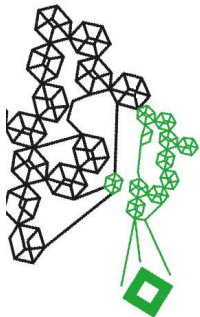
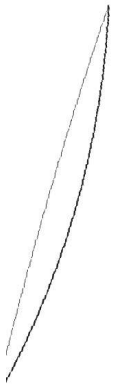
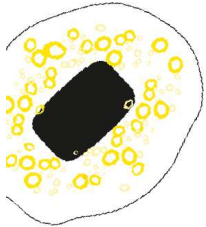


UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

"Sustainability and Customer Experience: Allies
or Rivals in Business?"

A. Zerrou¹



UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

Anass Zerrou – s3054551

University of Twente, Enschede, Overijssel, Nederland
Faculty of Behavioral Management and Social Sciences – BMS
Master thesis

First supervisor: Dr. Yasin Sahhar
Second supervisor: Dr. Lara Carminati
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Abstract

Purpose - This study examined the broad influence of sustainability perceptions on customer experience in the transportation industry. The identified gap is the limited academic research on how sustainability perceptions influence customer experience, particularly about the dimensions of social and economic sustainability and their context-specific implications in the transportation industry. The research aims to guide companies in adopting sustainable practices contributing to their competitive advantage and long-term success as market dynamics evolve. Therefore, the primary objective is to unravel the complex interplay between sustainability practices and customer experience.

Design/methodology/approach - Using qualitative research methods, this study explored the interplay between sustainability and customer experience and how the various sustainability dimensions shape customer experience. The study included sixteen purposively sampled interviews with executives from fourteen companies, providing a comprehensive and multifaceted perspective. The collected data were analyzed using Gioia's methodology.

Findings - The results of this study suggest a shift in the transportation sector, where sustainability initiatives have moved beyond mere operational considerations to become key drivers of the customer experience. Through an in-depth exploration of participants' insights, our findings highlighted the changing landscape of decision criteria, highlighting the growing importance of service quality, reliability, and sustainability in shaping long-term partnerships. Sustainability emerges as a key driver of positive emotional experiences for customers, underscoring its integral role in driving overall satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, our research highlights the complex interplay between sustainability promotion, regulatory compliance, and market competitiveness, revealing the complex challenges faced by companies seeking to balance economic needs with environmental responsibility while prioritizing customer-centric approaches. In addition, we explored the evolving dynamics of customer sustainability awareness and engagement, highlighting the critical need for proactive communication and education initiatives to create a better customer experience with meaningful customer connections.

Originality/value - This research extends theoretical frameworks by comprehensively integrating sustainability into customer decision-making processes. Managerial implications recommend an integrated approach encompassing environmental, social, and economic sustainability for sustainable success in the transportation industry. Recommendations for transport companies focus on customized roadmaps, real-time analytics, dynamic pricing, and collaboration platforms. Despite valuable insights, limitations include industry-specific focus, limited geography, and qualitative methodology. Future research recommendations include sample diversification, scope expansion, mixed methods approach, time dynamics, customer segmentation, and communication strategies.

Keywords

Sustainability, Customer Experience, Transportation, Qualitative Research.

I. Introduction

In the last 25 years, the business landscape and our perspective on marketing have evolved significantly. First, it was about creating popular consumer product brands (Keller, 1993). Then, it shifted to building customer relationships through service marketing (Crukeru & Moise, 2014). Currently, the main goal is to provide great customer experiences (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Holmlund et al., 2020; Klaus, 2011). Although not new, the concept of customer experience has gained significant attention and has seen a transformative shift in approach over the last three decades (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Despite the considerable attention it has received, including business leaders emphasizing its importance for firm competitiveness and marketing scholars underscoring its fundamental role in marketing management, there remains a significant lack of consensus regarding what customer experience truly encompasses (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). The Marketing Science Institute considers customer experience to be a critical research focus in the coming years due to the increasing number and complexity of customer touchpoints (Desai et al., 2012). They believe that enhancing positive experiences along the customer journey will lead to overall improvements (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Effectively managing each customer's experience is a key factor in fostering customer loyalty and trust (Jain et al., 2017). It concentrates on making customer interactions unique, enjoyable, and unforgettable, signaling a shift toward experiential business management (Frow & Payne, 2007).

To make customer interactions as unique and enjoyable as mentioned above, companies and managers are actively seeking ways to incorporate a balance of economic, environmental, social and cultural value creation into their business models (Porter & Derry, 2012). Today, sustainability is becoming increasingly significant in all aspects of organizational life. In today's business landscape, it is essential to recognize the interconnectedness of customer experience and sustainability. Problematically separating these two domains can lead to missed opportunities, reputational damage, and customer distrust (Gallardo-Vázquez et al., 2019). Sustainability was established over five decades ago and has emerged as a concept that shows how companies respond to the demands of the stakeholders (Ozkan et al., 2022). Sustainability is now universally recognized and embraced by nations, organizations, and individuals (Westin et al., 2022). It is suggested that customers develop positive perceptions and behaviors towards socially responsible companies (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). Recent research has identified sustainable development as an important factor in business growth (Elkington, 2004).

Sustainability not only helps businesses succeed and thrive, it also has a direct impact on consumer behavior, satisfaction and loyalty (Marín-García et al., 2022).

Businesses that authentically integrate sustainability into their customer experience strategy stand to gain not only from a competitive advantage but also from the broader societal benefits that come with responsible corporate behavior (Oncioiu et al., 2020). Ultimately, the fusion of customer experience and sustainability is not just a strategic choice but a moral and economic imperative for modern businesses (White et al., 2019). It has been shown that customers positively affected by perceived sustainability show increased loyalty and satisfaction, which in turn influences the organization's financial results (Westin et al., 2022). In addition, as recent research has shown, there is a growing interest in the role of sustainability in modern business operations (Khan & Fatma, 2023). The most commonly used definition of sustainability is that it involves a development strategy that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Kotob et al., 2011).

Until now, there has been limited scholarly exploration of how the perception of sustainability contributes to customer experience, particularly in the transport industry (Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2019; Westin et al., 2022). For instance, a very recent study conducted by Khan and Fatma (2023) has provided a fundamental understanding of how perceived sustainability influences customer responses. The study found that customer engagement does not act as a mediator between perceived sustainability and loyalty (Khan & Fatma, 2023). That is the reason why an investigation is needed into the mediating role of customer experience, as businesses increasingly adopt customer-centric approaches (Khan & Fatma, 2023; Sheth et al., 2011). However, other gaps in the current knowledge landscape require further investigation. Firstly, while the study of Khan and Fatma (2023) shed light on the impact of environmental sustainability on customer engagement, it has largely overlooked the social and economic dimensions of sustainability. Hence, understanding how socio-economic sustainability factors may shape customer experience. Furthermore, Ostrom et al. (2021) highlighted the challenges in achieving sustainability goals, where customer behavior significantly impacts these goals. They call for research on behavioral approaches to encourage customer and employee engagement in sustainability efforts in service industries. In addition, research to date has focused primarily on product and service brands, with limited exploration of the context in specific industries. In short, research exploring the customer experience and sustainability

relationship has been scarce (Khan & Fatma, 2023; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2019) and more research is needed to further unravel this relationship.

Hence, further research into the interplay between sustainability and customer experience is essential to enable companies to strategically integrate sustainable practices, gain a competitive advantage in the field, meet evolving consumer expectations, and optimize their sustainability efforts for improved customer satisfaction and long-term viability. By examining environmental, social, and economic dimensions, this study provides valuable insights into the multifaceted benefits of sustainability for specific industries. This research is crucial for guiding businesses toward sustainable practices that can improve their competitive edge and long-term success in an evolving market.

in light of this, the objective of this research is to understand the interplay between sustainability practices and to investigate how different aspects of sustainability impact customer experience.

Therefore, the following research questions have been formulated:

RQ1: “What is the interplay between sustainability and customer experience?”

RQ2: “How do the various sustainability dimensions shape customer experience?”

To tackle the research question, this thesis has adopted an abductive qualitative approach in the setting of the transport industry. The decision to focus on the transport sector in the context of sustainability is motivated by the sector's significant impact on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to environmental sustainability and responsible consumption and production (Vanovermeire & Sörensen, 2014). The study by Aloui et al. (2021) highlights the challenges the transport industry faces in aligning with the SDGs, emphasizing the need for improved collaboration and sustainability integration. The sector's impact on greenhouse gas emissions (SDG 13), public health (SDG 3), and transport sustainability (SDG 11) underscores its critical role in addressing global challenges. By addressing these issues, there is an opportunity to contribute to responsible business practices and positively impact both short- and long-term strategic goals (Gallardo-Vázquez et al., 2019; von Berlepsch et al., 2022).

The qualitative research methods that have been used, are interviews with customers. There has been explored how various sustainability dimensions in the transportation industry shape customer experiences and what the interplay is between sustainability and customer

experience. The findings are analyzed thematically to uncover insights, to offer practical, real-world context.

Understanding the relationship between customer experience and sustainability is of vital importance to theory, as it provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics that drive business behavior (Gong et al., 2023). Theoretical frameworks are enriched when we unravel the specific mechanisms by which firms integrate sustainability into their customer experience strategies (Petrini & Pozzebon, 2010). This deeper theoretical understanding allows us to unravel how companies adapt to evolving societal and environmental demands, providing a roadmap for their sustainability practices (Bari et al., 2022). From practical terms, acknowledging the relationship between customer experience and sustainability carries substantial implications for businesses (Bordian et al., 2023). It promotes the adoption of a comprehensive operational approach that encompasses not only customer satisfaction, but also environmental and social responsibility. This fusion of customer-centricity with sustainability offers several tangible advantages, including improved customer loyalty and more informed strategic decision-making (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

This study contributes to the fields of business management, marketing, and sustainability by investigating the relationship between customer experience and perceived sustainability. First, by providing a more comprehensive understanding of how sustainability perceptions affect customer behavior and attitudes in this specific sector (Uzunkaya, 2023). Second, this study enriches the customer experience sustainability discussion by adding two sustainability dimensions (social and economic) (Calza et al., 2023). Finally, this study extends the processes and mechanisms identified in previous research Khan and Fatma (2023) by conducting a qualitative investigation into the aspects of sustainability perceptions and their influence on customer behavior and attitudes. This qualitative study offers nuanced perspectives, explores behavioral drivers and attitude formation, provides contextual insights, and uncovers unexpected findings.

The paper is structured as follows. Next, the theory section includes theory on sustainability and customer experience. The research methodology section presents the qualitative approach and participant selection. The findings are discussed in relation to the research question, followed by practical recommendations for companies in the transport industry. The paper concludes with reflections on limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Theory

2.1 Customer experience

Based on the concept of the conscious mind by Chalmers (1996), we define customer experience as the way customers personally think and feel during an interaction with an experience partner at a specific point in their customer journey (Gahler et al., 2023). According to Klaus (2008) customer experience has two main categories: functional aspects (evaluated logically) and emotional aspects (involving sensory elements and the environment). Mentioning this categorization is important because it provides a basic understanding of the multifaceted nature of customer experience, which is critical for companies that want to create meaningful and satisfying interactions with their customers, and for researchers who want to study the field more closely. Furthermore Zaltman (1997) underscores that customer value is not solely determined by the trade-off between functionality and price, but it is heavily influenced by the intangible and emotional elements that consumers experience when interacting with a product or service. This highlights the importance of considering sensory and emotional factors in understanding and satisfying customer needs and desires.

