous emergence of new social challenges require preserving and enhancing the competitiveness of corporate groups, prompting the search for innovative ways to create multifaceted value for customers. New business models centred on sustainability synchronize a range of values—economic, social, and environmental—and integrate these values across all aspects of their multifaceted value creation (Šimberová & Kita, 2020).

Customer Satisfaction

B2B teams with shared values regarding environmental improvement can improve organizational sales performance with the use of concept of environmental stewardship as a marketing strategy (de Ruyter et al., 2009). Scholars now agree that sustainability solutions offered by suppliers lead to increased performance, customer commitment (Casidy & Lie, 2023), corporate reputation, trust and cooperation (Gabler et al., 2023). Implementing robust sustainability practices can significantly enhance trust and satisfaction among stakeholders. When companies demonstrate a genuine commitment to environmental and social responsibility, they build credibility and foster trust with their customers, investors, and partners. Sustainable practices signal a company's dedication to ethical operations, which can lead to increased customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Gaps in Current Literature

- *Lack of Industry-Specific Studies:* While there is substantial research on sustainability in general, there is a scarcity of studies focusing specifically on the chemical and related manufacturing sectors. These industries have unique challenges and opportunities related to sustainability that are not adequately addressed in the current literature.
- *Comprehensive Impact Analysis:* Existing research often focuses on individual aspects of sustainability, such as environmental benefits or cost savings, without providing a comprehensive analysis of how these practices impact various facets of buyers' business performance, including brand image, cost savings, regulatory compliance, premium pricing, competitive advantage, and customer satisfaction.
- *Empirical Data on Supplier-Buyer Relationships:* There is limited empirical data examining how sustainability offerings by suppliers directly influence the business performance of buyers. Most studies tend to focus on the internal benefits of sustainability within a single organization rather

than the inter-organizational dynamics between suppliers and buyers.

- *Importance of Communication Strategies:* The importance of communication of suppliers sustainability offerings to buyers is under-researched. There is a need for detailed research to know the perception of industry experts.
- Addressing these gaps in the current literature will provide a more holistic understanding of the impact of sustainability offerings by suppliers on the business performance of buyers, and offer valuable insights for both academia and industry.

Hypothesis

Below hypotheses are framed to conduct the research:

- Importance of communicating and demonstrating the commitment to sustainability practices in B2B industry.
  - H0: It is not crucial for suppliers to communicate and demonstrate their commitment to sustainability practices to influence buyers.
  - H1: It is crucial for suppliers to communicate and demonstrate their commitment to sustainability practices to influence buyers.
- Relationship between sustainability solutions provided by suppliers and brand image of buyer company.
  - H0: Sustainability solutions provided by suppliers do not help to strengthen the brand image of buyer company.
  - H1: Sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help to strengthen the brand image of buyer company.
- Relationship between sustainability solutions provided by suppliers and cost saving buyer company.
  - H0: Sustainability solutions provided by suppliers do not help to improve cost savings for buyer company.
  - H1: Sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help to improve cost savings for buyer company.
- Relationship between sustainability solutions by suppliers and regulatory compliance for buyer.
  - H0: Sustainability solutions provided by suppliers do not help strengthen regulatory compliance for buyer.
  - H1: Sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help strengthen regulatory compliance for buyer.
- Relationship between sustainability solutions provided by suppliers and prices for their products.
  - H0: Sustainability solutions provided by suppliers do not help buyers to obtain premium prices for their products.
  - H1: Sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to obtain premium prices for their products.
- Relationship between sustainability solutions provided by suppliers and competitive advantage for buyer.
  - H0: sustainability solutions provided by suppliers do not help buyers to gain a competitive advantage.
  - H1: sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to gain a competitive advantage.
- Relationship between sustainability solutions provided by suppliers and satisfaction for customers of buyers.
  - H0: sustainability solutions provided by suppliers do not help buyers to improve customer satisfaction.
  - H1: sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to improve customer satisfaction.

Research Methodology

In this research, a quantitative approaches is used to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of sustainability offerings by suppliers on buyers' business performance in the chemical and related manufacturing sectors. This approach allows for a robust analysis of both numerical data and in-depth insights from industry professionals. The target population includes regulatory specialists, customer support professionals, supply chain managers, procurement officers, sustainability coordinators, senior management, and other relevant industry professionals in the chemical and related manufacturing sectors. Stratified random sampling will be used to ensure representation across different regions and company sizes. Structured questionnaires will be distributed to a large sample of industry professionals. Descriptive Statistics and Inferential Statistics using hypothesis testing (t-tests) used to determine the significance of the relationships between sustainability practices and various performance metrics. Research timeline were as per the Table 1.

Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics provide an overview of the data collected, summarizing the key characteristics of the survey responses. Table 1 on Descriptive Statistics of Survey Responses covers the details on industry type, size, years of experience in general and related to sustainability which helps in relevancy of data.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Survey Responses

Factor		Number	Percentage (%)
Industry	Chemical	24	36
	Life Science and Healthcare	17	27
	Others (related to chemicals)	8	13
	FMCG	7	11
	Cosmetics	6	9
	Energy and natural resources (mining, water, oil, gas, power generation)	3	5
Size of industry	≤100	11	17
	101-500	3	5
	501-1000	1	2
	>1000	50	77
Total experience	≤5 years	4	6
	5-10 years	20	31
	10-15 years	23	36
	>15 years	18	27
Experience in sustainability	≤2 years	23	36
	2-5 years	19	30
	5-10 years	14	20
	>10 years	9	14

Table 2 is capturing analysis in terms of mean, standard deviation, minimum value and maximum value. These metrics collectively provide a comprehensive summary of the data's distribution and variability.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Survey Responses

Factor	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum value	Maximum value
Importance of Sustainability Communication	4.3125	1.0059	1	5
Brand image	4.5469	0.6650	1	5
Cost saving	3.8594	1.0369	1	5
Regulatory compliance	4.0938	1.0035	1	5
Premium pricing	3.5938	1.0498	1	5
competitive advantage	4.0938	0.7912	1	5
Customer satisfaction	4.0000	0.9428	1	5

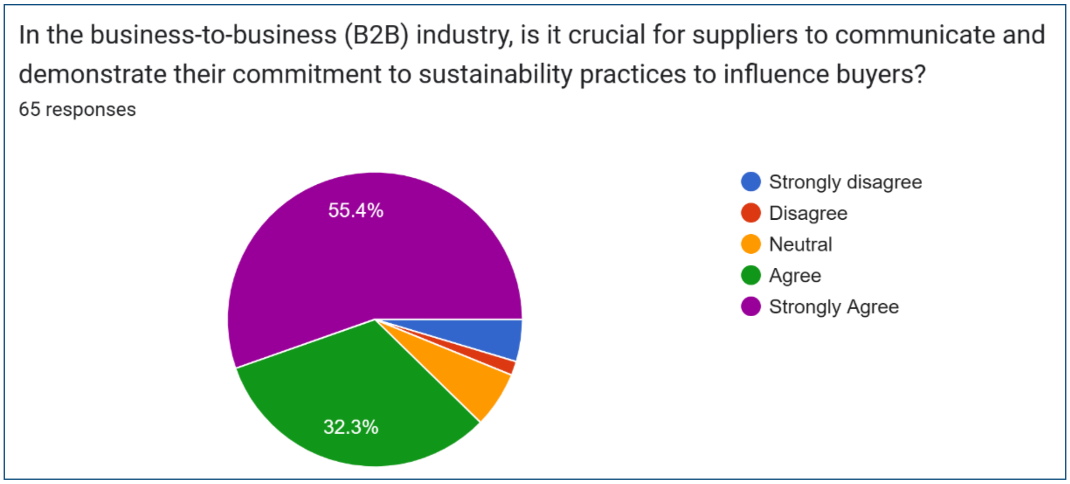

Fig. 2: Importance to Communicate and Demonstrate Their Commitment to Sustainability Practices

Fig. 3 presents the distribution of respondents' opinions on the importance of suppliers in the B2B industry communicating and demonstrating their commitment to sustainability practices to influence buyers. The data is categorized into five response options: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree. The majority of respondents (55%) strongly agreed on suppliers to communicate their sustainability practices, followed by 32% chose 'agree'. This distribution indicates a strong consensus among respondents on the importance of sustainability communication in the B2B industry. A combined total of 87% of respondents regard it as Important, underscoring the critical role of sustainability in influencing buyers' decisions.

