

## **‘Consumers want to make a difference, but need more support to do so’**

[Campaign Editorial](#)

Unilever’s Anila Gopal discusses why brands need to move from intention to action and lead consumers down the path to a sustainable future.



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Consumers hold incredible power in the fight against climate change. While governments and corporations play critical roles, individual choices and habits can additionally drive meaningful impact.

The concept of the ‘conscious consumer’ has been heralded as a beacon of hope for a more sustainable future as changes in consumer behaviour could significantly cut greenhouse gas emissions – something increasingly recognised by reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

In its latest report, IPCC identifies that demand-side strategies can reduce emissions by 40 per cent to 70 per cent globally by 2050. Companies with a proven track record in sustainability, such as Unilever play an essential role by breaking down barriers and creating opportunities for consumers to shift toward greener habits.

## The say-do gap

Whilst awareness of sustainability is increasing, a persistent gap remains between consumers' stated intentions and their actual actions. The Kantar Sustainability Sector Index (2022) found that while 97 per cent of people globally express a desire to live more sustainably, only 13 per cent actively change their behaviours. This gap is particularly evident in everyday shopping, where decisions are often made on price or convenience.

Some consumers lack sufficient information about sustainable choices, while others fear they might compromise on quality, price or convenience. In the UAE, the Ipsos Views of Sustainability study (2023) report states that 57 per cent of consumers say they're willing to pay more for eco-friendly products, though many hesitate if they perceive a drop in quality or usability.

## The role of brands

**Sustainable products are just the start:** A lot is happening behind the scenes to make sustainable choices simpler and accessible for everyone. Today's products are becoming both greener and better quality as companies work to cut down emissions, reduce waste in packaging, and use eco-friendly materials. From how products are made to how they reach us, everything is being rethought to make it easy to choose sustainably without giving up on quality or value.

**Going beyond product and education alone to drive choices:** For consumer brands, driving sustainable behaviour change requires more than just raising awareness; it involves creating motivation and reinforcement through compelling communication and aspirational experiences. A tried-and-tested approach that has proven effective for over a decade leverages five key strategies: make it understood; make it easy; make it desirable; make it rewarding; and make it a habit. Each principle is crafted to help consumers adopt sustainable behaviours as a natural part of their daily routines.

Education is a critical first step but is not enough on its own. Brands, as specialists in behaviour change, use direct and indirect rewards to make sustainable choices not only accessible but also rewarding. High-quality, sustainable products that are good value encourage consumers to adjust their everyday shopping habits with confidence. By making sustainable actions socially recognised and impactful, brands assure consumers that their choices benefit both themselves and the planet – driving positive, lasting shifts in society.

**A local example: sustainable choices and mangrove restoration:** An upcoming campaign by Unilever and its partners, Mastercard, Lulu Retail and Emirates Nature WWF, provides a locally relevant example of how brands can inspire sustainable action. Mangroves are a vital climate solution, and with the UAE committed to planting 100 million by 2030, mangrove restoration taps into a powerful regional priority.

This initiative educates consumers on the environmental impact of mangroves and enables them to participate directly. The purchase of sustainable products contributes to mangrove restoration through Mastercard's Priceless Planet Coalition, giving consumers a meaningful way to support climate action.

Research from IPCC shows that people are more likely to make eco-friendly choices when it's easy and when there are rewards involved. Using strategies like simple choices, clear labels

and social incentives, brands can help people pick greener options without much effort. This campaign emphasises the benefits of choosing sustainable products and looks to encourage lasting change in behaviour, making it easier and more rewarding for everyone to care for the planet.

## **The path forward: companies and brands as enablers of change**

The data is clear: consumers are keen to make a difference, but they need more information and support to do so. Companies, brands and retailers play a large role in ensuring that consumers are better informed so that they can align their purchasing habits with their values.

The journey towards sustainable consumption is not easy, but promising. By offering consumers great sustainable products at good value, we can bridge the gap between intention and action and ensure that every consumer choice contributes to a more sustainable future.

***By Anila Gopal, Global Sustainability Head, Brands & Middle East Advocacy, Unilever***

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