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Ethics in Corporate Marketing for the Promotion of Social Responsibility

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Abstract

The guidelines involved in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) demand acting with ethics, creativity, and adaptability to navigate the path to business success. In this paper, the ethical and practical considerations employed by an energy sector corporation in their marketing strategies to promote social responsibility were examined. A non-probabilistic intentional sampling was conducted with stakeholders. The data collection technique used was a survey, with a Likert scale questionnaire as the instrument. For the 155 respondents, the results revealed that a high percentage of participants recognized the implementation of CSR policies and systems in the organization. Moreover, it was found that the identification of purchase patterns based on CSR, along with its significance for corporate reputation and the alignment of marketing strategies with organizational values, were widely endorsed by the respondents..

Keywords: Corporate Responsibility, ethics, marketing, competitiveness, sustainability, environment.

Introduction

The new realities of the global market have significantly impacted the economic, cultural, and technological variables of corporate enterprises in each country. From a social perspective, there is a growing demand for the production, transaction of goods and services, and ideas to be approached from a standpoint of responsibility. In this regard, it is recognized that companies incorporate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into their operations in order to position themselves competitively in the market by having a differentiable attribute. Additionally, there are ethical considerations and a moral commitment to society (Kodirjonova and Kim, 2023; Holguín Ávila, Carrasquero Ferrer, and Suárez Rodríguez, 2023).

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Los actuales desafíos para las corporaciones empresariales involucran la obtención de grandes compensaciones económicas en un mercado altamente competitivo, cambiante, volátil, además se suma a ello que el desarrollo de proyectos o actividades que establezcan bien a realizar en el nicho de negocios que le es propio debe hacerse siguiendo el principio de -hacer el bien a la sociedad y al medio ambiente- esto proporciona a las comunidades una plataforma para un desarrollo sostenible. En este punto, se considera la ética empresarial como las problemáticas ambientales y sociales asumen un rol cada vez más protagónico en la agenda de la alta dirección de empresa y de la política internacional, por esta razón, en las últimas décadas, se han desarrollado conceptos y Responsabilidad Social Empresarial, RSE, o RSC, bajo la óptica de que llevan a cabo su función productiva y crean bienes y servicios que, en teoría, buscan beneficiar y no perjudicar a la sociedad en general (Nassani et al. 2023).

These propositions are aligned with current trends that imply a commitment from top management to be multidimensional. This means that the pursuit of financial goals should be approached by primarily linking the economic, social, and environmental aspects within the organization. This serves as an effective way to improve the quality of life, build thriving communities, and reduce the negative impacts caused by business activities on the environment (Deniz, 2023).

When facing the challenges brought about by rapid and accelerated changes, there is a growing need for organizational leaders to be more demanding each day. Regardless of the nature of their operations, they must seek greater adaptability and flexibility to ensure survival and capitalize on market opportunities for product or brand establishment. Furthermore, they must attract and retain increasingly informed, demanding, and decisive customers. In this complex environment, maintaining a strong position and competitiveness requires the effective and consistent use of Corporate Marketing as a strategy for business success. Ethical conduct is a crucial aspect in this framework, as a company that fails to act ethically runs the risk of losing credibility and legitimacy (Howaniec, 2023; Pérez-Cornejo and de Quevedo-Puente, 2022).

These processes, where corporations aim to achieve the best positioning among consumers while adhering to CSR guidelines, require acting with ethics, creativity, and adaptability in order to navigate the path to business success. The results of adopting measures from the perspective of corporate social responsibility bring significant benefits to organizations, as it has a positive relationship with important aspects such as corporate reputation, purchase intention, voluntarism, commitment, sustainability, and organizational performance (Jaimes Valdez, Jacobo Hernández, and Ochoa Jiménez, 2021).

From this perspective, corporate interventions focused on using marketing to rapidly disseminate an organizational and corporate image that aligns with CSR undoubtedly need to recognize ethics as a legitimate way of carrying out tasks effectively. In this regard, ethics speaks to universal and global values that should govern the actions of individuals and institutions, including businesses (Witek-Crabb, 2012).