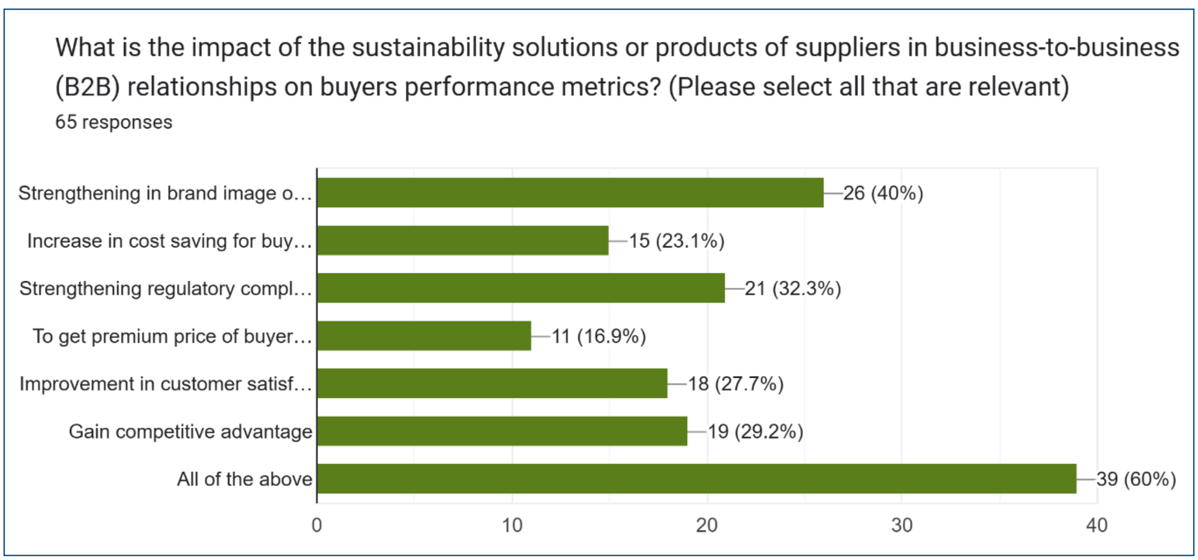

Fig. 3: Impact on Various Buyers' Performance Metrics

Fig. 4 shows the impact of suppliers' sustainability solutions or products on buyers' performance metrics in B2B relationships. The most frequently cited impact is on all of the above option 60% (Strengthening in brand image of buyer company, Increase in cost saving for buyer, Strengthening regulatory compliance, To get premium price of buyer company, Improvement in customer satisfaction, Gain competitive advantage). This data underscores the comprehensive benefits of sustainability solutions, highlighting the importance of integrating these practices into B2B marketing strategies to enhance various performance metrics. This information is crucial for making informed decisions and developing effective sustainability strategies.

Fig. 5 shows the distribution of respondents' opinions on whether sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help strengthen the brand image of the buyer company. The majority of respondents (57%) strongly agree with the statement, while 41.5% agree. A combined total of 98.5% of respondents see a positive impact on brand image, highlighting the significant role of sustainability solutions in enhancing the brand image of buyer companies. Only 1.5% of respondents strongly disagree. This data underscores the importance of sustainability in B2B relationships and its positive impact on brand image.

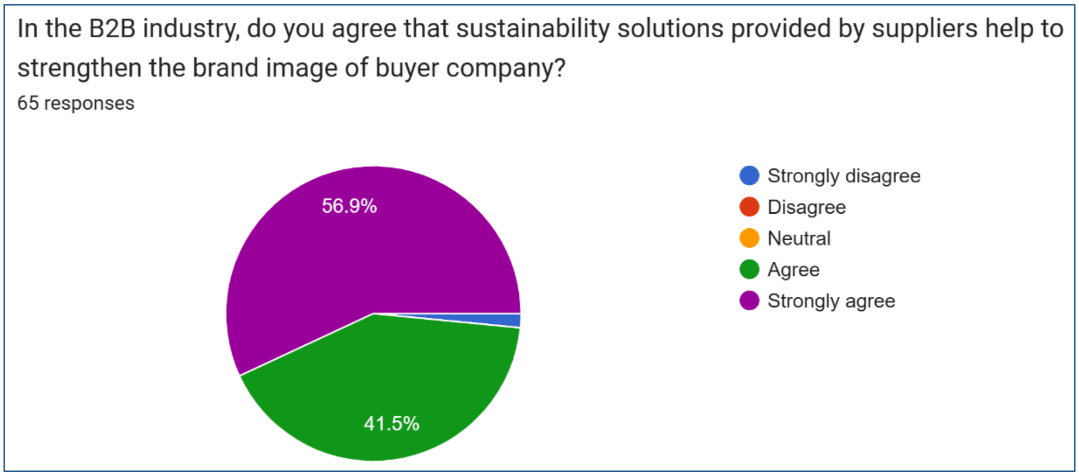

Fig. 4: Relationship between Sustainability and Brand Image

Fig. 6 shows the distribution of respondents' opinions on whether sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help improve cost savings for the buyer company. The majority of respondents (35%) agree with the statement, while 31% strongly agree. A combined total of 66% of respondents see a positive impact on cost savings, highlighting the significant role of sustainability solutions in enhancing financial performance. Only 3% of respondents strongly disagree, 6% disagree, 25% neutral. This data underscores the importance of sustainability in B2B relationships and its positive impact on cost savings for buyer companies.

