

Sustainable  
Jungle

# The Sustainable Consumer Research Report

2026



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# Table Of Contents

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Intro	3	4   What Consumers Want	11
Foreword	4	5   Who Drives Change?	13
1   Motivations Are Broadening	5	6   Consumer Frustrations	15
2   Product Categories & Shifts	7	7   What This Means for Brands	17
3   The Greenwashing Barrier	9		

# The Sustainable Consumer Report 2026

This second edition focuses on insights from our proprietary 2024 and 2025 reader surveys (n of 87 and 134, respectively), with trend data from our 2022 and 2023 surveys included where questions are consistent. Combined with findings from leading research institutions, this report provides useful intelligence for sustainability-focused brands.

Key topics covered by this report:

- Drivers of sustainable shopping behaviours (and how they're shifting)
- Key product and service categories of interest
- Most important sustainability attributes
- Barriers to supporting sustainable brands
- What consumers think needs to change
- Consumer frustrations with unsustainable products
- What this means for brands: the greenhushing paradox and how to navigate it

**Important:** The charts and insights provided in this report are based on proprietary survey research run by Sustainable Jungle with our reader base (who are inherently more interested in sustainability than the broader population). While not statistically representative of the general population, our findings consistently align with several broader studies, as referenced throughout, suggesting our respondent base reflects an amplified version of broader consumer trends.

# Foreword

This is our second consumer research report, and the picture it paints is more nuanced than our last report published in 2024.

Consumers haven't lost interest in sustainability. If anything, they're more discerning. Health and safety have emerged as a major purchase driver, going from virtually zero to nearly 70% of respondents in just two years. Nature and biodiversity now rival climate change as a top concern. And greenwashing scepticism has grown fivefold since 2022.

But while consumers are raising the bar on what they expect from brands, many brands are going in the opposite direction. Across the industry, sustainability communications are being scaled back, a trend known as greenhushing. Brands are doing the work but choosing not to talk about it, often out of fear that any claim will be picked apart.

That leaves a gap. Consumers want transparency, specificity, and proof that the brands they support are genuinely doing better. Brands want to show their progress without exposing themselves to accusations of greenwashing. Bridging that gap is, we think, one of the most important challenges in sustainable commerce right now, and it's something we explore in Section 7 of this report.

The data sections that follow (Sections 1 through 6) lay out what our audience cares about, what's changing, and where the friction points are. We hope the insights are useful for any brand trying to understand and connect with sustainability-minded consumers.