Customer experience can be defined as a complex concept that considers a customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensory, and social reactions to a company's offerings throughout the entire customer's buying journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The same dimensions were also used in the study by Ta et al. (2022). In that study, they also adopted the widely accepted multidimensional conceptualization of customer experience to comprehensively understand various the facets of customer experience. These dimensions which can be seen in Figure 1 suggests that customer experience encompasses a range of responses, including sensory, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and social reactions. The following section describes these dimensions in detail.

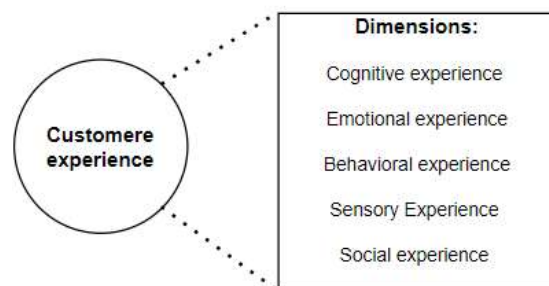


FIGURE 1 MODEL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE DIMENSIONS (TA ET AL., 2022)

Cognitive experience involves engaging customers' thinking and conscious mental processes. It is about stimulating their cognitive abilities and can manifest through surprising, intriguing, and thought-provoking interactions. This experience is formed through various means, including direct interactions with offerings, processing secondary sources of information (like online reviews and word-of-mouth), and comparing information against previous memories. Cognitive experiences can also include subconscious elements like fantasies, imagery, and memories that occur during the shopping process (Ismail et al., 2011; Ta et al., 2022).

Emotional experience focuses on the emotions and feelings evoked when customers interact with a brand, service, or product. These emotions can range from positive ones like joy and happiness to negative ones like disappointment or frustration. Companies strive to create positive emotions because they are associated with customer satisfaction, loyalty, and the buying process. However, negative emotions can also arise, and they can have long-lasting consequences (Ismail et al., 2011; Ta et al., 2022).

Behavioral experience is about the behavioral actions and responses that become evident through lifestyle, interaction, and objects. It occurs when a customer's values and beliefs align with what a brand represents. For example, in the context of clothing brands, behavioral experience can be seen through consumer loyalty, attitudinal attachment, consideration of certain brands, and a willingness to pay premium prices (Ismail et al., 2011; Ta et al., 2022).

Sensory Experience pertains to how customers experience a product or service through their five senses, sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. It is not limited to just the product; it extends to the retail environment as well. For instance, a pleasant fragrance in a store can positively affect how customers feel and how they evaluate the store. Elements such as music, color, lighting, and the crowd in a retail space also play a role in shaping customers' shopping experiences (Ismail et al., 2011; Ta et al., 2022).

Social experience arises from how customers relate themselves to reference groups, cultures, or lifestyles. It is about how customers connect with others and their social environment. These social experiences can contribute to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Consumers use their purchasing decisions to convey personal values and can engage in status enhancement or self-esteem enhancement. This dimension is a way for customers to express their social identity and communicate their social position to others (Ismail et al., 2011; Ta et al., 2022).

A lot of research has been done on customer experience. Customer experience is a critical focus for companies, and its importance is recognized by marketing executives who recognize its impact on competitive advantage¹. Beyond product quality and brands, customer experience influences 73% of purchase decisions (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; PWC, 2018). While companies excel at managing functionality, understanding and improving the emotional aspect of the customer experience remains a challenge, but is essential to maintaining competitive advantage (Caruelle et al., 2024). According to Ahmed et al. (2022), a customer's evaluation of a product or service, whether conscious or unconscious, can impact their intentions to repurchase, reuse, or recommend it to others. Therefore, the valence of the customer's experience can be either positive or negative, affecting their behavioral intentions (Brady et al., 2006). A positive customer experience in the purchase process contributes to customer satisfaction, increases loyalty, and attracts new customers (de Haan et al., 2015; Olsen, 2002). Satisfied customers are likely to develop strong relationships with sellers, leading to longevity through retention and loyalty (Storbacka et al., 1994). Positive customer experiences correlate with increased customer loyalty, which ultimately improves business performance (Uncles et al., 2010). Other findings also provided evidence of the relationship between the sales interaction experience, customer satisfaction, loyalty, and ultimately, willingness to recommend (Human et al., 2020). Early research focused on measuring the success of the customer experience in the B2B context, considering factors such as asset management, cost, productivity, customer service, and logistics quality (Akdoğan & Durak, 2016). With the shift towards consumer-centric supply chain management and consumer-driven e-commerce, there's a growing focus on evaluating logistics and delivery services in relation to marketing (Olsson et al., 2023). Prioritizing the customer experience not only builds brand loyalty, but also promotes responsible behavior that aligns with the need for sustainable business practices in today's marketplace.

2.2 Sustainability

As organizations prioritize improving the customer experience, they often find themselves at the intersection of customer satisfaction and sustainability (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). This is because today's socially-conscious consumers are not only looking for great products and services but also expect businesses to take meaningful steps towards sustainability (Geissdoerfer et al., 2018). Sustainability has emerged as a crucial element for gaining competitive advantages in the business landscape (Marín-García et al., 2022). The concept of

¹ <https://www.zendesk.com/au/blog/cx-trends-2023-immersive-cx/>

sustainability was initially introduced by the United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development, defining it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987, p. 37). The term 'sustainability' has its roots in the Latin word 'sustinere,' which expresses the concept of 'holding.' Definitions of sustainability in various dictionaries share the idea of 'maintaining,' 'supporting,' 'enduring,' or related meanings (Sakalasooriya, 2021). However, the literature demonstrates that sustainability is not easily defined, with some researchers focusing on its environmental aspect, while others adopt a broader view that includes social and economic dimensions (Marín-García et al., 2022).

Elkington (2004) proposed the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) theory, encompassing three key dimensions of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic. Elkington's Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, emphasizing People, Planet, and Profit, has globally influenced sustainable business strategies (Chabowski et al., 2011; Elkington, 1998; Goran & Wagner, 2015). This model aligns with the three critical dimensions of sustainable development: environmental quality, social equity, and economic benefits (Elkington, 1998). The widely accepted nested spheres model illustrates sustainability as their intersection, although it has been criticized for lacking hierarchy (Getzner, 1999).

Alternatively, the "strong approach" by Getzner (1999) envisions sustainability as a broader environmental system, where the economic and social domains have boundaries, resembling a Russian doll model. This robust perspective underscores the need for businesses to align with broader social and environmental systems (Lawson & Beckmann, 2010).

Environmental sustainability involves both reactive and proactive approaches, aiming to minimize environmental impact and waste while promoting alternative production processes (Kumar & Polonsky, 2019; Lüdeke-Freund et al., 2017). There is growing evidence that the mainstream market is increasingly embracing sustainability, as seen in the widespread availability of green products, eco-labeling, and ISO 14001 certification (Correia, 2019). Consequently, Seuring and Müller (2008) argue that the environmental aspect of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) holds the most importance, with economic and social dimensions considered secondary since all aspects of sustainability ultimately rely on Earth's resources, limits, and systems. In an interesting twist, Sheth et al. (2011) proposed a redefinition of this dimension in relation to consumers, framing it as the impact of environmental changes on human health and well-being resulting from consumption.

Social sustainability entails effective stakeholder management, fostering strong relationships with various stakeholders, and addressing social issues such as human rights and community projects (Kumar & Polonsky, 2019; Lüdeke-Freund et al., 2017). A prevailing focus within this dimension revolves around the growing significance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, which are not only a subject of extensive research but also a crucial aspect of corporate strategies and operations (Correia, 2019). It is suggested that there are positive connections between CSR activities and how consumers perceive organizations (Lichtenstein et al., 2004). Consequently, CSR initiatives are viewed as a potent tool for enhancing public relations, especially in today's market environment (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006).

Economic sustainability revolves around achieving long-term financial performance and economic growth through value creation, sales growth, and optimized production processes (Bottani et al., 2019; Kumar & Polonsky, 2019; Lavorata, 2014). Furthermore, it emphasizes assessing an organization's performance by efficiently managing its strategic capabilities, including core competencies, shareholder value creation, and marketing orientation. It also recognizes that consumer concerns about economic sustainability have risen after the 2008 economic downturn, potentially impacting financial stability and employment prospects (Correia, 2019). As sustainability becomes increasingly integrated with customer expectations, the need to shift to customer-centric sustainability initiatives is becoming essential for companies seeking a competitive advantage.

2.3 Customer-Centric Sustainability Initiatives

In today's rapidly changing business environment, companies are navigating a shifting paradigm that underscores the imperative of combining customer-centricity with sustainability practices. This synergy not only drives innovation but also fosters a sense of shared purpose between companies and their customer base. To understand the deeper implications of this approach, we delve into a collection of studies that highlight how customer-centric sustainability initiatives are shaping the future of responsible business. In the context of sustainability within service industries, it is essential to consider the dynamic relationship between consumers and sustainability. First, it is argued that the service industry is becoming increasingly unsustainable, but by involving consumers in service innovation and adopting a broader stakeholder perspective, sustainability goals can be achieved (van Riel et al., 2021). This shift emphasizes profit, planet, and people over the shareholder-first doctrine. The study by van Riel et al. (2021) introduces a five-actor model, highlighting the consumer as a key driver of sustainability. Empirical evidence shows that innovations in social and environmental aspects enhance

customer loyalty, and consumers aware of sustainability risks tend to consume more responsibly. Service firms considering stakeholders in their service systems perform better in terms of profit, planet, and people. In addition, the paper by Nogueira et al. (2023) explores customer-centered sustainability in the context of fast fashion brands, assessing consumers' perceptions of economic, environmental, and social sustainability. It also examines the impact of customer-brand relationships, specifically brand trust, affective brand commitment, and continuance brand commitment. The results show a significant relationship between customer-centric sustainability and brand trust. Economic and social sustainability significantly predict affective brand commitment. The study also shows that brand trust positively influences consumers' intention to maintain long-term relationships. The rise of customer-centric sustainability initiatives underscores the critical link between customer experience and sustainability, creating an opportunity to explore the interconnectedness of customer experience in shaping responsible business practices.

2.4 The Interconnection Between Customer Experience and Sustainability

Customer experience and sustainability are essential components of modern business operations. Sustainability serves as a driver for improving customer experience (Westin et al., 2022). This suggests that customers' perceptions of sustainable practices have a significant impact on their overall experience with a brand or organization. Consequently, organizations are encouraged to integrate sustainable practices into their operations to enhance brand image and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, innovation and sustainability play a critical role in increasing customer satisfaction (Marín-García et al., 2022). This highlights the importance of combining sustainable practices with innovative approaches to achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction. By integrating sustainability into their innovation strategies, companies can effectively create value for customers, improve the overall customer experience, and foster greater customer satisfaction.