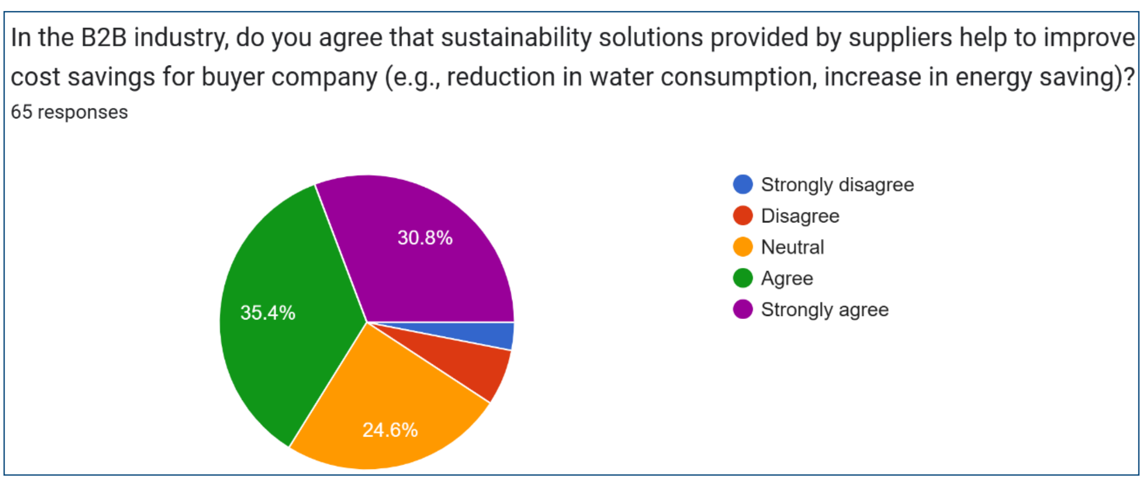

Fig. 5: Relationship between Sustainability and Cost Saving

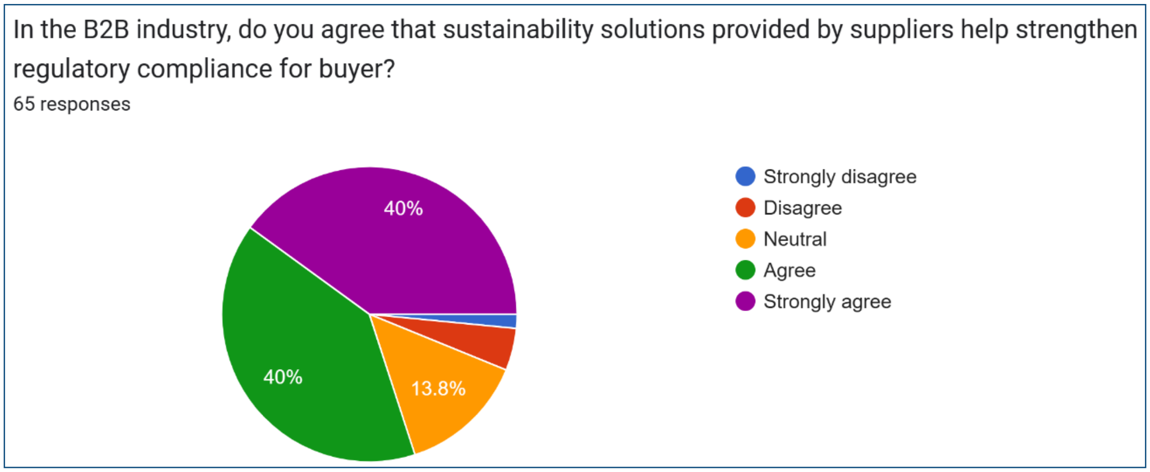

Fig. 6: Relationship between Sustainability and Regulatory Compliance

Fig. 7 shows the distribution of respondents' opinions on whether sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help strengthen regulatory compliance for the buyer company. The majority of respondents (40%) agree with the statement and 40% strongly agree. A combined total of 80% of respondents see a positive impact on regulatory compliance, highlighting the significant role of sustainability solutions in enhancing compliance strategies. Only 1.5% of respondents strongly disagree, and 5% disagree, indicating a 14% of scepticism. This data underscores the importance of sustainability in B2B relationships and its positive impact on regulatory compliance for buyer companies.