Joy McConnochie

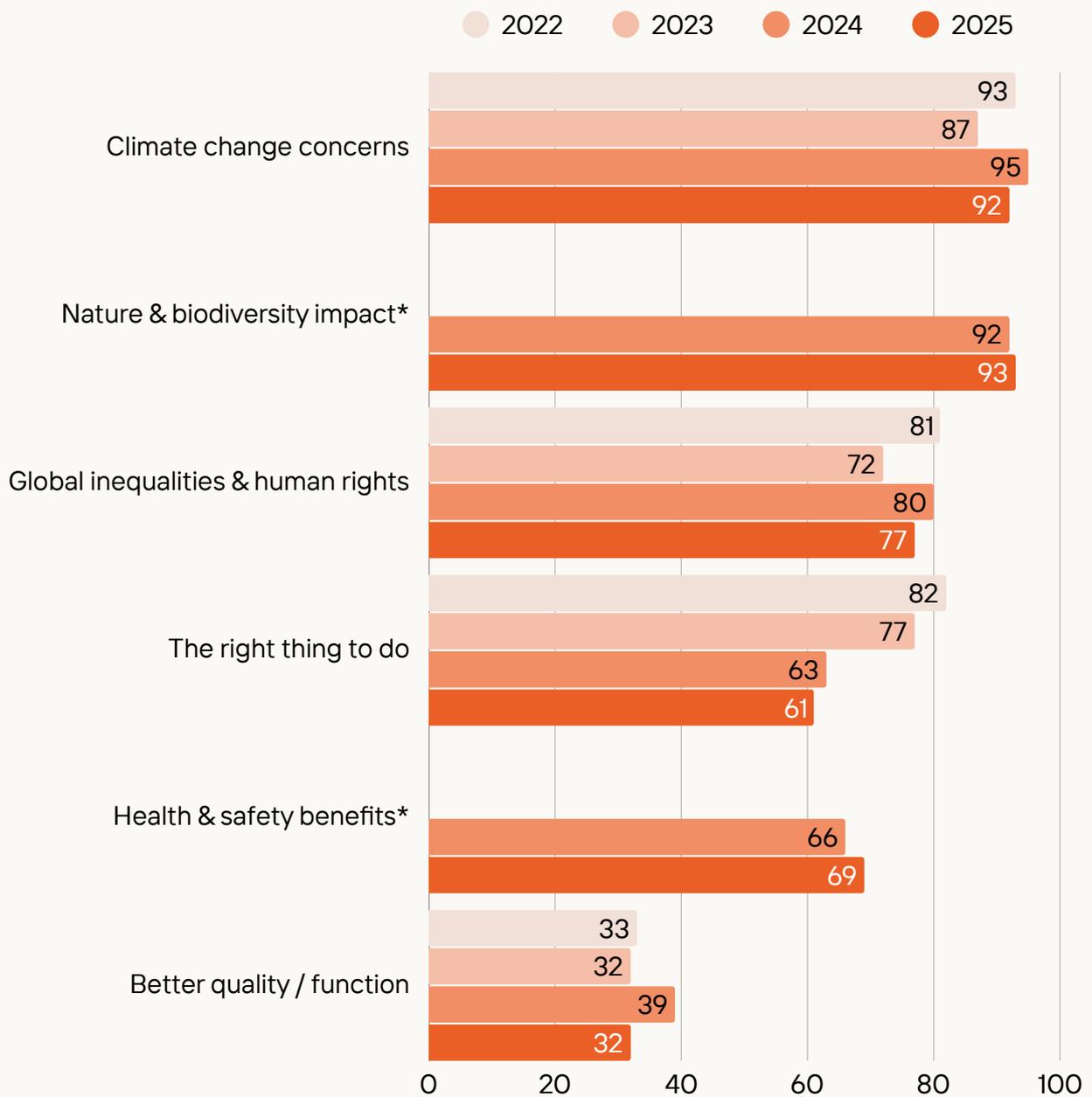
Co-founder

Sustainable Jungle

# 1 | The Motivations Behind Sustainable Consumption Are Broadening

Respondents were driven by a wider set of motivations when consuming sustainably, with clear shifts toward personal health and nature-focused concerns alongside the continued influence of climate change.

Figure 1: What drives you to consume more sustainably (% respondents, top 6)?



\*New response options added in 2024 survey

**Key Insight:** The Rise of "Personal Stakes". The biggest shift in our data is the emergence of health and safety as a primary driver, now the fourth-highest in 2024/2025 (69%). Consumers are connecting sustainability with personal wellbeing, not just planetary outcomes. Meanwhile, "the right thing to do" has declined steadily from 82% to 61%, suggesting abstract moral obligation is losing ground to more concrete, personal motivations.

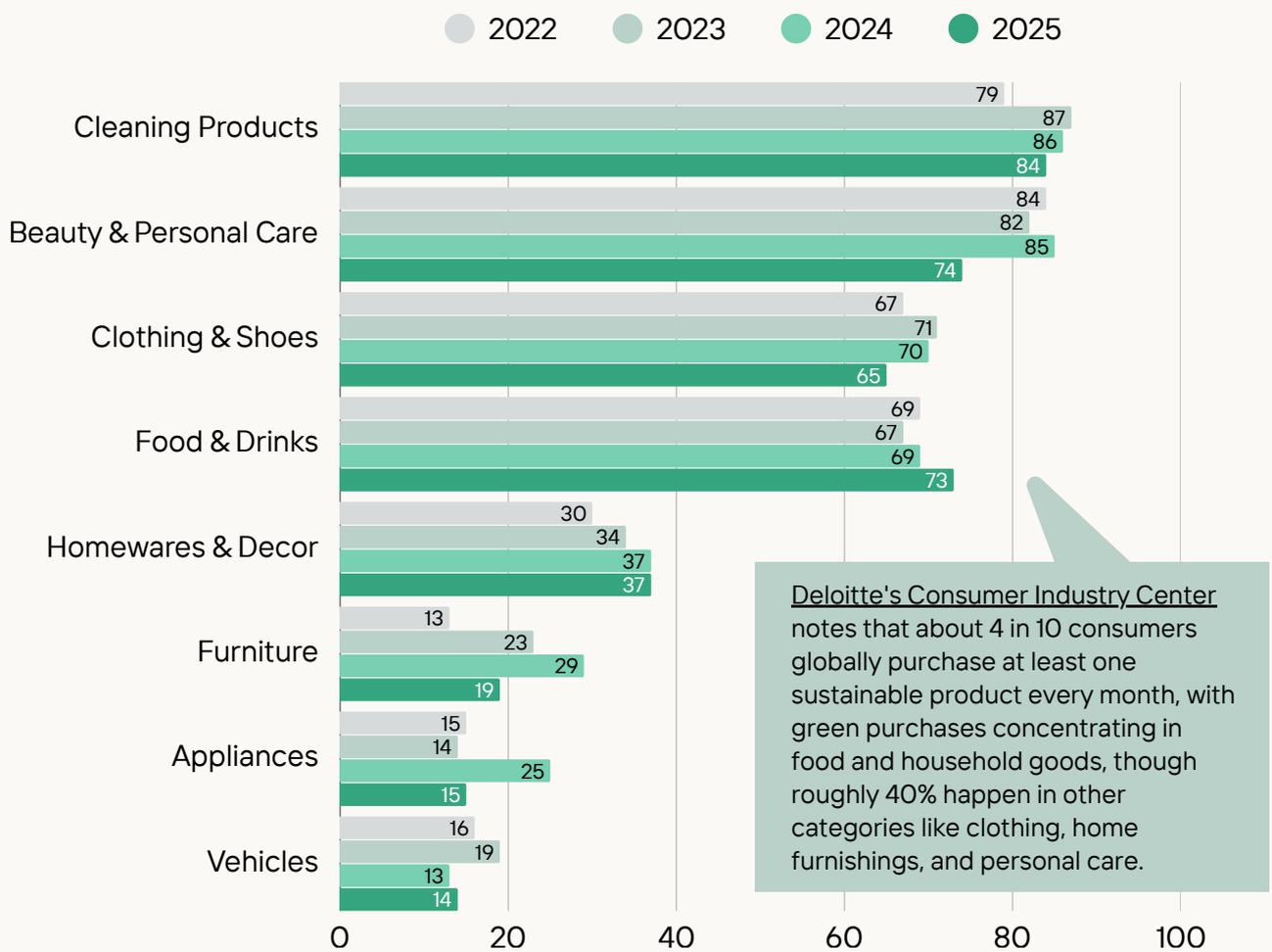
NielsenIQ's 2025 research confirms this pattern, finding that 47% of consumers globally are more likely to choose a brand that has health benefits for them as well as the planet. GlobeScan's Healthy & Sustainable Living Report 2025 (surveying nearly 32,000 consumers across 31 markets) goes further, finding that 65% of consumers want to change their lifestyle to be both healthier and more sustainable, while only 7% are interested in sustainability alone. Health, the report concludes, is now the strongest driver of sustainable behaviour change, not environmental concern.