These propositions reflect the recognition that the foundations, tools, and processes associated with ethical actions will guarantee a profitable and sustainable future for organizations in various business domains. It has been demonstrated that ethics and social responsibility ultimately generate gains for the company, which will be better perceived by society if it sincerely practices profitable values, making business endeavors sustainable and socially responsible (Ahmad, Yaqub, and Lee, 2023; Ferrer-Estévez and Chalmeta, 2023).

The scenario presented suggests that corporate organizations that embrace Corporate Marketing as an economic alternative in their marketing plans, under the framework of ethical principles to promote social responsibility, will continue to evolve. By adopting this approach, they are, in a way, ensuring their success. In this regard, social marketing aims to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence behaviors that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good (Pfajfar et al., 2022).

Corporate Marketing can provide various benefits to a company. Firstly, it enhances trust in the organization, elevates corporate reputation, and consequently attracts new customers while retaining existing ones. It also strengthens relationships with other companies and suppliers. Moreover, when seeking financing from investor organizations, it can lead to greater ease and favorable conditions for entering beneficial agreements for all parties involved (Flacandji, Passebois Ducros, and Ieva, 2023).

In a globalized world, where it is not uncommon to encounter positions and actions that undermine human beings and their integrity, it is important to resort to rising values and guiding principles that should serve as the foundation and backbone of all corporate activities, especially in the realm of marketing (Fernandes and Machado, 2023).

That is why, in the current economy, the role of CSR and ethics in marketing strategies plays a leadership role in business affairs (Howaniec, 2023; Morales, Castañeda, and Largosa, 2022). Some of the factors driving towards CSR include new concerns and expectations from stakeholders such as citizens, consumers, authorities, investors, and the influence of social criteria in investment decision-making (Rubio, 2021).

While it is true that the premise of business ethics has been promoted from various perspectives for several decades, over the course of time, it has evolved and consolidated into a model that incorporates various aspects that are now demanded to be incorporated into the actions of corporate organizations. Thus, the analysis highlights six different levels of ethical business interest: 1) the individual; 2) the company or corporate policy, corporate culture, and corporate social responsibility to the extent that such responsibility is ethical; 3) the specific industry level; 4) the national level; 5) the international level; and 6) the global level, addressing the ethical responsibility of companies to contribute to solutions for global issues such as global warming and similar topics that can only be resolved globally, but for which both companies and nations are responsible (Seijo and Torres, 2023; Angely C. et al., 2023).

This represents a new formula and method to strongly embrace the incorporation of these principles and redirect budgets towards ethical Corporate Marketing strategies to positively influence customer behavior in line with CSR (Ferrer-Estévez and Chalmeta, 2023; Pfajfar et al., 2022).

Corporate Marketing practices are directly related to the brand, a valuable asset that the company possesses, capable of generating revenue beyond a single accounting period. The brand is also a name that has the power to influence buyers, opinion leaders, and distribution channels (Howaniec, 2023).

In this sense, aiming to add value in marketing management with customers, Corporate Marketing cannot be overlooked in today's business landscape. The trends in negotiations and commercialization are aligned with the paradigm of Social Responsibility, as it is associated with quality and a better reputation for the company. Furthermore, business ethics has developed and expanded alongside business practices (Lourenço et al., 2022).

In this study, ethical considerations and practices employed by a corporation in the energy sector were examined in their marketing strategies to promote social responsibility. The research explored the impact of ethical marketing on consumer behavior, brand reputation, long-term business sustainability, and its potential contribution to creating a socially responsible business environment.

Methodology

En cuanto a la Población y Muestra, se tiene que los sujetos de esta investigación se encuentran constituidos por los directivos, gerentes, jefes de departamentos, trabajadores y clientes de una corporación del sector energético del país. De este modo, se realizó un muestreo no probabilístico intencional (Banning 2023). El instrumento empleado para la recolección de datos fue la encuesta, para ello se desarrolló y validó por expertos un cuestionario tipo escala Likert con opciones de respuestas múltiples (siempre; casi siempre; pocas veces; nunca) (Heo et al. 2022; Anjaria 2022).

The following strategic axes were addressed:

- a) Corporate Social Responsibility.
- b) Environmental management.
- c) Marketing strategies based on changes in customer purchasing patterns.
- d) Corporate Social Responsibility and business reputation.
- e) Marketing based on the organization's ethical principles and values.