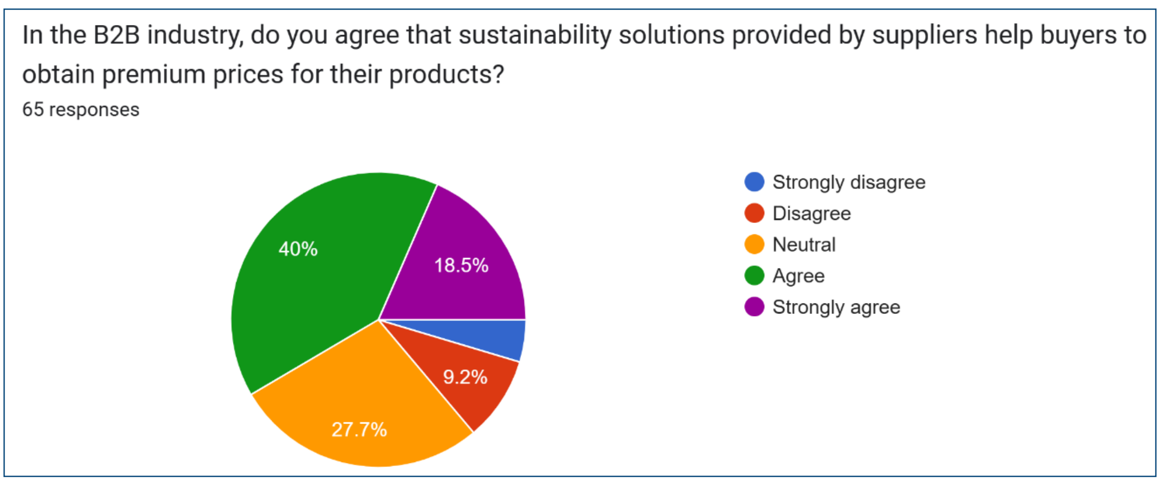

Fig. 7: Relationship between Sustainability and Premium Pricing

Fig. 8 shows the distribution of respondents' opinions on whether sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers obtain premium prices for their products. The majority of respondents (40%) agree with the statement, while 18.5% strongly agree. A combined total of 58.5% of respondents see a positive impact on obtaining premium prices, highlighting the significant role of sustainability solutions in enhancing pricing power. Only 5% of respondents strongly disagree, 9% disagree, and 28% of scepticism. This data underscores the importance of sustainability in B2B relationships and its positive impact on obtaining premium prices for buyers' products.