**Key Takeaway:** Brands communicating only around environmental impact are missing a growing segment of consumers driven by personal health and safety. Messaging that connects sustainable practices to personal benefits (non-toxic materials, health-safe production, clean ingredients) will likely resonate more broadly.

# 2 | Core Product Categories Remain Consistent

Cleaning Products, Beauty & Personal Care, Food & Drinks, and Clothing & Shoes continue to dominate as the categories where consumers most actively seek sustainable alternatives. But there are some interesting shifts underneath.

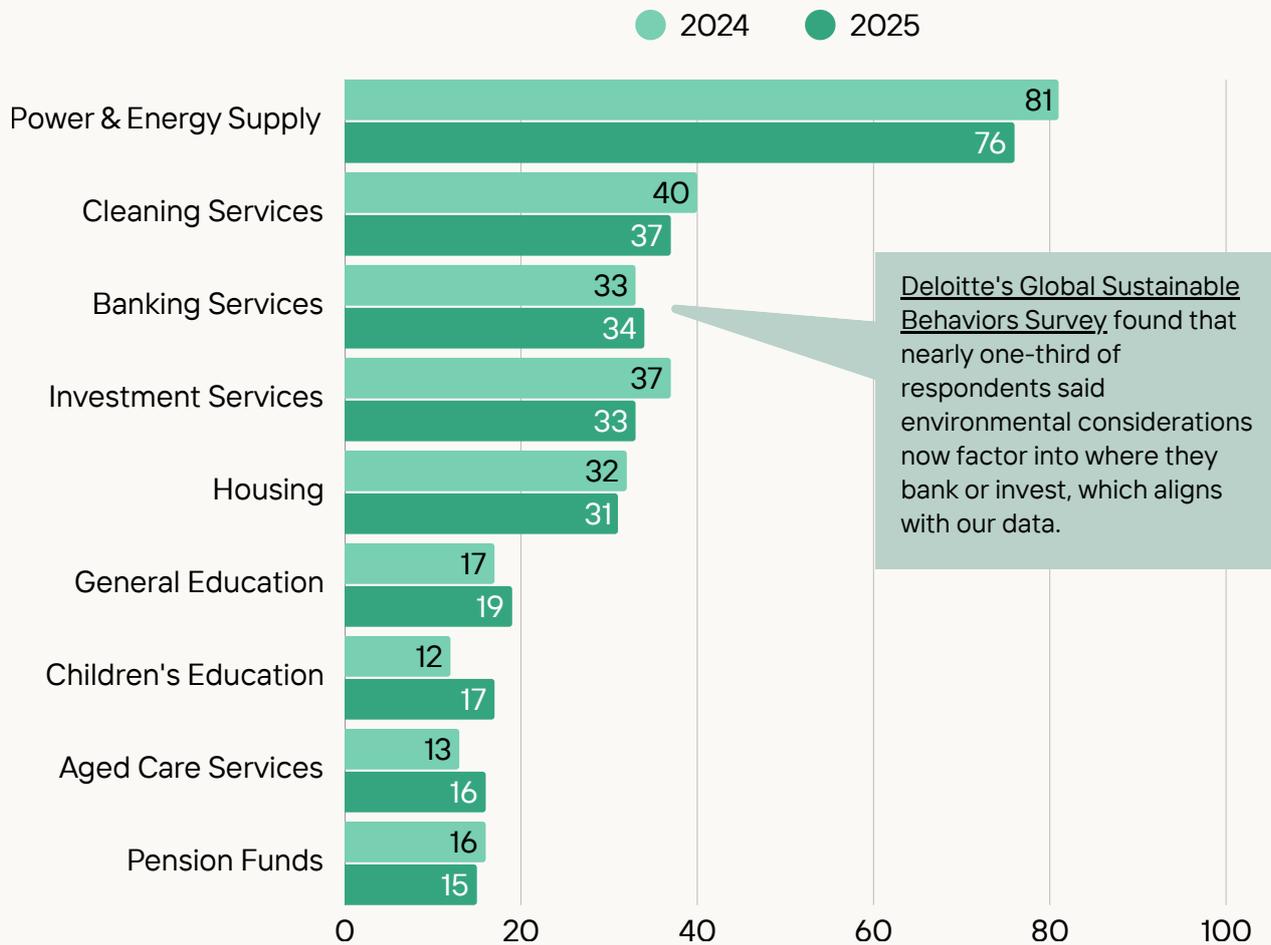
Figure 2: What consumables do you generally buy from sustainably focused brands (% respondents)?