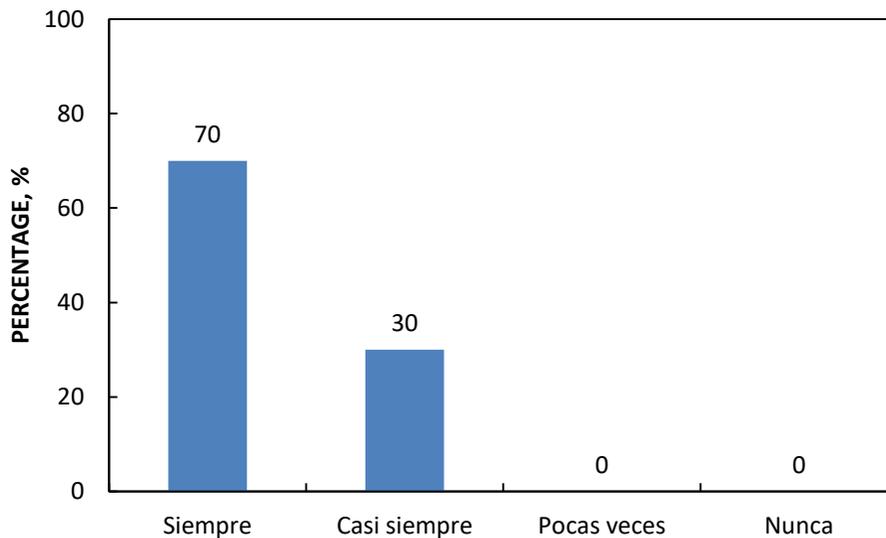
The data were processed using the statistical software SPSS. Furthermore, the tables were interpreted, and the results were discussed by comparing them with other research studies.

Results and discussion

Corporate Social Responsibility

Figure 1 displays the results regarding the implementation of corporate responsibility policies in the studied entity as a way to align with the guidelines promoted by national and international entities.

Figure 1. Corporate Social Responsibility in the institution



It was found that 70% of respondents believe that the organization implements corporate social responsibility policies, which is essential according to current trends to maintain a well-positioned entity in the business market.

In the national context, the paradigm of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is gradually being embraced in Ecuador. It implies, as previously mentioned, the need and obligation for companies and institutions engaged in economic activities, including universities, to maintain a conduct that respects legality, ethics, morality, and the environment. Numerous studies have been conducted attempting to establish a relationship between CSR, financial performance, and the economic strategy of organizations (Fernando GUERRERO Chicaiza et al., 2017). The concept of CSR proposes sustainability as a combination of ethical principles that constitute the foundation of best business practices. It acknowledges the importance of equity in fostering harmonious coexistence. Therefore, actions that seek to address social concerns while maximizing resources that enhance life are encouraged (Morales, Castañeda, and Largosa, 2022).

In this regard, concerning the implementation of corporate social responsibility policies, it is evident that the company is aligned with the current trends in economic and financial transactions.

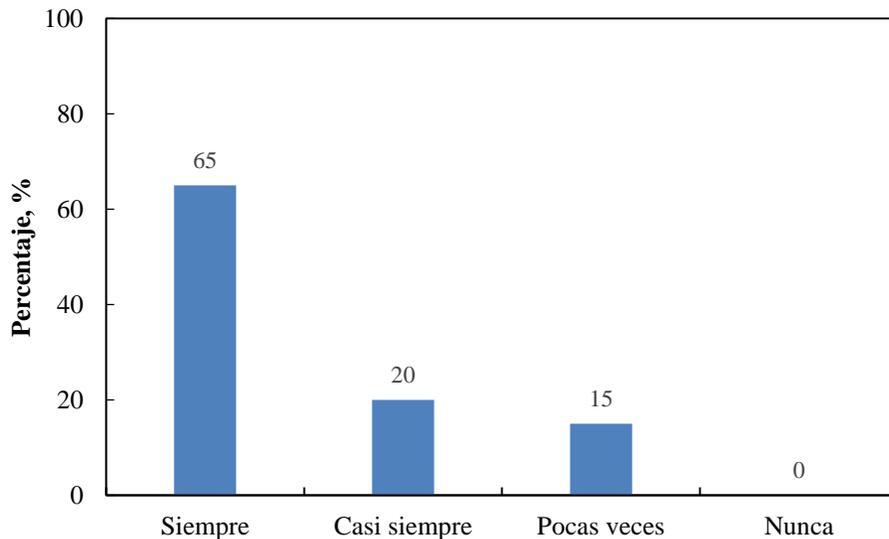
In the document prepared by the BBVA Group, emphasis is placed on the fact that CSR policies should be aligned with the entity's code of conduct, which helps define and promote behaviors that generate value for all stakeholders (customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers, and society) (Valmayor, Duarte Monedero, and Gil-Alana, 2021).