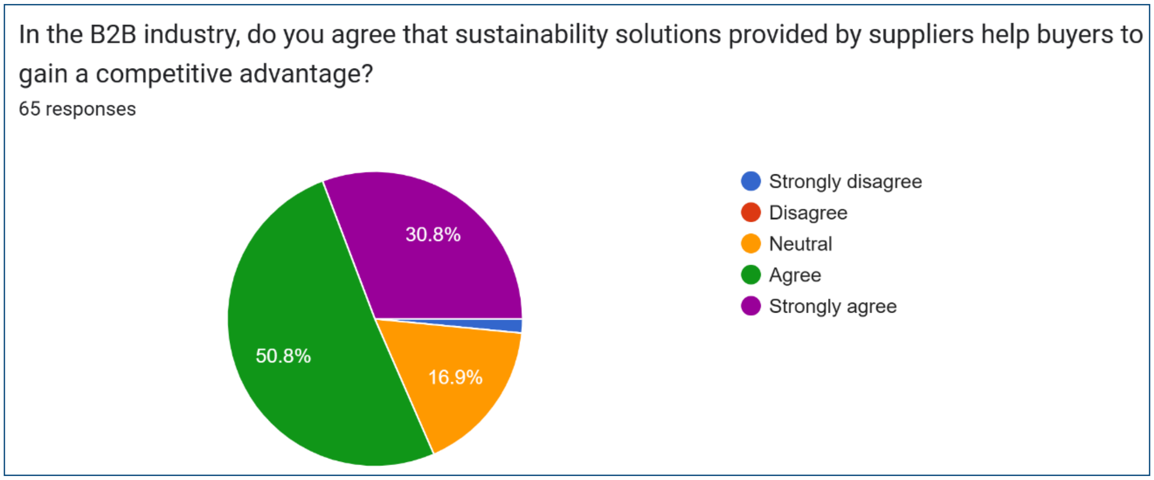

Fig. 8: Impact on Competitive Advantage for Buyer

Fig. 9 illustrates the distribution of respondents' opinions on whether they agree that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers gain a competitive advantage. The responses are categorized into five levels of agreement: 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Agree', and 'Strongly Agree'. The majority of respondents (51%) agree with the statement, while 31% strongly agree. A combined total of 82% of respondents see a positive impact on competitive advantage, highlighting the significant role of sustainability solutions in enhancing market positioning. Only 1.5% of respondents strongly disagree, and 17% neutral. This data underscores the importance of sustainability in B2B relationships and its positive impact on gaining a competitive advantage for buyers.

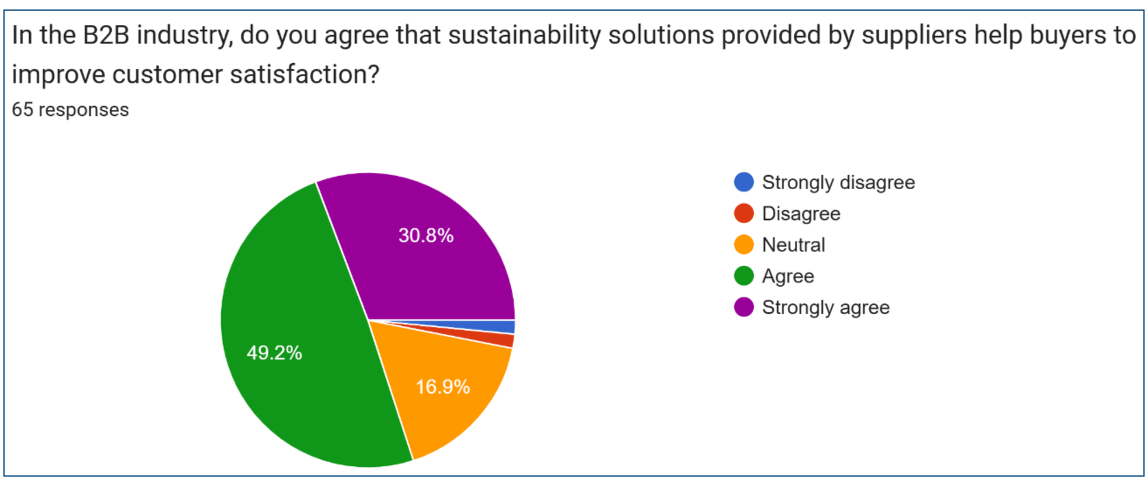

Fig. 9: Impact on Customer Satisfaction

Fig. 10 shows the distribution of respondents' opinions on whether sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers improve customer satisfaction. The majority of respondents (49%) agree with the statement, while 31% strongly agree. A combined total of 80% of respondents see a positive impact on customer satisfaction, highlighting the significant role of sustainability solutions in enhancing customer experience. Only 1.5% of respondents strongly disagree, and 1.5% disagree, indicating 17% respondents with scepticism. This data underscores the importance of sustainability in B2B relationships and its positive impact on improving customer satisfaction for buyers.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using a t-test to determine the impact of sustainability solutions provided by suppliers on buyer performance metrics. Hypothesized population mean (μ0) be 3, which represents the neutral point on the scale. Sample size (n) was 65.

Table 3 below presents the results of t-tests conducted to determine the impact of sustainability solutions provided by suppliers on various performance metrics of buyer companies. The factors analyzed include influence on buyers, brand image, cost savings, regulatory compliance, premium pricing, competitive advantage, and customer satisfaction. Table 3 provides the results of the t-tests for seven key factors assessing the impact of sustainability solutions from suppliers on buyer performance metrics. The factors include influence on buyers, brand image, cost savings, regulatory compliance, premium pricing, competitive advantage, and customer satisfaction.

Table 3: t-Test Statistics

Factor	*Influence Buyer*	*Brand Image*	*Cost Saving*	*Regulatory Compliance*	*Premium Pricing*	*Competitive Advantage*	*Customer Satisfaction*
Mean	4.32	4.54	3.85	4.09	3.58	4.09	4.00
Standard Deviation	1.01	0.66	1.04	1.00	1.05	0.79	0.94
Sample Size (n)	65	65	65	65	65	65	65
Degrees of Freedom (df)	64	64	64	64	64	64	64
Std Error	0.12424327	0.08226634	0.12828523	0.12349688	0.12951891	0.09737684	0.11602387
t-Value	10.6490831	18.7009833	6.59587886	8.84482017	4.51374542	11.2173256	8.61891607
p-Value	8.35E-16	1.25E-27	9.47E-09	1.06E-12	0.00002793	9.41E-17	2.63E-12
Significance	Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant

The t-test results across all seven factors indicate that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers have a significant positive impact on various performance metrics of buyer companies. The consistently low p-values (all below 0.05) lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis, affirming the crucial role of sustainability practices in influencing buyer performance in B2B relationships. This highlights the importance for suppliers to effectively communicate and demonstrate their commitment to sustainability to positively influence their buyers.