**Key Insight:** Beauty is Slipping While Food is Rising. Beauty & Personal Care, historically the top or second-highest category, dropped 11 percentage points from 2024 to 2025 (85% to 74%). This may reflect growing skepticism around "clean beauty" claims, or the influence of broader greenwashing concerns on a category that has been particularly prone to vague sustainability marketing. Meanwhile, Food & Drinks has steadily climbed, overtaking both Beauty and Clothing for the first time, likely driven by the health-sustainability connection identified in Section 1.

Consumers are also still actively weighing sustainability when choosing service providers, not just product brands.

Figure 2b (New): Services where sustainability is now considered

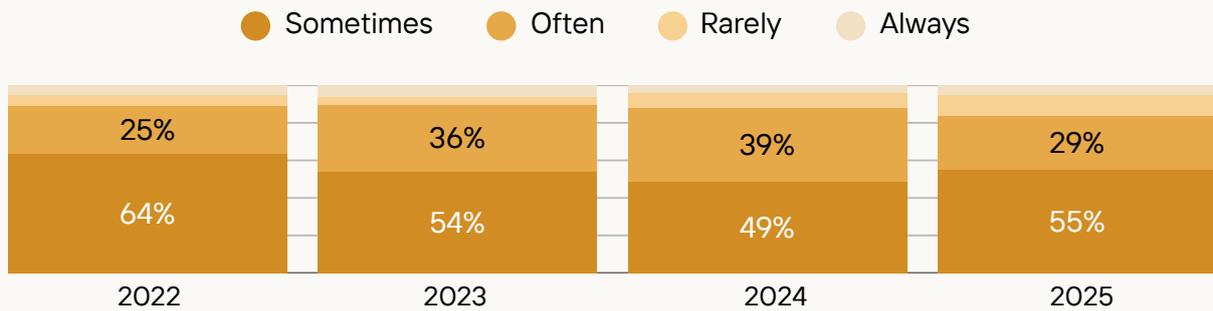


**Key Takeaway:** Sustainable brands in food, cleaning, and household categories continue to see the strongest demand, but there's a real opportunity for service-oriented businesses (energy, banking, education, aged care) to differentiate on sustainability.

# 3 | Greenwashing Concern Is the Fastest-Growing Barrier

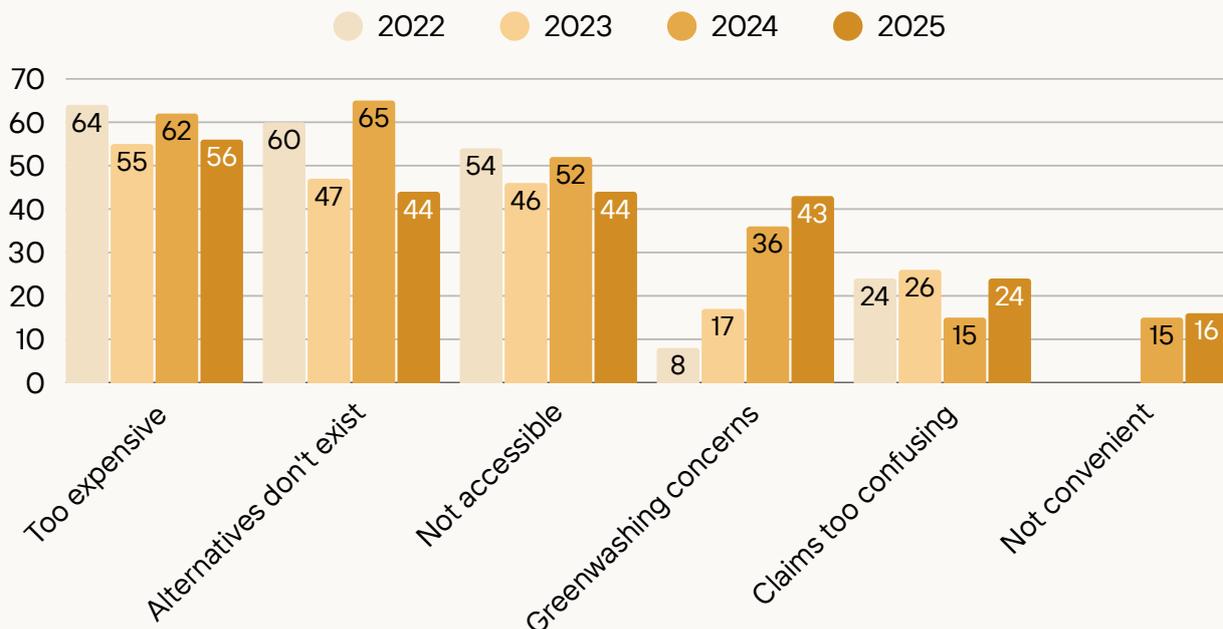
Cost remains the top barrier to sustainable purchasing, but the standout trend in our data is the growth in greenwashing concern: a 5x increase in four years.