On the other hand, the general idea of CSR is that corporations should consider the impact of their activities not only on their shareholders but also on their stakeholders, which include individuals, groups, and institutions (Ott, 2009; Jaimes Valdez, Jacobo Hernández, and Ochoa Jiménez, 2021). Other studies have shown that the significant progress of CSR in terms of management, transparency, measurement, environment, and governance translates into a crucial contribution to the efficiency and sustainable growth of the company (Lopez, Rangel, and Fernández, 2022; Ortiz-Martínez, Marín-Hernández, and Santos-Jaén, 2023).

Environmental management

Within the framework of environmental protection trends, there has been a growing interest in understanding how compliance with this crucial aspect is being carried out. In this regard, the information gathered regarding the fulfillment of environmental responsibilities is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Environmental management



According to the data collected, 65% of respondents believe that the organization implements social responsibility systems that manage environmental impact. This element is crucial for modern entities in terms of promoting their brand or corporate image in line with the principles advocated by CSR trends. Circular economy is seen as an umbrella concept for integrating policies based on

sustainable development (Babkin et al., 2023).

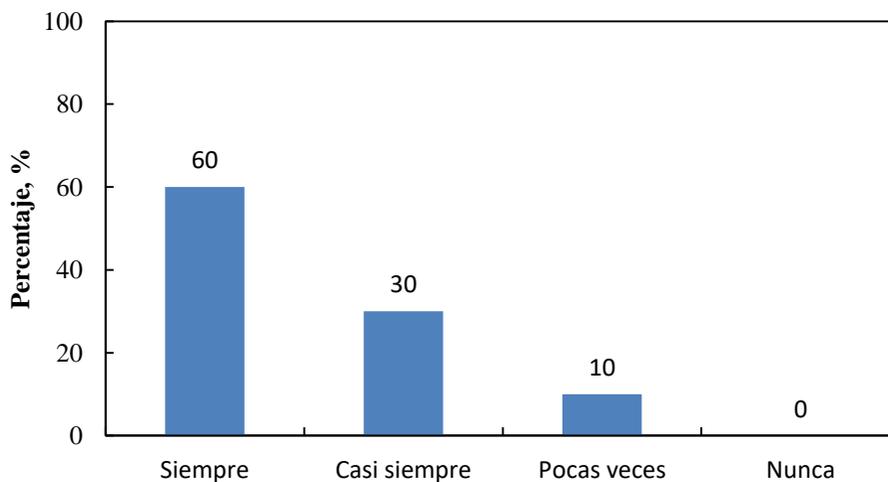
Furthermore, the application of CSR that manages environmental impact is in line with the pillars on which the principle of sustainable production is based. It aims to harmonize economic profitability, social well-being, and environmental care (Wahyuningrum et al., 2023). Globally, there has been a promotion of the need to protect the environment, which has led to increased demands from various stakeholders and, consequently, an evolution of environmental management in organizations. This evolution has transitioned from an anthropocentric approach to a sustainability-oriented approach (A. K. Singh, Zhang, and Anu, 2023; Chen, Zhu, and Liu, 2023).

Environmental concerns, along with economic and social aspects, form a pillar of CSR. It refers to how industries make appropriate use of resources while considering sustainability, going beyond what is required by regulations (Ahmad, Yaqub, and Lee, 2023). Therefore, a company that respects society in general and its stakeholders in particular should practice responsible, respectful, and ethical marketing that contributes to the development of human beings (Valdez Cornejo, 2021).

Marketing strategies based on changing customer buying patterns

Figure 3 presents the results found within the framework of the changing consumer buying patterns.