Results and Discussions

The survey results indicated a high importance of sustainability communication by suppliers in B2B relationships, with a mean rating of 4.2 (on a scale of 1 to 5). This highlights that buyers in the B2B industry expect suppliers to actively communicate and demonstrate their sustainability practices. The high rating suggests that buyers are increasingly valuing transparency and commitment to sustainability from their suppliers. This aligns with findings from previous studies indicating that effective communication of sustainability practices can enhance trust and strengthen business relationships (Leonidou et al., 2013). According to the survey results, approximately 95% of respondents expressed a high likelihood of recommending that suppliers incorporate their sustainability offerings into their marketing strategies. This reflects a strong consensus that highlighting sustainable practices can enhance brand appeal and drive market success.

Based on t-test results, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the hypothesis which states that it is crucial for suppliers to communicate and demonstrate their commitment to sustainability practices to influence buyers. This is aligned with literature search which states sustainability has become a significant factor in supplier selection criteria. Buyers are more likely to engage with suppliers who can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability, as it aligns with their own corporate values and sustainability goals. Communicating sustainability efforts helps build trust and enhance the reputation of suppliers. A study published in the Journal of Business Ethics suggests that transparency and clear communication about sustainable practices can improve buyer-supplier relationships and lead to long-term partnerships. Trust in a supplier's commitment to sustainability can be a decisive factor in the procurement process (Casidy & Yan, 2022). Suppliers who proactively communicate their compliance with sustainability regulations help buyers mitigate risks associated with regulatory breaches and negative publicity (Kemp, 2004). Suppliers that can effectively communicate their sustainability initiatives are more likely to differentiate themselves in a crowded market (RRBM, 2017).

Buyer Performance Metrics

The survey assessed various buyer performance metrics influenced by sustainability solutions. Key metrics included cost savings, regulatory compliance, premium pricing, competitive advantage, and customer satisfaction. Results are discussed in detail in below section. Based on the survey results, nearly 93% of respondents indicated that sustainability practices create significant opportunities for collaboration between suppliers and buyers. These practices not only foster stronger partnerships but also help ensure the long-term viability of their businesses.

Impact on Buyer's Brand Image

The survey results indicate that majority of respondents with mean rating of 4.5 (on the scale of 1-5) reported that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers positively impact buyers brand image. This finding suggests a strong correlation between supplier sustainability and buyers brand perception. Based on t-test results, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the hypothesis which states that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers do not help to strengthen the brand image of buyer company. This indicates that aligning with sustainable suppliers helps buyer companies reinforce their corporate values and commitment to sustainability, which is crucial for brand reputation. The survey results provide strong evidence that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers significantly strengthen the brand image of buyer companies.

Impact on Cost Savings

The survey results with mean rating of 3.8 (on the scale of 1-5) indicating that sustainability solutions provided by supplier are perceived to be moderately contribute to cost savings for buyer company. Based on t-test results, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the hypothesis which states that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help to improve cost savings for buyer company. This indicates that aligning with sustainable suppliers helps buyer companies to save costs through different aspects like water saving, energy saving, reduction in penalty related to noncompliance, etc. The survey results provide strong evidence that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help to improve cost savings for buyer company.

Impact on Regulatory Compliance

The survey results indicate that majority of respondents with mean rating of 4.1 (on the scale of 1-5) reported that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help strengthen regulatory compliance for buyer. Further, based on t-test results, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the hypothesis which states that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help strengthen regulatory compliance for buyer. This finding suggests a strong correlation between supplier sustainability and buyers' regulatory compliance. One of the professionals from survey provided additional comments stating that '*Europe is the leader in sustainability, particularly as it comes to regulatory compliance. For example, certain crops, if used as raw materials, need to a high degree of traceability. Also don't forget the "social" and "governance" aspects related to "sustainability" that suppliers must also be aware of. Please note such third-party validation of sustainability performance of suppliers, e.g., Eco Vadis, CDP. In addition, other drivers are with regards to customer demand and competitive advantage, helping buyers and their downstream users meet their sustainability goals and product development*'.