A direct causal relationship between environmental sustainability and customer experience within the hospitality industry was established, shedding light on a previously unexplored connection (Moliner et al., 2019). This research also revealed an indirect link between environmental sustainability and customer satisfaction, mediated through the customer experience. Additionally, sustainability appears to be influenced by customer experiences and perceived value, particularly in the context of social media (Rahardja et al., 2021). These factors, in turn, impact the quality of customer-vendor relationships and customers' intention to maintain sustainable relationships with companies.

On top of that the study by Ostrom et al. (2021) underscores the significance of considering customer experience in the context of sustainability. It introduces the concept of "customer proactivity for well-being," highlighting the evolving role of consumers in service industries. Customers are increasingly assuming an active role in services that affect their well-being, as well as the well-being of others and the environment. The relevance of customer experience to sustainability is multi-faceted. First, it emphasizes the idea of "value co-creation" in services, where consumers actively engage and contribute to the creation of value. This can manifest in sustainable choices, such as selecting eco-friendly options or participating in peer-to-peer services and smart city initiatives aimed at reducing resource consumption and promoting sustainability. Second, it emphasizes the concept of "consumer responsibility for personal health and welfare." In the pursuit of their own well-being, consumers are making choices that align with sustainability, such as opting for healthier and environmentally friendly services. Third, customers play a pivotal role in broader sustainability efforts. Their choices, whether in supporting sustainable products and services or engaging in eco-friendly initiatives, directly impact the environment and society. To conclude the paper by Sfakianaki et al. (2022) investigated the influence of adopting sustainable or 'green' strategies on customer experience within the retail sector. Findings that demonstrate the positive impact of green strategies on customer experience, whether through direct or indirect channels involving omnichannel practices. Customers attributes, such as environmentally conscious customers, and situational factors play a crucial role in moderating the relationship between green strategies and customer experience.

The section also highlighted the growing importance of customer-centric sustainability initiatives that seek to align customer centricity with sustainable practices. Studies highlight the role of consumers in driving sustainability and how engaging them in service innovation can lead to positive outcomes for both the bottom line and the planet. In addition, research suggests a strong link between customer experience and sustainability. Sustainable practices can positively influence brand image and customer satisfaction, and the combination of sustainability and innovation can lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction. Environmental sustainability has been shown to indirectly influence customer satisfaction through customer experience. In addition, customer experience and perceived value play a role in influencing customers' intentions to maintain sustainable relationships with companies. Finally, the section highlighted the evolving role of consumers in actively contributing to sustainability through their choices and engagement with services.

This is not only about value co-creation, but also about consumer responsibility for personal health and well-being. Customers play a central role in broader sustainability efforts, impacting the environment and society through their choices. This broad understanding of customer experience and sustainability underscores the importance of integrating sustainable practices and customer centricity into the modern business landscape, contributing to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and sustainable growth.

In this study, we aimed to gain a better understanding of how sustainability perceptions affect customer behavior and attitudes in the transport sector. By considering the social, environmental, and economic aspects of sustainability, we sought to investigate how these different dimensions shape the customer experience. This research aimed to provide detailed insights into the drivers of behavior and attitude formation, and we tried to provide contextual insights. Figure 2 illustrates the integration of customer experience and sustainability. This theoretical framework visually illustrates the theory that has been discussed and how the influence of sustainability dimensions on different facets of customer experience should be explored.

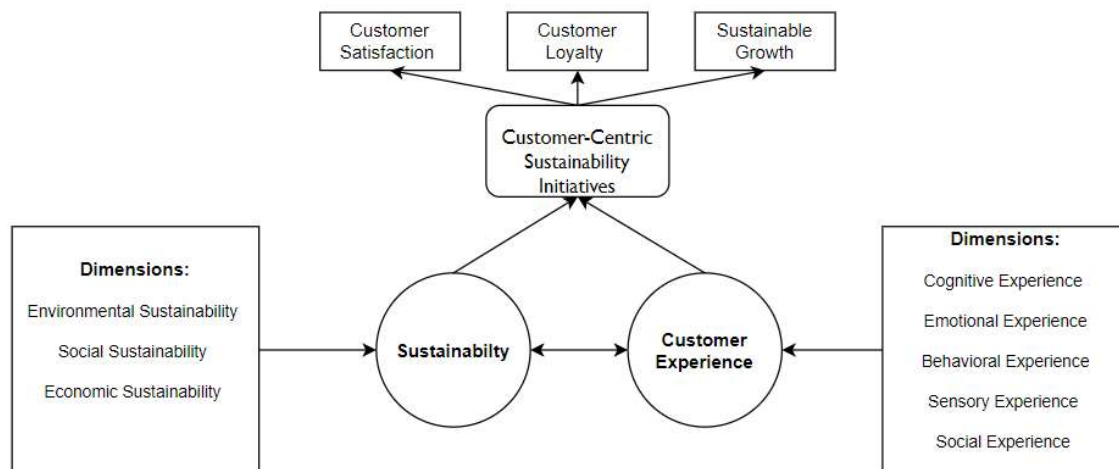


FIGURE 2 OVERVIEW OF THE INTERSECTION OF SUSTAINABILITY AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Researchers must make three critical decisions when conducting a study: choosing between a quantitative, a qualitative or a mixed-method approach, determining whether to conduct broad or in-depth research, and opting for an empirical or non-empirical setting (Babbie, 2021). This research focuses on exploring the interplay between sustainability and customer experience, a relatively uncharted area in academic literature (Khan & Fatma, 2023). This research design draws upon the qualitative approach, known for its capacity to unearth rich insights, develop a deeper understanding of complex relationships, and capture the perspective of participants (Gioia et al., 2013; Orb et al., 2001).

Murillo and Lozano (2006) argued that qualitative research is the most suitable method for an investigation into sustainability. As sustainability and customer experience encompass multifaceted dimensions, an abductive approach was chosen for this qualitative research. This to build on existing knowledge rather than to validate already generalized assumptions or build entirely new theory. In contrast with to a deductive and inductive reasoning the abductive approach uses prior knowledge about a topic to gain knowledge about a topic in order to gain a better understanding of the topic (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

The chosen research strategy is the case study approach, which aligns with the need to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context and processes related to sustainability and customer experience (Saunders et al., 2000). Robson (2002) defines case study as a strategy for empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, utilizing multiple sources of evidence. This approach allows for a thorough exploration of the 'why,' 'what,' and 'how' questions, making it particularly suitable for explanatory and exploratory research. In line with Yin (2003), this research utilizes an exploratory-case approach, focusing on a critical or unique case, i.e., the interplay between sustainability and customer experience. This exploratory-case approach enables an in-depth analysis of this relatively uncharted territory within academic literature (Saunders et al., 2000).

3.1.1 Research Instrument

The research instrument chosen for this study is semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (as provided in Appendix A). This method was selected for its flexibility and comprehensiveness, enabling a deep exploration of the intricate relationship between sustainability and customer experience (Babbie, 2021). Semi-structured interviews allow for adaptability during conversations, comprehensive insights, and the capturing of direct voices from individuals directly involved in these processes (Saunders et al., 2000). This approach aims to reveal the nuanced depth of the relationship between sustainability and customer experience, providing a rich understanding of their interplay. For this research, a purposive sampling method has been used. Purposive sampling allows researchers to squeeze a lot of information out of the data they collect. This allows researchers to describe the major implications of their findings for the population (Babbie, 2021). The research involved sixteen participants, and the interviews were conducted in person in Dutch and were translated and transcribed afterward. The Dutch interview format can be found in Appendix B. Sixteen interviewees were selected for this study because Guest et al. (2006) found in their analysis that data saturation occurred when they analyzed twelve interviews. After conducting the interviews, the interviews have been transcribed, and they have been sent to the interviewees for their confirmation of the information or any suggested changes to enhance the reliability and confidentiality of the data (Saunders et al., 2000). To ensure accurate transcription, the interviews were recorded, and consent for recording was obtained from the interviewees, with a clear assurance of confidentiality and data deletion upon the conclusion of the research.

3.2 Data Collection

The research is conducted within the operational context of the company, a transportation company that serves customers. The company, based in Enschede, The Netherlands, is a significant logistics service provider with a global presence. It operates various specialized business units and employs over 515 individuals. While it is a Dutch company, its operations extend worldwide. Access to information about the company was obtained from colleagues, since I am employed by the company. This company is well suited for this research due to its diverse services and substantial size, which provide valuable insights into the dynamics of the logistics industry. This is suitable because it effectively communicates the company's suitability for the research project based on its characteristics and the potential benefits it can bring to the study (Rashid et al., 2019). For this research, we focused on the company's Dutch customers.

3.2.1 Participants

The participants in this study encompass managers who represent various companies, carefully selected due to their status as the principal customers of the Dutch transport company under investigation. The selection of these participants reflects the strategic significance of their insights and experiences in unraveling the multifaceted and nuanced interplay between sustainability and customer experience within this pivotal sector of the Dutch transport industry. By engaging with these key stakeholders, this research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of how sustainability initiatives impact the customer experience, thereby contributing invaluable knowledge to the field. An overview of the participants and other additional information is shown in Table I below.

TABLE I

Informational Table Participants

Company	Category (Employees)	Industry	Partnership time (Years)	Interviewee	Function
Company A	51 - 200	Wholesale building materials	12	A	Operations Manager
Company B	51 - 200	Furniture	20	B	Manager Logistics
Company C	51 - 200	Wholesale building materials	20	C	Operations Manager
Company C	51 - 200	Wholesale building materials	20	D	Head Logistics
Company D	11-50	Food and beverage services	15	E	Controller
Company E	51 - 200	Production glass, ceramics and concrete	16	F	Manager Planning
Company E	51 - 200	Production glass, ceramics and concrete	16	G	Expedition Leader
Company F	51 - 200	Furniture	20	H	Technical Manager
Company G	11-50	Production glass, ceramics and concrete	30	I	Manager Logistics

Company H	51 - 200	Industrial Hoses and Couplings	30	J	Expedition Leader
Company I	51 - 200	Fitness	20	K	Warehouse Manager
Company J	11-50	Manufacturing of electrical appliances	30	L	Head Logistics
Company K	51 - 200	Textile production	12	M	Manager Logistics
Company L	51 - 200	Production of industrial machinery	7	N	Purchase & Supply chain manager
Company M	51 - 200	Productions of Toys	20	O	Purchaser
Company N	11-50	Wholesale building materials	12	P	Manager Logistics

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3.3 Data Analysis

To unravel the intricate relationship between sustainability and customer experience, we employed a rigorous data analysis process (Babbie, 2021). The following steps outline the systematic approach taken in this study. The collected data were analyzed using Gioia's methodology (Gioia et al., 2013). This approach involved extracting in-vivo codes, which are quotes directly from the transcripts, and transforming them into first-order concepts. These first-order concepts were organized into second-order themes, leading to the identification of a few core dimensions. This process not only facilitated the construction of a structured data framework but also visually represented the progression of raw data into terms and themes, a crucial aspect of ensuring the accuracy of qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). Qualitative precision has served to establish confidence and trust in the research findings (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). In Figure 3 a linear overview is shown of the method process made and used for this research.