Figure 3.1: How often are you able to find satisfactory sustainable alternatives (% respondents)?



**Key Insight:** Finding Alternatives Is Getting Harder, Not Easier. After steady improvement from 2022 to 2024, the percentage of respondents who can "often" find sustainable alternatives dropped 10 points in 2025 (39% to 29%), while "rarely" nearly tripled (4% in 2023 to 11% in 2025). This could reflect higher standards and greater scrutiny rather than fewer options. As consumers get more savvy, the bar for what counts as a "satisfactory" sustainable alternative is higher.

Figure 3.2: Barriers to buying from sustainability-focused brands (% respondents)



**Key Insight:** The Greenwashing Trust Crisis. Greenwashing concern has grown from 8% in 2022 to 43% in 2025, a more than fivefold increase. It is now nearly on par with cost as a barrier.

This isn't just our audience: [NielsenIQ reports](#) that 77% of global consumers would stop buying from a company found guilty of greenwashing. [Deloitte's Canadian Consumer Sustainability Report](#) found that 57% of consumers don't believe most sustainability claims that brands make.

**Cross-tab Insight:** Cost Hits Younger Consumers Hardest. Our 2025 data shows cost as a barrier varies significantly by age: 73% of 26 to 35 year olds cite it vs. just 40% of those over 66. Meanwhile, greenwashing concern is fairly consistent across all age groups (33 to 47%), suggesting it's a universal concern rather than a generational one.

**Key Takeaway:** The trust deficit is now a barrier almost as big as price. Brands need to invest in transparency: third-party certifications, supply chain disclosures, and specific (not vague) claims.

# 4 | Safety and Materials Lead, While Supply Chain Transparency Grows

When asked to select their top 3 sustainability attributes, respondents consistently prioritised safe and non-toxic products and sustainable materials. Notably, supply chain transparency saw a meaningful rebound in 2025 after two years of decline.

Figure 4: What is most important to you when looking for a sustainable brand or service, top 3 (% respondents)?



\*Response options were restructured in 2024. End of life / circularity and Climate action figures for 2022/2023 were captured under different wording (bundled with materials and green business practices respectively) and are not directly comparable to 2024/2025.

**Key Insight:** Safety Stays Steady, Transparency Is Recovering. Safe & non-toxic is the most stable attribute across all four years, hovering between 64% and 68%. This consistency, combined with the surge of health as a purchase driver (Section 1), suggests toxicity and safety are a baseline expectation for this audience. Supply chain transparency, after declining from 48% in 2022 to 36% in 2024, recovered to 41% in 2025. Given the growth in greenwashing concern (Section 3), this rebound makes sense: consumers who worry about false claims naturally place more value on verifiable supply chain practices.