Impact on Premium Pricing

The survey results with mean rating of 3.6 (on the scale of 1-5) indicating that sustainability solutions provided by supplier are perceived to be moderately contribute to premium pricing for buyer company's products. Based on t-test results, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the hypothesis which states that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to obtain premium prices for their products. This indicates that aligning with sustainable suppliers might help buyer companies to get premium pricing for their products. The survey results provide strong evidence that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to obtain premium prices for their products.

Impact on Competitive Advantage

The survey results indicate that majority of respondents with mean rating of 4.1 (on the scale of 1-5) reported that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to gain a competitive advantage. This finding suggests a strong correlation between supplier sustainability and competitive benefit for buyer. Based on t-test results, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the hypothesis which states that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to gain a competitive advantage. Results shows statistical evidence to support the hypothesis that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers gain a competitive advantage. This indicates that aligning with sustainable suppliers helps buyer companies reinforce their corporate values and commitment to sustainability, which is crucial for competitive advantage. The survey results provide strong evidence that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to gain a competitive advantage.

One of the survey respondents mentioned that "*Depending on the business sector, for example, if for personal care, if a raw material supplier complies with COSMOS certification, Natrue certification, labelling criteria, etc. then it is a competitive advantage for them to sell to multiple buyers*".

Impact on Customer Satisfaction

The survey results indicate that majority of respondents with mean rating of 4.0 (on the scale of 1-5) reported that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to improve customer satisfaction. This finding suggests a strong correlation between supplier sustainability and buyer's customer satisfaction. Based on t-test results, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the hypothesis which states that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to improve customer satisfaction. This indicates that aligning with sustainable suppliers helps buyer companies reinforce their corporate values and commitment to sustainability, which is crucial for customer satisfaction. The survey results provide strong evidence that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers significantly customer satisfaction for buyer companies.

Conclusion

This study has explored the importance of integrating sustainability into B2B marketing strategies, with a focus on the chemical industry and related manufacturing sectors. The findings from the survey and subsequent data analysis have underscored the significant impact of sustainability solutions provided by suppliers on various buyer performance metrics. The survey revealed that communication of sustainability practices by suppliers is crucial in B2B relationships. Buyers place a high value on transparency and commitment to sustainability, which enhances trust and strengthens business partnerships. Sustainability solutions positively affect several buyer performance metrics, including cost savings, regulatory compliance, premium pricing, competitive advantage, and customer satisfaction. This highlights the multifaceted benefits of sustainability for buyers in the B2B industry. Suppliers with strong sustainability practices can justify higher prices through improved brand reputation, cost savings, enhanced regulatory compliance, long-term sustainability, and operational efficiencies. This comprehensive value proposition underscores the strategic importance of sustainability. Overall, the study provides compelling evidence that integrating sustainability into B2B marketing strategies offers numerous benefits for both suppliers and buyers. It highlights the need for suppliers to prioritize sustainability in their business operations and marketing efforts to foster stronger, more resilient relationships with buyers.

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Appendix

Survey Questions

1. In the business-to-business (B2B) industry, is it crucial for suppliers to communicate and demonstrate their commitment to sustainability practices to influence buyers?
2. What is the impact of the sustainability solutions or products of suppliers in business-to-business (B2B)

relationships on buyers' performance metrics? (Please select all that are relevant)

3. In the B2B industry, do you agree that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help to strengthen the brand image of buyer company?
4. In the B2B industry, do you agree that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help to improve cost savings for buyer company (e.g., reduction in water consumption, increase in energy saving)?
5. In the B2B industry, do you agree that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help strengthen regulatory compliance for buyer?
6. In the B2B industry, do you agree that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to obtain premium prices for their products?
7. In the B2B industry, do you agree that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to gain a competitive advantage? In the B2B industry, do you agree that sustainability solutions provided by suppliers help buyers to improve customer satisfaction?
8. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being strongly disagree), how strongly do you agree that sustainable practices offer an opportunity for both suppliers and buyers to collaborate with each other and sustain business?
9. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being strongly disagree), how strongly would you promote adoption of sustainability practices in your respective industry?
10. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being strongly disagree), how likely are you to recommend suppliers to integrate their sustainability offerings into marketing strategies?
11. How can suppliers with strong sustainability practices justify the higher price of their products to buyers? (Please select all that are relevant)
12. Do you have any additional comments related to the impact of sustainable practices of suppliers in the B2B industry?