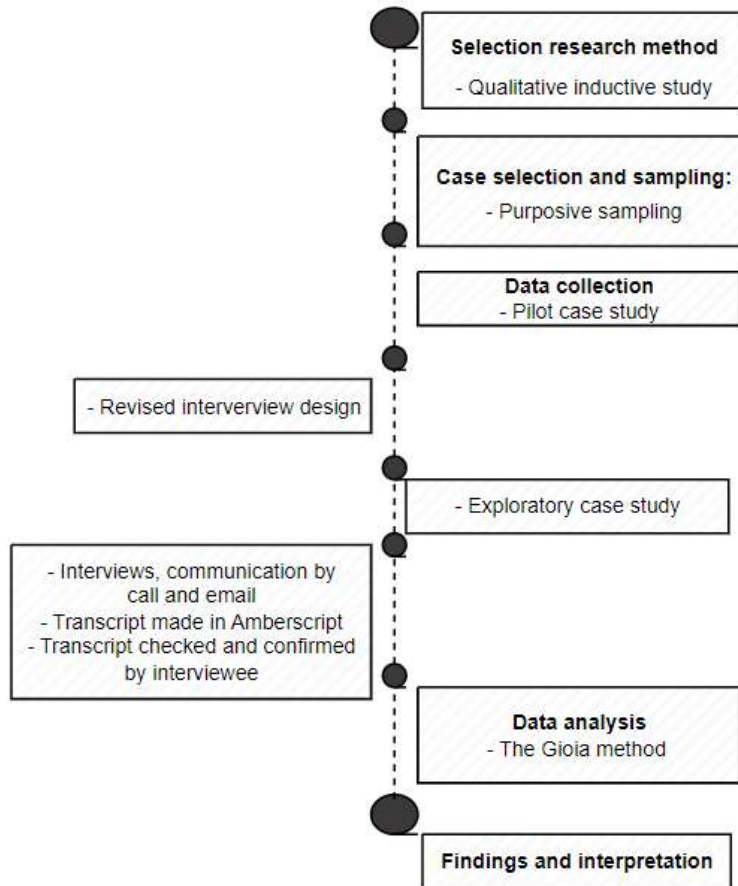


FIGURE 3 METHOD PROCESS

4. Findings

In the following section, we have explored the dimensions of this study, delving into the relationship between sustainability and customer experience. We delved into the different dimensions of customer experience: sensory, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive experiences and their influence on customer perceptions of sustainability. The study also covers the sustainability dimensions: environmental, social, and economic. For a clear overview, the findings of this study are visually summarized in Figure 4. While Figure 4 shows the data structure according to the methodology of Gioia et al. (2013), further exemplary quotes can be found in Appendix C. Throughout this paper, we referred to the company under review as "SustainableCare Logistics" when discussing the results and give recommendations. This name combines "sustainable" and "care" to underscore the company's commitment to both sustainability and exceptional customer experience. It communicates a dedication to taking care of the planet and customers alike through sustainable logistics solutions.

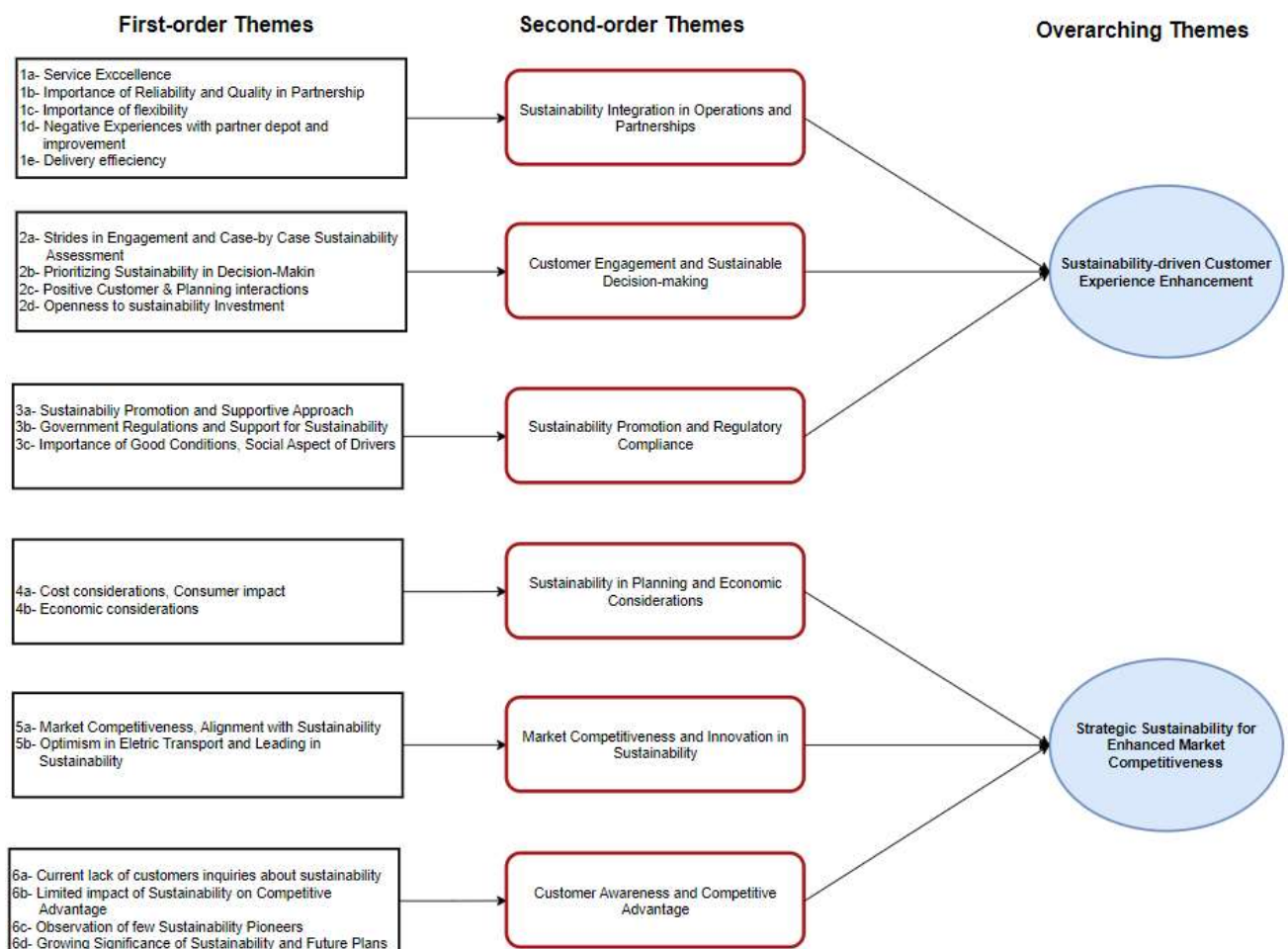


FIGURE 4 DATA STRUCTURE

4.1 Sustainability-driven Customer Experience Enhancement

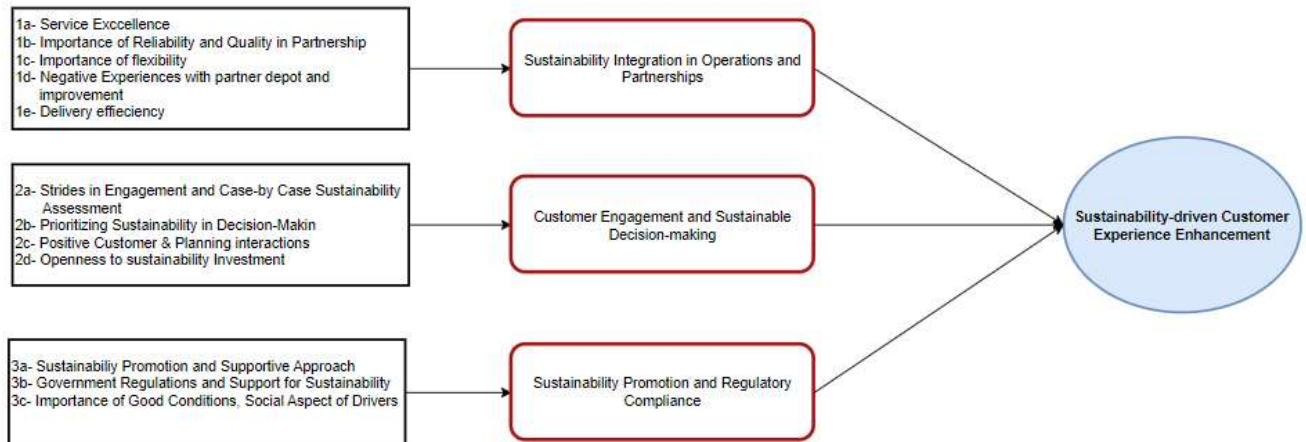


FIGURE 5 SUSTAINABILITY-DRIVEN CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE ENHANCEMENT

In this section, we delved into the integration of sustainability principles within operational practices and partnerships in the transportation sector which can be seen in Figure 6. Through participant insights, we explored how factors beyond price, such as service quality, reliability, and sustainability, influence decision-making processes and contribute to building strong partnerships.

4.1.1 Sustainability Integration in Operations and Partnerships

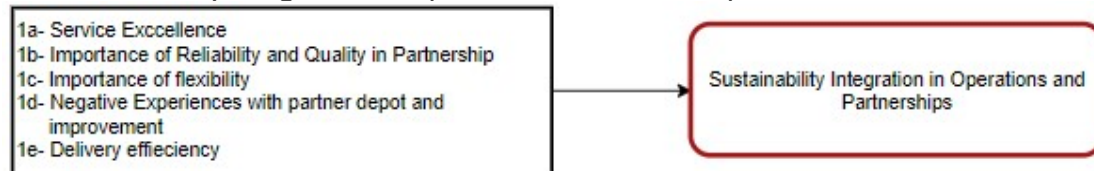


Figure 6 Sustainability Integration in Operations and Partnerships

Some participants, such as Company G, emphasized that price is not the only factor considered in the decision-making process. The quote reads, *"No, it is just business for us, sure, and we have a set fee. But it is not just the price that matters; the quality of the service also plays a crucial role."*

"We switched to another transport company, but due to the excellent service provided by SustainableCare Logistics, we eventually returned to them because it suited us well," said Company H, another participant, confirming this opinion. This illustrates the long-lasting effects of excellent customer service on their loyalty and judgment.