Figure 3. Marketing strategies based on changing customer buying patterns



As pointed out by the consulted authors, it has been found that brand-oriented companies strategically adopt organizational behaviors that embrace transformation in corporate marketing strategies to design campaigns that position the brand and/or company image (Piha, Papadas, and Davvetas, 2021).

In this study, 60% of respondents agreed that the organization identifies customer brand

purchasing patterns based on their knowledge of RSC-related aspects. It was evident that the organization has an understanding of the gradual changes occurring in consumer preferences for products, goods, and services based on sustainability principles. These findings align with other studies (Lourenço et al., 2022; Šerić, Gil-Saura, and Ruiz-Molina, 2014).

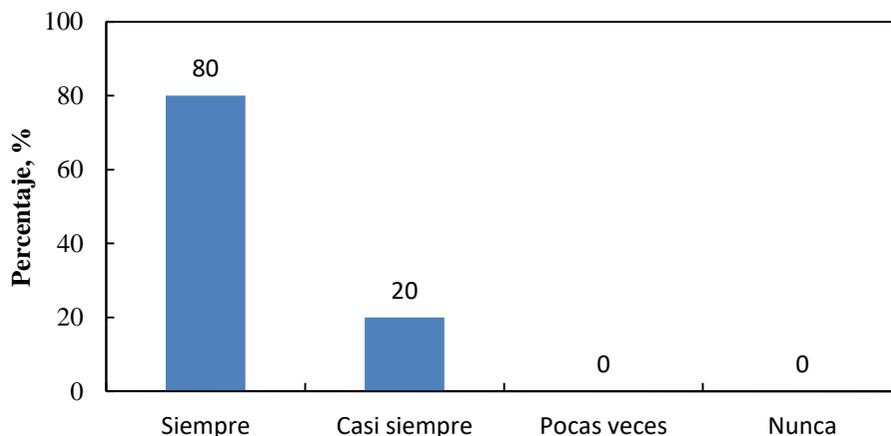
Furthermore, regarding the identification of customer purchasing patterns from the perspective of social responsibility, the organization recognizes this aspect as relevant for positioning itself in customer preferences. Consumers are increasingly interested in patronizing distinguished companies that demonstrate social responsibility. This aspect sets them apart from companies that show little empathy towards social causes (A. Singh and Pathak, 2023; Ferrer-Estévez and Chalmeta, 2023).

The relationship between brands and consumers has indeed changed. Brands are aware that they need to be close to consumers (Ferrer-Estévez and Chalmeta, 2023). Products no longer compete solely based on quality and price; there is a new magical ingredient that increasingly influences consumer purchasing decisions. Under this premise, a portion of society has generated a social, economic, and political movement that has resulted in a new way of consuming, which is gaining traction worldwide (A. K. Singh, Zhang, and Anu, 2023). In this regard, marketing specialists or marketers have the mission of ensuring that companies adequately satisfy the needs of consumers (Valdez Cornejo, 2021; Patil and Rahman, 2022).

Corporate Social Responsibility and business reputation

The importance given by the organization to CSR contributes to maintaining a good corporate image or reputation in the business sphere. Figure 4 displays the results obtained in this regard.

Figure 4 Corporate Social Responsibility and business reputation



In this section, the importance given to the principle of CSR as a fundamental aspect for corporate reputation is evident. In this regard, 80% of the respondents believe that internal processes should

always be optimized in favor of this vision. These results are in line with other studies that establish a link between corporate reputation and risk management systems, along with the role played by CSR performance as a mediator (Pérez-Cornejo and de Quevedo-Puente, 2022; Kodirjonova and Kim, 2023).