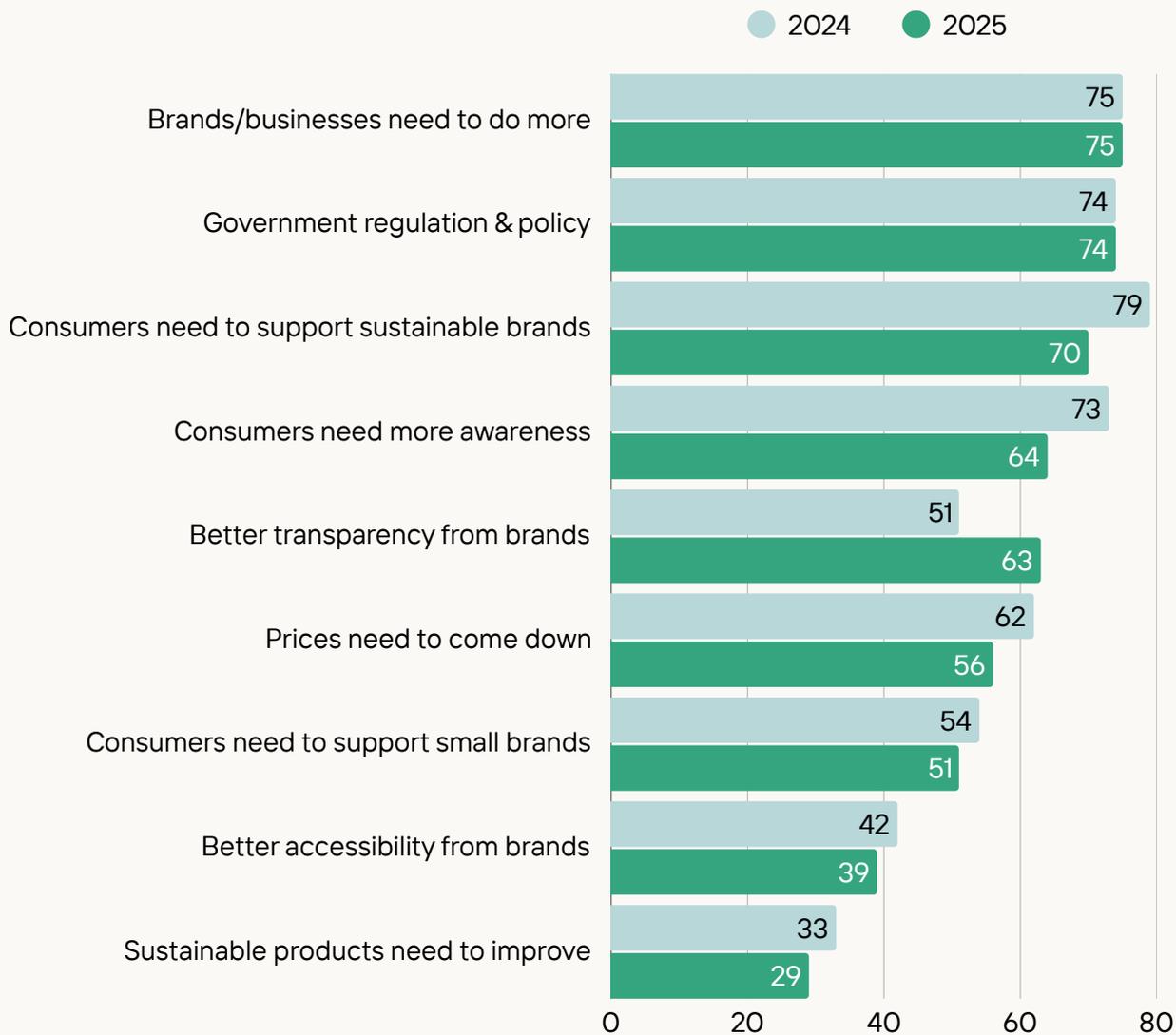
NielsenIQ's 2025 research found that responsible sourcing is one of the most important sustainability claims for 45% of consumers globally, and that consumers want brands to make labelling easy to understand for both sustainable claims (45%) and recycling (41%).

**Key Takeaway:** Brands should lead with safety/toxicity disclosures and sustainable materials. These two attributes are consistently the highest priorities. Supply chain transparency is on the way back up and should not be neglected, particularly as greenwashing scepticism continues to grow.

# 5 | Consumers See Businesses and Governments as the Primary Drivers of Change

When asked what needs to happen to improve sustainability in consumer products, respondents see it as a shared effort: government regulation (74%), brand action (75%), and consumers supporting sustainable brands (70%) all ranked within a few points of each other, suggesting people view this as a joint responsibility rather than something any single group should own.

Figure 5: What do you think needs to happen (% respondents, 2024 to 2025)?



Note: This question was free text in 2022/2023 and converted to multi-select in 2024, so direct comparison is limited to the last two years.

**Key Insight:** Demand for Transparency Is Growing Fastest. While most responses were fairly stable, "better transparency from brands" jumped 12 percentage points (51% to 63%), making it the fastest-growing demand. This reinforces the findings from Sections 3 and 4: transparency is becoming central to the sustainable consumer relationship.

NielsenIQ found that 40% of consumers globally believe their government is most responsible for driving sustainability progress, while 74% agree governments should increase regulations to push businesses to act.