Quotes from a range of participants emphasized how important quality and reliability are to building strong partnerships. Company D highlighted, *"The aspects that we consider important, particularly reliability, learning from reliability in combination with, well, first of all, the coverage throughout the Netherlands, but also the coverage in Europe."* Company C elaborated on these

factors, saying, *"Delivery reliability is important above and beyond pricing. Sustainability is a crucial component that comes next."* This demonstrates how sustainability, reliability, and other elements are interdependent in determining how customers perceive a service. As one participant, Company J, emphasized, *"We rely on SustainableCare Logistics for all our needs, from handling packages to ensuring reliable and swift services."* Such declarations of dependence on a transportation partner for dependable and efficient services highlight the extent of the influence on consumer opinions. Furthermore, Company H emphasized the sensory element of cleanliness in the delivery process by noting, *"Delivered cleanly, yes, those are the most important aspects for most of our customers..."*

"Flexibility is crucial for us, and we observe that many transporters in the Netherlands lack this, especially when it comes to ABC deliveries," said Company K, highlighting the importance of flexibility. This clarifies the aspect of flexibility and how rare it is thought to be in the sector. In conclusion, the concepts of service excellence, reliability, quality in collaboration, and flexibility are closely related to sensory experiences in the transportation sector.

"We have had some negative experiences when deliveries go through partner depots," said Company C, highlighting bad situations. It is an area that needs development given our past interactions. This comment underscores the importance of the delivery process and the impact of partner depots on customer satisfaction. The fact that there is room for development suggests that bad experiences in this area can have a significant impact on how emotions are perceived.

Company A highlighted satisfaction with the efficiency of the dedicated network and effective route planning. The quote: *"Satisfaction lies in the efficiency of the dedicated network, observing the planners' effective route planning with ample stops. I find it commendable,"* underscores the importance placed on efficient logistics and route optimization. Company B expressed satisfaction with the impact of efficiency on the overall process by the quote: *"I'm quite pleased and enjoy observing the impact of efficiency on the entire process... portal provides visibility on whether there are reports available regarding the CO2 impact."* This indicates a broader awareness of the environmental impact of operations and a desire for transparency in monitoring and reporting CO2 impact.

Company D highlighted the critical decision to select SustainableCare Logistics for its network, with the quote: *"That was the decisive choice to choose for SustainableCare Logistics, for their network."* This choice was influenced by the efficiency of the network and its positive impact on the overall delivery process. The emphasis on the network as a deciding factor suggests

that companies are increasingly considering environmental sustainability in their selection criteria.

In summary, the transportation sector's operational practices and partnerships are increasingly influenced by sustainability considerations, in addition to traditional factors such as price and quality. Factors such as reliability, flexibility, efficiency, and monitoring of environmental impact play a key role in shaping the customer experience and fostering long-term partnerships. This underscores the interdependence of sustainability, operational excellence, and customer satisfaction in the transportation industry.

4.1.2 Customer Engagement and Sustainable Decision-making

In the exploration of customer engagement and sustainable decision-making within the context of various companies, we delved into the evolving priorities and attitudes towards sustainability initiatives which can be seen in Figure 7. This section sheds light on the intricate relationship between customer engagement, cognitive shifts in decision-making criteria, and the willingness to invest in sustainability efforts.

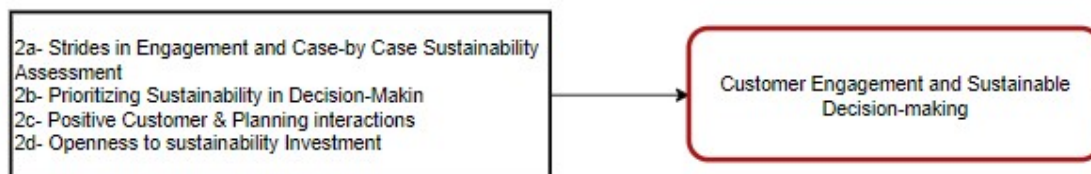


FIGURE 7 CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DECISION-MAKING

With the statement, *"Significant strides are still needed, especially in engagement,"* Company A emphasized the continued need for progress in engagement. *"SustainableCare Logistics appears to be taking the initiative, but we must become involved."* With a focus on the necessity of ongoing improvement, this emphasizes the significance of actively participating in sustainable activities. *"You have to assess things on a case-by-case basis and evaluate the costs and investments for sustainability in specific scenarios and business cases,"* the quote adds emphasis on, demonstrating a contextualized and nuanced approach to sustainability assessments.

A change in priorities was expressed by participants such as Company C, who stated, *"The days of choosing the least expensive option are over. We now seek partners with a compelling narrative, a forward-thinking approach, and a genuine commitment to sustainability."* This is an example of a cognitive change in the criteria used to make decisions, going beyond financial concerns to give partners a higher priority using a sustainable and holistic strategy. *"I foresee sustainability becoming more important in our partnerships,"* said Company I, expressing this

sentiment. The emphasis on eco-friendly practices affecting decisions shows the cognitive recognition of sustainability as a major determinant in partnership choices.

Conversely, Company B expressed satisfaction by noting, *"Well, fortunately, your automated tasks work well...the response from your customer service is prompt."* This positive feedback about automated tasks and prompt customer service reflects a positive emotional experience. In addition, Company C contributed to the positive narrative by stating, *"Our interactions are consistently positive, especially with customer service and scheduling. Different people handle things well, and overall, we have a positive experience."* This underscores the importance of positive interactions, especially with customer service and planning, in shaping a favorable emotional experience for customers.

Regarding sustainability investments, Company B emphasized openness: *"Suppose you treat it separately. Put a one-euro surcharge on every invoice for environmental investments, we would be fine with that."* Meanwhile, Company I also expressed a willingness to invest in sustainability, mentioning, *"We are open to investing in sustainability, even with additional costs."* Company K agreed, saying, *"Yes, that is a good point. Sustainability costs money, but I'm willing to pay a little more for it, especially during a trial period."* These quotes underscore the importance of customers being open to sustainability investments and recognizing them as valuable initiatives that could potentially become new standards.

In summary, the insights from participants' statements underscore the evolving landscape of sustainability in decision-making. Companies are expressing a growing awareness of the need for active engagement in sustainable activities, signaling a shift away from purely profit-driven decision-making paradigms. The shift toward prioritizing partners with robust sustainability narratives reflects a broader cognitive shift, highlighting the integral role of environmental practices in shaping partnership decisions. Moreover, the willingness of companies to invest in sustainability initiatives despite potential additional costs speaks to the recognition of sustainability as a valuable investment in long-term viability. This underscores the importance of fostering positive emotional experiences and proactive engagement in sustainability efforts to drive meaningful change in business practices.

4.1.3 Sustainability Promotion and Regulatory Compliance

In the realm of sustainability promotion and regulatory compliance, companies navigate a landscape shaped by both internal practices and external regulations. In this section, we examined the interplay between sustainability promotion initiatives and regulatory compliance, as illustrated in Figure 8. Through participants' insights, we uncover the nuances of companies' experiences in pursuing sustainability goals while complying with government regulations.

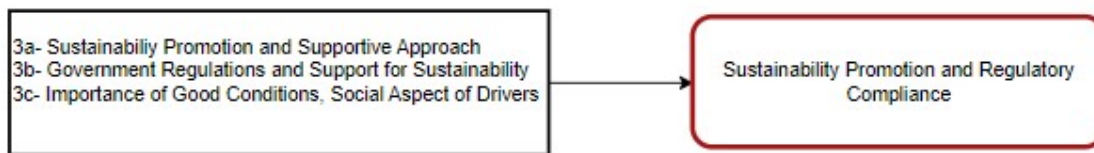


FIGURE 8 SUSTAINABILITY PROMOTION AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

Company B shared a positive experience, stating, *"We have encountered various situations where assistance was needed...large delivery to several stores...received help promptly to resolve the situation."* This underscores the importance of prompt assistance in resolving complex situations, which contributes to a positive behavioral experience. In contrast, Company C expressed dissatisfaction with a lack of support, particularly in the context of sustainability promotion, stating, *"A planning employee suggested that we figure things out on our own, which made us expect more support."* This highlights the discrepancy between sustainability promotion and the perceived level of support and underscores the need for a more supportive approach.

On the regulatory front, Company E acknowledged government regulations and expressed support for focusing on sustainability, recognizing it as a shared responsibility. Quote Company E: *"Yes, and it is naturally almost government-regulated that we have to, you know, so we can't do otherwise, and that's good as well, I mean because I think it is important to focus on sustainability it is our responsibility."* This perspective is consistent with the idea that government regulations play a role in shaping and enforcing social sustainability practices.

Company K highlighted the importance of social sustainability by stating, *"Let me put it this way. Social sustainability with our transporter is important. However, I think it is a characteristic that a transporter should take care of itself."* This perspective underlines the importance of social sustainability in the partnership with transporters, but with the expectation that the transporter takes the lead in managing these aspects. Company J emphasized the importance of how the transporter treats its drivers, stating, *"How the transporter treats its drivers is important to us. Yeah, and this driver here, well, he's nice, he's friendly, and that's good. That's fine with me."* This quote highlights the role of interpersonal relationships, particularly positive

experiences with the driver, in shaping perceptions of social sustainability. Company L provided a nuanced perspective, expressing that the social aspect, specifically the well-being of employees, weighs more heavily for them than the environmental aspect of going green. This suggests a prioritization of social sustainability in terms of ensuring good working and living conditions for employees.

Company M confirmed this opinion: *"I believe that the responsibility lies with the transporter itself, and we take good care of our employees. So, I expect a Dutch transporter to treat his employees well. This quote underscores the expectation that social responsibility lies with transporters and extends to treating employees well."* In addition, Company A emphasized the importance of the satisfaction of the drivers, both in terms of the overall experience and even inside the truck. Quote Company A: *"Drivers should find it pleasant to deliver a product from us to a customer. I mean completely, even in the truck."* Highlighting the importance of creating positive and comfortable working conditions for drivers.

In summary, an examination of sustainability promotion and regulatory compliance reveals the complex dynamics at play in business operations. Companies face the dual challenge of promoting sustainability initiatives while remaining compliant with government regulations. While some highlight positive experiences and support for sustainability efforts, others identify areas for improvement. The emphasis on social sustainability underscores a broader understanding of responsibility beyond environmental concerns, with a focus on employee well-being and interpersonal relationships. Ultimately, companies strive to balance internal sustainability goals with external regulatory expectations to promote positive environmental and social impacts within their operations.

4.2 Strategic Sustainability for Enhanced Market Competitiveness

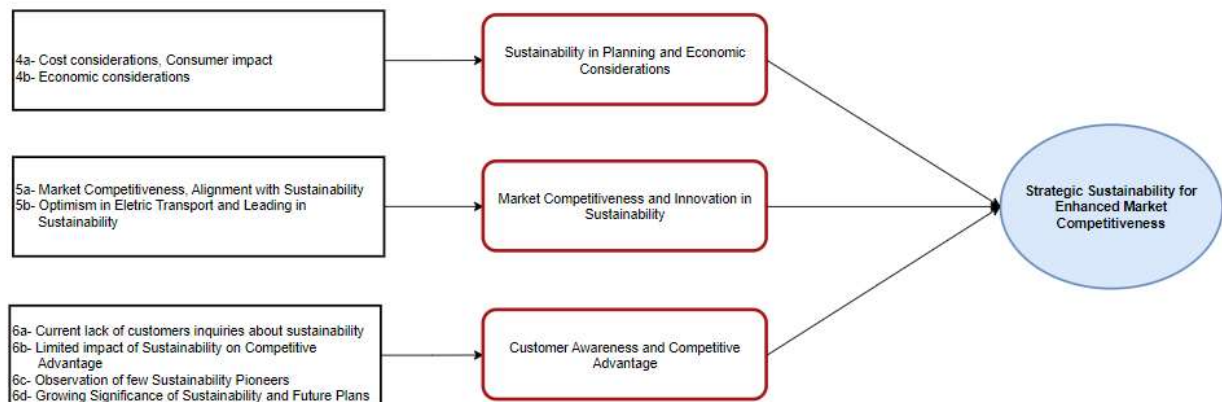


FIGURE 9 STRATEGIC SUSTAINABILITY FOR ENHANCED MARKET COMPETITIVENESS

4.2.1 Sustainability in Planning and Economic Considerations

This section explored the intersection of sustainability and economic considerations in business planning as shown in Figure 10. Participants offer insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating green practices while remaining competitive in the marketplace.