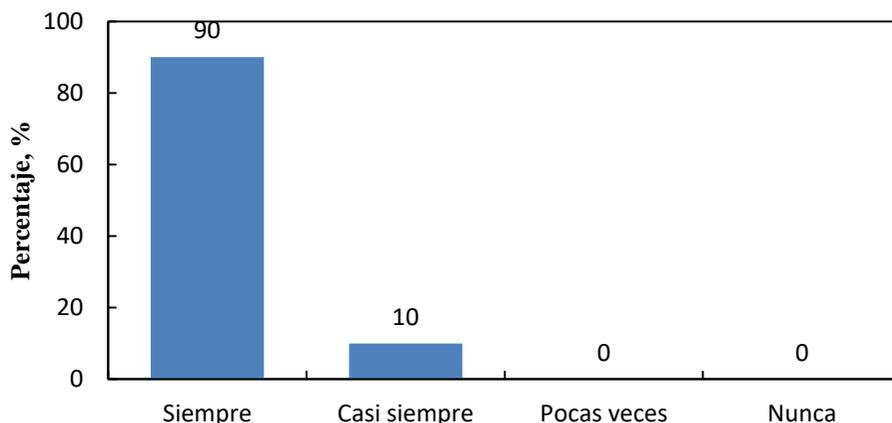
CSR implies that companies must take responsibility for their social, economic, and environmental impacts. It is a voluntary practice that goes beyond compliance with laws and regulations and seeks to contribute to societal well-being and sustainable development (Fernandes and Machado, 2023; Deniz, 2023). Companies committed to CSR implement policies and actions that promote equity, environmental protection, respect for human rights, and transparency in their operations. This not only generates benefits for society but can also strengthen the company's reputation and foster consumer loyalty (Nassani et al., 2023).

Corporate reputation consists of the prestige, image, and perception that different stakeholders have of a company. Therefore, it is a valuable intangible asset as it influences consumer preference, investor trust, employee relations, and the overall perception of the public (Vuong and Bui, 2023). A good corporate reputation is built through ethical management, transparency, quality products and services, commitment to social responsibility, and the fulfillment of commitments made. Maintaining a strong reputation is essential for the long-term viability and success of a company as it can influence its ability to attract and retain talent, establish strategic partnerships, and maintain market preference (Morales, Castañeda, and Largosa, 2022; Pfajfar et al., 2022).

Marketing based on the ethical principles and values of the organization

Here, the perspective held by the entity under study was taken into account to propose and execute strategies that clarify the ethical principles and values that permeate the operation of the corporation, Figure 5.

Figure 5. Marketing based on the ethical principles and values of the organization



It was found that 90% of the respondents believe that the Marketing strategies reflect the principles and values of the organization. The adoption of this perspective in the entity is significant, as these marketing strategies undoubtedly generate trust in the organization and what it offers in the market (Vuong & Bui, 2023).

Ethics in corporate marketing is crucial for promoting social responsibility, as it integrates the values and principles that should accompany any product launch or marketing campaign to position the brand that identifies an organization. Particularly from the perspective of corporate social responsibility (CSR), it involves a series of essential processes aimed at controlling the elements surrounding the product, goods, or services offered in the market (Ndhlovu & Maree, 2022).

In this regard, recent studies indicate that an increasing number of consumers consider the values and ethics of a brand when making purchasing decisions (Vuong & Bui, 2023; Park & Yoo, 2023). Ethical marketing is not just a marketing strategy; it is a philosophy that should permeate all levels of the company. Therefore, in terms of marketing tactics, corporate social responsibility (CSR) generally impacts marketing actions in society (Pfajfar et al., 2022). A substantial part of this responsibility lies in marketing ethics, which includes the principles and standards that define acceptable behavior in marketing activities. Incorporating ethics as an inseparable element of business activities, particularly in marketing, is crucial, considering that the economy should serve humanity (Rubio, 2021). Ethical marketing can generate trust, commitment, and is an important aspect in building long-term relationships (Chatterjee, Chaudhuri, & Vrontis, 2023).

Conclusions

There is a high perception and recognition of the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the organization under study. The majority of the respondents believe that the organization implements CSR policies and systems, particularly in managing environmental impact, which is essential for maintaining a good reputation and positioning in the current market. Additionally, it is observed that the entity is concerned about changes in consumer preferences, as consumers increasingly value sustainability in their purchasing decisions.

The results also highlight the importance of optimizing internal processes aligned with this CSR vision, which is supported by the high agreement among the respondents. It is also emphasized that the marketing strategies reflect the principles and values of the organization, thereby generating trust in the entity and its offerings in the market. Additionally, the results support the idea that the organization is in line with CSR trends and principles, which is beneficial for maintaining a good corporate image and meeting the expectations of sustainability-conscious consumers.

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