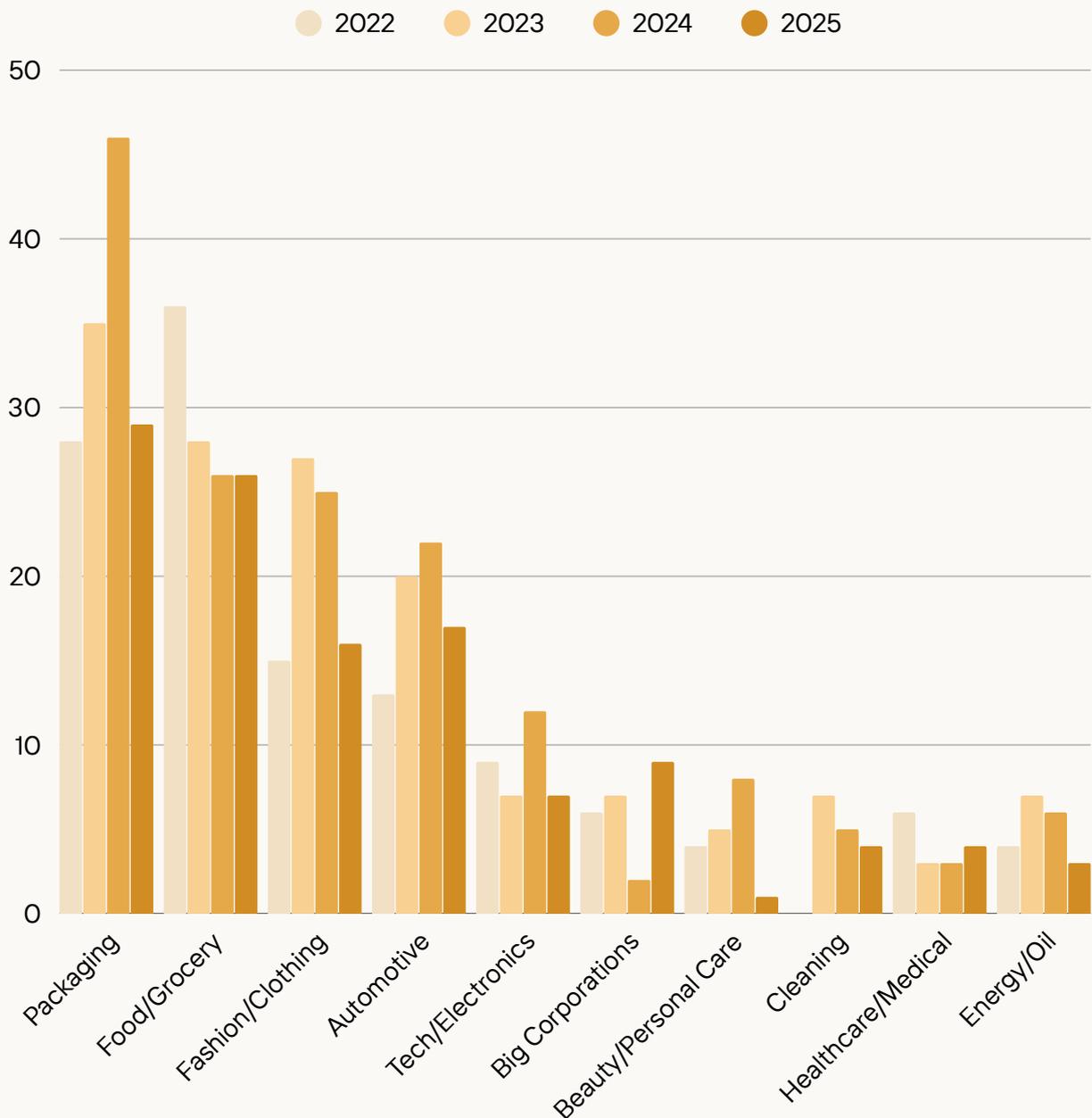
Deloitte's 2025 C-suite Sustainability Report found that while business leaders continue to increase sustainability investment (83% reported increases), they're taking a more selective, strategic approach, which could be a disconnect from the urgency consumers feel.

**Key Takeaway:** Brands have direct control over several areas that their target audience consider most important: transparency, accessibility, product improvement, and pricing. Those that act proactively rather than waiting for regulation have a real opportunity to build trust and loyalty. The challenge, as we explore in Section 7, is that many brands are currently moving in the opposite direction.

# 6 | Packaging and Food Remain the Biggest Consumer Frustrations

When asked about products, services, or brands they find particularly frustrating in their lack of sustainability progress, respondents highlighted packaging, food/grocery, fashion, and automotive as persistent pain points.

Figure 6: Consumer frustration themes from free-text responses (% of text respondents who mentioned each theme)



**Key Insight:** Packaging Frustration Spiked Then Eased, But Didn't Go Away.

Packaging hit peak frustration in 2024 at 46%, likely driven by increased awareness of plastic pollution, before settling back to 29% in 2025. Food/grocery frustration remains stubbornly consistent (26 to 36% across all four years), pointing to deep, systemic issues. More respondents in 2025 called out large corporations by name (9%, up from 2% in 2024), a sign that expectations for big business are rising.

Brands and categories specifically mentioned in 2024/2025 open-text responses include: fast fashion (Shein, Temu, and H&M came up repeatedly), Amazon, automotive (EV charging infrastructure, hybrids), grocery packaging (plastic-wrapped produce, single-use containers), and medical/pharmaceutical products.

**Key Takeaway:** Packaging remains a persistent frustration even beyond its 2024 peak, and food brands face ongoing scrutiny. Big corporations are increasingly being named directly, which means brand reputation is on the line for those seen as lagging.

## 7 | What This Means for Brands

There's a growing disconnect between what consumers want and what brands are willing to say.

On one side, our data is unambiguous: 63% of respondents want transparency from brands. Greenwashing distrust has gone from 8% to 43% in four years. Health and personal wellbeing have overtaken environmental concern as the main reason people engage with sustainability. Consumers haven't stopped caring. If anything, they're more discerning than ever.