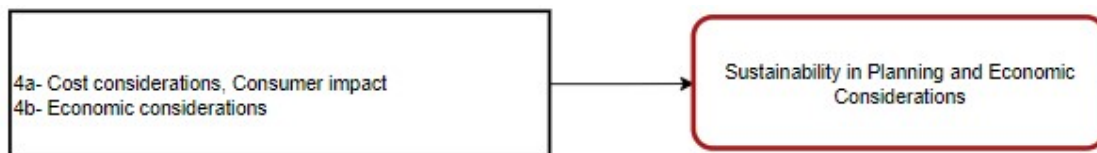


FIGURE 10 SUSTAINABILITY IN PLANNING AND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

Several participants expressed concern about the feasibility of implementing green practices without passing on the associated costs to consumers. Company B highlighted the dilemma faced when costs cannot be passed on to consumers, indicating a potential barrier: *"Well, you reach a point where you face a crossroads... not feasible because I can't pass that cost on. In the end, it is the consumer who has to pay."*

Company D repeated similar feelings, emphasizing the need for sustainability without imposing additional costs on their business: *"Look, I wouldn't mind if SustainableCare Logistics goes completely green, but then we come to the next point: they shouldn't pass the costs on to me."*

Participants such as Company E and Company F raised concerns about the competitive aspect of economic sustainability. The quotes reflect the challenge of balancing green initiatives with the need to remain competitive in the field: *"Well, you see, you can, you can go along with sustainability up to a certain point. Can you allow the selling price of your glass to rise to a certain point in comparison to your competition, based on your cost price?"* and *"Yes, on the one hand, being*

green is good, but on the other hand, you don't want to price yourself out of the market. Ultimately, that cost gets shifted through the entire chain, one way or another."

Company H acknowledged the significant investment required for green practices and the potential increase in costs for both the carrier and the customer. This quote highlights the interconnectedness of economic sustainability considerations with customer preferences and the challenges of justifying expenses while remaining competitive: *"I understand, as it involves significant investments. As a transporter, you would need to justify those expenses, and it could increase costs for us and our customers. Of course, we have our customers, and it would also make things more expensive for them. So, the customer often doesn't want it to be expensive."*

Company L emphasized the need to balance environmental concerns with economic considerations. While acknowledging the importance of leaving a better world for the next generation, the quote underscores the business perspective where making money and commercial decisions are critical elements: *"Yes, I do agree with that. I also believe that we need to leave a better world for the next generation. However, from a business perspective, the bottom line is crucial. It means making money, and in that aspect, commercial choices may differ."*

In assessing economic sustainability and market competitiveness, Company B and Company G offered contrasting views. Company B expressed skepticism about the direct impact of economic sustainability on their operations: *"No, well, in terms of economic sustainability, I don't see it immediately... I don't think there's a significant difference in that aspect compared to what competitors or colleagues would do."* Meanwhile, Company G prioritized getting the best price, indicating a market-driven perspective: *"Specifically regarding the impact of transportation on our customers and their economic sustainability, personally, it is not a major concern for me. My primary emphasis is on obtaining the best price. Alright, that's my perspective."*

In summary, discussions of sustainability in planning and economic considerations highlight the difficult balance that companies must strike between environmental responsibility and financial viability. Concerns about cost implications and market competitiveness underscore the complexity of implementing green initiatives. Moving forward, achieving this balance will require innovative strategies that prioritize sustainability without compromising profitability, ensuring a more resilient and environmentally conscious business landscape.

4.2.2 Market Competitiveness and Innovation in Sustainability

This section explored the dynamics of market competitiveness and sustainability innovation in the business landscape as shown in Figure 11. Participants share insights into proactive strategies to leverage sustainability as a competitive advantage, recognizing its growing importance in shaping market trends and consumer preferences.



FIGURE 11 MARKET COMPETITIVENESS AND INNOVATION IN SUSTAINABILITY

Several participants expressed a proactive stance toward sustainability, recognizing it as a competitive advantage. Company I emphasized the importance of aligning with sustainability trends to remain competitive, suggesting the desire for transport partners to meet specific standards, including sustainability certification: *"Remaining competitive in the market requires us to align with sustainability trends. If it becomes more important, we want our transport partners to meet certain standards, such as having a sustainability certification."* The same was repeated by Company A, which highlighted the non-monetary benefits of sustainability in communication and corporate direction: *"It provides a competitive advantage, not necessarily in monetary terms, but in communication and the direction we, as a company and a world, are heading."*

Company K emphasized the future importance of sustainability as a competitive advantage, stressing its increasing significance: *"Sustainability will become a competitive advantage, especially with an eye on the future. It is becoming a serious matter."* The belief that a more sustainable transport partner contributes to a positive customer experience was noted, with Company K encouraging the idea of taking a pioneering role in promoting sustainability for SustainableCare Logistics: *"If the transporter is more sustainable, it certainly contributes to a more positive customer experience. I believe there is an opportunity for you, as a decent-sized player in the Netherlands, to take on a pioneering role in promoting sustainability."*

On the topic of electric transportation, Company A expressed optimism about its development and a desire to be a leader in sustainability. The quote: *"I am optimistic about the development of electric transport. However, to effectively commercialize sustainability, it is essential to be a leader. We want to be the first, as seen with our dedicated electric truck in the east of the country,"* reflects a proactive approach to embracing electric transportation as a means of reducing the environmental footprint.

Finally, the discussions on market competitiveness and innovation in sustainability underscore the proactive approach companies are taking to use sustainability as a strategic advantage. Participants emphasize the importance of aligning with sustainability trends to maintain competitiveness and highlight non-monetary benefits such as improved communication and corporate alignment. The recognition of sustainability as a key driver of customer experience further reinforces its importance in shaping market dynamics. As companies embrace innovations such as electric transportation, there is a palpable sense of optimism and a desire to lead in advancing sustainability initiatives. Going forward, a continued emphasis on innovation and sustainability will be essential for companies to thrive in an increasingly environmentally conscious market landscape.

4.2.3 Customer Awareness and Competitive Advantage

Customer education and awareness play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of sustainability initiatives in the transport industry (Gong et al., 2019). The quotes from participants provide insights into how companies perceive the influence of sustainability on market competitiveness, customer experience, and the current level of customer inquiries about sustainable practices which can be seen in Figure 12.

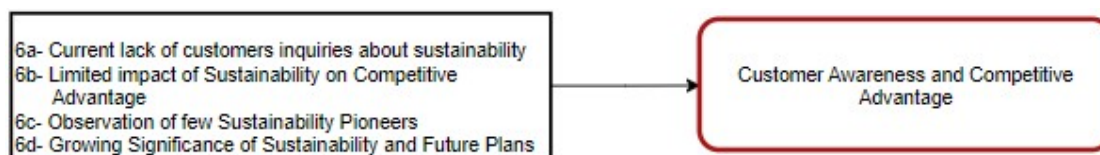


FIGURE 12 CUSTOMER AWARENESS AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

On the topic of customer inquiries about sustainability, Company L and Company H provided contrasting views. Company L foresaw potential changes in customer demands related to carbon footprint and greening efforts in the future, depending on the target market: "Yes, currently, our customers don't inquire about or demand our carbon footprint or our efforts in greening. However, I foresee that this might change in the future, depending on your target market." However, Company H stated that, at the moment, the sustainability efforts of a transport partner were not interesting to them, highlighting a current lack of customer inquiries about sustainability: "At this point, it is not interesting for us whether a transport partner of ours is 100 percent green with another that isn't."

Notably, some participants expressed a limited impact of sustainability on competitive advantage. Company L and Company M indicated that extensive sustainability efforts by a transporter may not actively contribute to a more positive customer experience or provide a competitive advantage: "If another transporter, for instance, emphasizes extensive sustainability

efforts, it wouldn't necessarily provide a competitive advantage for us, because sustainability does not actively add value to our decision-making process when choosing a transport partner."

Company G shared a similar sentiment: *"At the moment, our customers are not actively focused on sustainability. Their primary goal is to achieve the most cost-effective solution. We don't necessarily associate a more positive experience with a transport provider being more sustainable, at least that's what I believe."*

The quotes also revealed varying levels of awareness and perspectives on sustainability within the industry. Company K expressed a perception of few pioneers in sustainability within the transport industry, indicating potential gaps in awareness or visibility of sustainable practices: *"I still see very few pioneers in terms of sustainability in the entire transport industry, but that might also be because I'm not looking in the right places."*

Several participants highlighted the growing importance of sustainability. Company A stated, *"In the long term, other carriers will offer more options for sustainable distribution. However, it is important to look ahead and differentiate ourselves with initiatives such as solar panels, reduced gas consumption, and social sustainability."* This highlights a strategic focus on differentiating through a combination of environmental and social sustainability initiatives. Company B agreed, stating, *"Sustainability is becoming increasingly important, not just to us, but to society as a whole...together we can make significant progress towards a more sustainable future."* This quote underscores the interconnectedness of individual companies and society at large in contributing to a sustainable future. Company I provided insight into its future plans, noting, *"Sustainability is growing in importance, and although we haven't researched it extensively, we sense its importance in the field. In the near future, we plan to address issues such as the use of electric trucks and other environmentally friendly practices in response to growing consumer interest."* This reflects a proactive stance that acknowledges the market's sensitivity to sustainability and outlines plans to align with evolving consumer interests.

In addition, Company J highlighted the influence of customer demand, stating, *"Yes, sustainability is a trending topic right now. Our clients in the energy sector, who are focused on achieving energy neutrality, are keen to inquire about our sustainability practices."* This illustrates how the social experience is shaped not only by general societal trends but also by specific demands from clients, especially those focused on sustainability in their operations.

In summary, participants' perspectives shed light on the evolving relationship between sustainability awareness, market competitiveness, and consumer demand. While some anticipate future shifts in customer preferences toward sustainability, others see limited interest today. Despite differing views on the direct impact of sustainability on competitive advantage, there's consensus on its growing importance in shaping market dynamics. In summary, companies are increasingly integrating sustainability into their strategies and aligning themselves with evolving consumer interests to move toward a more sustainable future.

5. Discussion

5.1 Reflections

In reflecting on the diverse findings of this study, it is important to acknowledge the broad understanding gained through the thematic exploration. In table 2 a table is provided for understanding the dynamics between sustainability and customer experience in the transportation sector. Furthermore, the suggestions for empirical research offer promising avenues for deeper investigation, in keeping with the purpose of the study to further academic knowledge. By contextualizing the findings within the broader academic literature, this study makes a significant contribution to advancing current knowledge in the field. The integration of sustainability principles into operational practices and partnerships emerges as a key for fostering long-term relationships and meeting evolving customer expectations. Furthermore, proactive customer engagement emerges as a key driver of sustainable decision making, underscoring the need for companies to align with sustainability trends in order to remain competitive. In addition, balancing sustainability promotion with regulatory compliance is challenging and requires supportive approaches to improve stakeholder engagement and satisfaction. Strategies for integrating sustainability into business considerations underscore the importance of innovation and adaptability in navigating the dynamic business landscape. Ultimately, aligning market competitiveness with sustainability goals emerges as a critical aspect for companies seeking to thrive in an increasingly environmentally conscious business.

These findings extend our current understanding by providing nuanced perspectives on the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating sustainability into business practices. Moving forward, there is a clear need for empirical quantitative research to further validate and extend these findings, as well as to explore the potential impacts of sustainability initiatives on various stakeholders within the transportation industry. Table 2 serves as a powerful tool to get a deeper understanding of the implications for theory and practice. Overall, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on sustainability and customer experience and provides valuable insights for academics and practitioners.

TABLE 2
REFLECTION

Second order themes	Business Challenge	Research Area	Research Question
Sustainability Integration in Operations and Partnerships	Balancing sustainability with operational efficiency	Correlation between sustainability integration and financial performance	How does integrating sustainability practices into operations and partnerships affect long-term financial performance?
Customer Engagement and Sustainable Decision-making	Shifting towards sustainability as a competitive advantage	Impact of customer engagement on brand reputation and loyalty	What is the influence of customer engagement in sustainable decision-making on brand reputation and customer loyalty?
Sustainability Promotion and Regulatory Compliance	Meeting internal sustainability goals while complying with regulations	Effectiveness of sustainability promotion strategies	How effective are sustainability promotion strategies in enhancing regulatory compliance and stakeholder satisfaction?
Sustainability in Planning and Economic Considerations	Integrating green practices while maintaining economic viability	Strategies for balancing environmental responsibility with financial viability	What innovative strategies can businesses adopt to integrate green practices into planning without compromising economic sustainability?
Market Competitiveness, Alignment with Sustainability	Aligning market competitiveness with sustainability goals	Relationship between market competitiveness and alignment with sustainability initiatives	How does the alignment of market competitiveness with sustainability initiatives impact organizational performance?
Customer Awareness and Competitive Advantage	Leveraging customer awareness to gain a competitive edge	Influence of customer awareness on competitive advantage	How does customer awareness influence competitive advantage and market positioning?

In the transportation industry, sustainability initiatives can have both positive and negative impacts on the customer experience, revealing a "dark side". Sustainability initiatives also present significant challenges that organizations must navigate to maintain a difficult balance between sustainability goals and customer satisfaction. One notable concern is the potential "dark side" between sustainability goals and service reliability. For example, transportation companies may prioritize reducing carbon emissions by implementing slower, more fuel-efficient routes. However, this could result in longer delivery times and reduced reliability for customers who depend on timely transportation services. As a result, customers may become frustrated and dissatisfied with the perceived decline in service quality.

In addition, the implementation of sustainability measures may accidentally disrupt customers, highlighting the "dark side" of green initiatives. For example, logistics providers may impose stricter packaging requirements to reduce waste, resulting in additional effort and cost for customers to prepare shipments. Similarly, initiatives such as vehicle emission restrictions in urban areas can result in restricted access for transportation vehicles, causing delays and disruptions to delivery schedules.

In addition, the adoption of sustainable practices often requires significant up-front investments in technology and infrastructure, casting a "dark shadow" on cost considerations. These costs can be passed on to customers in the form of higher service fees or surcharges, which can lead to resistance or unwillingness to use green transportation services.

In summary, while sustainability efforts in the transportation industry are critical to reduce environmental impacts, they can reveal a "dark side" to the customer experience. Balancing sustainability goals with customer needs and expectations is critical to avoid negative impacts on service quality, convenience, and cost-effectiveness. Companies must carefully consider these "dark side" factors to ensure that their sustainability initiatives actually enhance, rather than reduce, the overall customer experience.

5.2 Contributions to theory

Sustainability is no longer just a checkbox, but an integral part of strategic imperatives, aligned with service excellence, reliability, and customer focus (Geissdoerfer et al., 2018; Westin et al., 2022). This sentiment is confirmed in our findings, where sustainability emerges as a critical factor influencing customer perceptions and shaping long-term partnerships beyond traditional considerations such as price and quality. Moreover, a noteworthy shift in decision-making criteria towards sustainability commitments is identified in the cognitive dimension. This aligns with research that supports the notion that customers are increasingly considering sustainability factors in their decision-making processes (Bolis et al., 2017; Dekker et al., 2012).

In addition, the insights gained from the participants' perspectives shed light on the complex dynamics between sustainability promotion, regulatory compliance, and market competitiveness. Companies face the dual challenge of promoting sustainability initiatives while navigating regulatory requirements and remaining competitive in the market (Gong et al., 2019). Our findings underscored the tension between economic considerations and environmental responsibility, highlighting the need for innovative strategies to balance sustainability goals with financial viability. While some participants in this study view sustainability as a competitive advantage, others emphasize the continued importance of cost-effectiveness in decision-making. This is consistent with the varying perspectives showcasing the divergent viewpoints within the industry (Munuhwa, 2023). Competitive positioning in sustainable logistics is critical for companies seeking competitive advantage, market differentiation, and long-term success (Rakya et al., 2022).

Further, this study contributed to the understanding of customer awareness and engagement with sustainability. Siebert et al. (2020) discussed the importance of proactive communication in bridging the gap between customer awareness and corporate commitment to sustainability. Our findings support this view, emphasizing the need for educational initiatives and proactive engagement to drive meaningful change in consumer behavior and preferences.

Consistent with Westin et al. (2022), this research also highlights a positive relationship between sustainability and customer experience. The alignment of the findings of this study and with existing literature underscores the solidity of this relationship. This alignment contributes valuable insights to the literature on enhancing customer experience through sustainable practices. It provides a basis for strategic decision-making in organizations seeking to foster positive customer experience.

Overall, this study not only highlights the multifaceted dimensions of sustainability within the transportation sector, but also underscores the importance of holistic strategies that integrate environmental responsibility with economic viability, customer focus, and regulatory compliance.

This study contributed to the intersection of business management, marketing, and sustainability in several ways that provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between sustainability and customer experience.

First, it addressed a significant gap in the literature by exploring the nuanced relationship between sustainability and customer experience within a specific industry. By revealing how sustainability perceptions intricately influence various dimensions of customer experience, including sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social aspects, this research extends existing frameworks and provides a more comprehensive view of customer experience dynamics (Uzunkaya, 2023; Westin et al., 2022).

Second, it expands the field on customer experience and sustainability by incorporating two often overlooked dimensions of sustainability: social and economic. While previous studies have primarily focused on environmental sustainability, this research highlighted the importance of considering the broader socioeconomic implications of sustainability practices in shaping customer experience (Calza et al., 2023; Khan & Fatma, 2023).

Finally, this study contributed by enriching the existing body of knowledge by building on previous research efforts, such as those conducted by Khan and Fatma (2023), through the use of qualitative methods. By employing qualitative approaches, this research delves deeper into the mechanisms underlying sustainability perceptions and their impact on the customer experience. This qualitative research provides nuanced insights into the contextual factors that shape customer responses to sustainability initiatives, thereby enriching our understanding of this complex relationship and providing a more comprehensive foundation for both theoretical development and practical application.

5.3 Implications to practice

As noted earlier in this study, sustainability is no longer a checkbox; it is an integral part of strategic imperatives, aligned with service excellence, reliability, and customer focus (Geissdoerfer et al., 2018). Customer experience is a popular topic and a promising driver of sustainable competitive business advantage (Sahhar et al., 2023). Well-maintained fleets enhance the sensory experience by incorporating eco-friendly scents and auditory enhancement technology. Creating a narrative around green practices shapes cognitive commitments, with measurable progress through partnerships and integrated sustainability measures. Improving the emotional experience includes customer service training that emphasizes empathy while actively seeking and incorporating feedback on sustainability initiatives. Increasing the behavioral dimension by rewarding sustainable behavior through rebates and loyalty programs.

A comprehensive approach that integrates environmental, social and economic sustainability is critical. This includes investments in fuel-efficient and electric vehicles, social sustainability initiatives, and economic analysis for long-term viability. Technology integration for operational efficiency includes route optimization software, IoT devices for real-time monitoring, and data analytics to improve sustainability. These practices represent the ultimate in sustainable success, positioning companies as industry leaders that deliver exceptional customer experiences while significantly contributing to a more sustainable future.

In response to the growing demand for sustainable business practices, transportation companies should elevate its management approach by implementing comprehensive strategies (Nasermoadeli et al., 2012). The company needs to develop customized sustainability roadmaps for customers and provide personalized guidance to integrate green practices throughout the supply chain. A performance analytics dashboard will provide real-time data on sustainability metrics, fuel consumption, and emissions. Dynamic pricing models will encourage customers to choose greener transportation options, while an integrated supply chain collaboration platform will facilitate communication and collaboration on sustainable practices. Ongoing employee training programs will ensure that employee expertise is aligned with the latest advances in sustainable transportation. To accommodate varying levels of customer interest in sustainability, transportation companies should adopt a stepped approach, offering sustainability as an optional service to customers and tailoring solutions to meet individual preferences without imposing universal cost increases. This

flexibility ensures that customers who are committed to sustainability bear the associated costs, while others have the option to opt out.

In addition, this research highlights the need for proactive communication about sustainability efforts. The use of social media channels, regular newsletters, and frequent LinkedIn updates can serve as effective tools for informing customers about the company's ongoing sustainable practices. The study by Sahhar and Loohuis (2022) stated that through strategic marketing efforts, managers can use a technique (positive temporal friction) to enhance customers' interactions and experiences. This technique involves generating curiosity and encouraging customers to actively engage with the product or service, as indicated by previous research (Siebert et al., 2020). This communication strategy helps bridge the gap between customer awareness and the company's commitment to sustainability.

Finally, transportation companies might hire a sustainability manager to help with a personalized approach to sustainability that can be taken by engaging with customers who express interest in becoming more sustainable. By informing these customers about the specific progress and improvements that can be made in terms of sustainability, transportation companies can foster a sense of involvement and collaboration, making sustainability a shared journey between the company and its customers. This approach not only aligns with customer preferences, but also improves the overall perception of the company's commitment to sustainable practices.