On the other side, brands are pulling back. [GlobeScan's 2025 Healthy & Sustainable Living research](#) found that only 36% of consumers saw sustainability messaging from brands in 2025, down from 49% just two years earlier. Trust in those messages dropped too, from 79% in 2022 to 65% in 2025. This trend has a name: greenhushing. Brands are going quiet on sustainability, driven by fear of greenwashing accusations, tightening regulations like the EU's Green Claims Directive, and in some markets, political backlash.

Most of these brands haven't actually stopped doing the work. A [Harvard-led survey of 75 global companies in 2025](#) found that 85% maintained or expanded their sustainability programs, but only 16% said so publicly. The researchers put it bluntly: what looks like retreat is actually widespread greenhushing.

This is a problem worth taking seriously. When brands go quiet, consumers don't assume the best. They assume there's nothing worth saying. And in a market where 70% of our respondents believe consumers should be actively supporting sustainable brands, that silence is a missed opportunity on both sides.

So what do brands do when they're damned if they talk and invisible if they don't?

[A 2025 study published in the Journal of Consumer Affairs](#) looked at exactly this question. The researchers found that organisations navigating the greenhushing dilemma are increasingly relying on third-party sustainability signals rather than making direct claims themselves. When a brand feels it can't say it without risking a backlash, having a credible independent party say it instead changes the equation entirely.

## 7 | What This Means for Brands cont.

This is the gap that the Sustainable Jungle Brand Rating was built to fill.

We assess consumer brands across 22 criteria, grouped into four pillars: Nature & Animals (materials, packaging, carbon, waste, animal welfare), Communities & Wellbeing (labour practices, wages, supply chain, product safety), Values & Governance (ethics, transparency, reporting), and Product Performance (durability, functionality, repairability).

Ratings are based on publicly available information, certifications, and brand-provided disclosures. Every brand is benchmarked within its product category, so a skincare brand is compared to other skincare brands, not to a furniture company. Brands receive an overall rating from "Starting" through to "Disrupting" (our highest tier, for brands in the top 10% of their category).

The point isn't to verify every claim a brand makes. We can't do that, and we're upfront about it. What we do is work with brands to capture the specifics of what they're doing, score it against consistent criteria, and present it in a clear, structured format that consumers can actually understand. It's a way for brands to show their work openly, without relying on marketing language that risks being dismissed as greenwash.

Because ratings are renewed periodically, they also tell a story of progress. A brand that improves its materials sourcing, earns a new certification, or strengthens its supply chain practices will see that reflected in an updated score. For brands genuinely investing in sustainability, that visible improvement over time is one of the most powerful things they can communicate.

A rating that captures what a brand is doing today and tracks how it's improving over time gives consumers a reason to pay attention, and gives brands a reason to keep going.

To learn more about how the Sustainable Jungle Brand Rating works, visit [sustainablejungle.com/our-ratings-explained/](https://sustainablejungle.com/our-ratings-explained/) or get in touch at [hello@sustainablejungle.com](mailto:hello@sustainablejungle.com).

## 8 | Respondent Demographics

Figure 7: By Region (% respondents)

	2022	2023	2024	2025
North America	71	81	71	75
Europe & United Kingdom	14	10	15	12
Australia & Pacific	6	4	7	8
Asia	4	3	2	2
Africa	3	0	2	2
South & Central America	1	1	0	2

Figure 8: By Age Range (% respondents)

	2022	2023	2024	2025
<15 years	1	1	1	0
16-25 years	6	11	5	5
26-35 years	30	11	17	12
36-45 years	7	15	14	7
46-55 years	19	14	14	17
56-65 years	19	20	22	31
>66 years	19	27	28	28

Figure 9: By Gender Identity (% respondents)

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Female	74	84	82	83
Male	10	11	8	12
Non-binary	7	4	5	3
Rather not say	9	1	3	2
Other	0	0	2	1

# Research Methodology

Responses for the 2025 survey were collected in Q4 2025 and early Q1 2026 (n=134). Responses for the 2024 survey were collected in Q4 2024 and early Q1 2025 (n=87). Responses for the 2023 and 2022 surveys were collected in Q4 of each respective year (n=79 and n=70). Responses were collected directly by Sustainable Jungle from our subscriber base via Google Forms. Analysis was conducted by Sustainable Jungle co-founder Joy McConnochie, who has over 18 years of experience in business analysis and management consulting.

## About Sustainable Jungle

Sustainable Jungle (SJ) is a leading consumer-focused online publication that promotes sustainable living through tips, guides, products, brands, and inspiring stories.

Our readers care about their impact. They want to make conscious, deliberate, and responsible choices that align with their values. To guide them, we take a holistic approach by covering a range of topics that touch upon most aspects of daily life, including home, fashion, beauty, finance, travel, tech, and more.

We rate brands on sustainability and ethics across four categories (Nature & Animals, Communities & Wellbeing, Values & Governance, and Product Performance) and maintain a searchable Brand Directory to help consumers find brands that align with their values.

We believe that brands who prioritise sustainability and ethics are the future and we are passionate about supporting them to set the bar for a better world.

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