To effectively implement the management implications outlined above, transportation companies should take a holistic approach to sustainability integration. This includes aligning sustainability goals with core business strategies, prioritizing customer-centric approaches, and leveraging technology and communication channels to drive meaningful engagement. By embedding sustainability into every aspect of their operations, from fleet management to customer service, companies can not only increase their competitive advantage, but also contribute to a more sustainable future. This requires proactive leadership, strategic planning, and an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. In addition, fostering a culture of sustainability within the organization and grow partnerships with stakeholders will be critical to long-term success. Ultimately, by treating sustainability as a strategic imperative and embracing the principles of environmental, social, and economic sustainability, companies can create value for both their customers and society as a whole.

5.4 Limitations

While this study provided valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The focused examination within a specific industry, the limited geographic location, and the use of qualitative methodology limits the generalizability and statistical validity of the findings. Acknowledging these limitations is critical to shaping the future course of research. To improve our understanding, future research efforts should consider diversifying industry samples and expanding the geographic scope to include the nuances of different markets. Integrating a mixed-methods approach could increase the depth of understanding by triangulating qualitative findings with quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive perspective. Furthermore, examining temporal dynamics through longitudinal studies would be instrumental in uncovering how sustainability perceptions and customer experiences evolve and change over time. In addition, exploring customer segmentation based on demographic, psychographic, or firmographic characteristics has the potential to reveal variations in the relationship between sustainability and customer experience.

5.5 Future research

To address limitations and deepen our understanding of sustainability in transportation, future research could focus on how companies communicate and promote sustainability to customers. Understanding the effectiveness of these communication efforts and their impact on customer perceptions, loyalty, and decision-making processes would be a significant contribution to the field. In addition, a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative data could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play. This approach could triangulate qualitative findings with quantitative data to provide deeper insights into the relationship between sustainability initiatives and customer experiences. In addition, longitudinal studies could examine how sustainability perceptions and customer experiences evolve over time. By tracking these temporal dynamics, researchers can gain a better understanding of the long-term impact of sustainability practices on customer behavior and preferences. Finally, exploring customer segmentation based on demographic, psychographic, or firmographic characteristics could reveal variations in the relationship between sustainability and customer experience. By segmenting customers based on relevant criteria, researchers can identify specific preferences and behaviors related to sustainability, thereby informing targeted marketing strategies and initiatives. Through these future research efforts, scholars can continue to unravel the complexities of sustainability and its dynamic interplay within the customer experience landscape in the transportation industry.

5.6 Concluding remarks

Based on the findings presented, the interplay between sustainability and customer experience is evident in the transportation sector. Companies are increasingly prioritizing factors beyond price, such as service quality, reliability, and sustainability, in their decision-making processes and partnerships. The lasting impact of excellent customer service on loyalty and evaluations underscores the importance of service excellence in shaping customer perceptions. In addition, sustainability, reliability, and other elements are interdependent in determining how customers perceive a service, underscoring the integral role of sustainability in shaping the customer experience. Flexibility, efficiency, and monitoring environmental impact also play an important role in fostering positive customer experiences and building long-term partnerships.

When it comes to customer engagement and sustainable decision-making, there is a notable shift in priorities toward sustainability initiatives. Companies are expressing a growing awareness of the need to actively engage in sustainable activities, signaling a shift away from purely profit-driven decision-making paradigms. The emphasis on environmental practices in decision making reflects a broader cognitive shift, highlighting the integral role of sustainability in partnership decisions. Moreover, the willingness of companies to invest in sustainability initiatives despite potential additional costs speaks to the recognition of sustainability as a valuable investment in long-term viability. Proactive engagement in sustainability efforts is seen as essential to driving meaningful change in business practices.

In terms of strategic sustainability for improved market competitiveness, companies are challenged to balance environmental responsibility with financial viability. Concerns about cost implications and market competitiveness underscore the complexity of implementing green initiatives. However, there is a proactive approach among companies to leverage sustainability as a strategic advantage. Participants emphasize the importance of aligning with sustainability trends to maintain competitiveness and highlight non-monetary benefits such as improved communication and corporate alignment. The recognition of sustainability as a key driver of customer experience underscores its importance in shaping market dynamics.

Overall, the findings suggest that sustainability is increasingly being integrated into business strategies in the transportation sector, shaping customer experience, partnership decisions and market competitiveness. Companies are recognizing the importance of sustainability for long-term success and are actively adapting their practices to meet evolving consumer interests and regulatory requirements, moving toward a more sustainable future.

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Appendix A

Interview Format in English:

In this interview, we aim to understand how the sustainability practices of [Company Name] impact your customer experience. Thank you for sharing your perspectives.

Introduction Questions:

1. Can you briefly tell us **how long** your company has been collaborating with [Company Name]? What **goods** do you transport through their services? **Why** did you initially choose [Company Name]?

Customer Experience:

2. **Sensory (Perception):** Do you experience a smooth loading and unloading process, or do you have suggestions for improvement? What is your impression of the image of [Company Name], its drivers, and equipment?
3. **Cognitive (Thinking):** Can you share a specific example where you and [Company Name] collaborated on optimizing a process? How did this thinking process influence your overall experience with [Company Name]?
4. **Social (Interactions):** How do your interactions with [Company Name] influence your overall customer experience? (Consider contact with customer service and scheduling with [Company Name].) Have these interactions led to stronger relationships, more efficient coordination, or other social aspects that have increased your satisfaction and loyalty?
5. **Emotional (Feeling):** How has your experience with [Company Name] shaped your opinion of the company? Can you provide an example of a situation where you were satisfied or dissatisfied with [Company Name]'s services and how this shaped your overall experience?
6. **Behavioral (Doing):** Have your experiences with [Company Name] influenced your behavior as a customer? For example, based on your experiences, have you recommended [Company Name] to other parties or not? Consider aspects like service expansion as well.

General Sustainability Question:

7. What does sustainability mean to you? (Include an explanation of sustainability and its different dimensions.) Can you tell us how important sustainability is for your as a company?

Economic Sustainability:

8. How important do you think it is that the transportation of [Company Name] your goods contribute to economic sustainability. How do you rate the role of as a transportation partner in terms of economic sustainability? For economic sustainability, a transportation partner can use fuel-efficient vehicles, optimize logistics, invest in green technology, ensure regular maintenance, manage costs, and diversify services.

Environmental Sustainability:

9. To what extent do you value environmental sustainability when selecting a transportation partner? What is your perspective on [Company Name]'s efforts regarding environmental sustainability, such as reducing its carbon footprint and promoting green transportation solutions, optimizing cargo, implementing waste management, and participating in emission reduction programs.? Are there specific environmentally friendly initiatives that can make a difference for you?

Social Sustainability:

10. How important do you think it is that transporting [Company Name] your goods contribute to social sustainability, such as improving working conditions for drivers? A transportation company can promote social sustainability by providing safe working environments, fair wages, training programs, diversity and inclusion, health initiatives and involvement in the local community.

Interaction between Sustainability and Customer Experience:

11. Which sustainability efforts are most important to you, and how would you like to see them reflected? For example, Lean method, reduced environmental impact, improved working conditions, or other sustainability initiatives?
12. Would additional sustainability efforts provide a competitive advantage, and why?
13. How do you think [Company Name]'s sustainability efforts in the future could influence your choices as a customer? Are there specific sustainability initiatives you hope to see implemented?
14. Do you see [Company Name] as an innovator in sustainability in the transportation sector? How can innovative sustainability practices improve the overall customer experience? (This includes Economic, Environmental, and Social Sustainability)
15. How do you think [Company Name]'s sustainability practices align with the values and goals of your company, and do they impact your overall satisfaction as a customer?
16. Sustainability requires significant investment. Are you, as a customer, willing to pay more for sustainable transport?

Conclusion, Recommendations, and Improvements:

17. How would you describe your overall experience as a customer of [Company Name]?
18. Are there specific changes or improvements you would like to see in [Company Name]'s approach to sustainability that could benefit both the company and customers? Is there anything else you would like to add or other insights that are important?

Appendix B

Interview format Nederlands

In dit interview willen we begrijpen hoe duurzaamheidspraktijken van [Bedrijfsnaam] van invloed zijn op uw klantbeleving. Bedankt voor het delen van uw perspectieven.

Introductievragen:

1. Kun je kort vertellen **hoe lang** jullie bedrijf al samenwerkt met [Bedrijfsnaam]?
Welke **goederen** transporteren jullie via hun diensten? **Waarom** hebben jullie in beginsel voor [Bedrijfsnaam] gekozen?

Klantbeleving:

2. **Zintuiglijk (Waarnemen):** Ervaren jullie een soepel verlopend laad- en losproces, of zijn er suggesties voor verbetering? Wat is jullie indruk van de uitstraling van [Bedrijfsnaam], haar chauffeurs en materieel?
3. **Cognitief (Denken):** Kun je een specifiek voorbeeld delen waarin je samen met [Bedrijfsnaam] hebt nagedacht over het optimaliseren van een proces? Hoe heeft dit denkproces jouw algehele ervaring [Bedrijfsnaam] met beïnvloed?
4. **Sociaal (Interacties):** Hoe beïnvloeden jullie interacties met [Bedrijfsnaam] jullie algehele ervaring als klant? (Denk hierbij aan het contact met de klantenservice en de planning van [Bedrijfsnaam]?) Hebben deze interacties geleid tot sterkere relaties, efficiëntere coördinatie, of andere sociale aspecten die jullie tevredenheid en loyaliteit hebben vergroot?
5. **Emotioneel (Voelen):** Hoe heeft jullie ervaring met [Bedrijfsnaam] jullie mening over het bedrijf gevormd? Kun je een voorbeeld geven van een situatie waarin jullie tevreden of ontevreden waren over [Bedrijfsnaam] haar diensten en hoe heeft dit jullie algehele ervaring gevormd?
6. **Gedragmatig (Doen):** Hebben jullie ervaringen met [Bedrijfsnaam] invloed gehad op jullie gedrag als klant? Hebben jullie bijvoorbeeld op basis van jullie ervaringen [Bedrijfsnaam] aanbevolen bij andere partijen of juist niet? Denk bijvoorbeeld ook aan uitbreiding van diensten.

Algemene vraag Duurzaamheid:

7. Wat verstaan jullie onder duurzaamheid? (Hier komt de uitleg over duurzaamheid en de verschillende dimensies). Kun je vertellen hoe belangrijk **duurzaamheid** is voor jullie als bedrijf?

Economische Duurzaamheid:

8. Hoe belangrijk vinden jullie het dat het transport van [Bedrijfsnaam] jullie goederen bijdraagt aan economische duurzaamheid. Hoe beoordelen jullie de rol van als transportpartner in termen van economische duurzaamheid? Voor economische duurzaamheid kan een transporteur brandstofefficiënte voertuigen gebruiken, logistiek optimaliseren, investeren in groene technologie, zorgen voor regelmatig onderhoud, kosten beheren, en diensten diversifiëren.

Milieu Duurzaamheid:

9. In hoeverre hechten jullie belang aan milieuvriendelijkheid bij het selecteren van een transportpartner? Wat is jullie perspectief op de inspanningen van [Bedrijfsnaam] met betrekking tot milieuduurzaamheid, zoals het verminderen van de ecologische voetafdruk en het bevorderen van groene transportoplossingen, optimaliseren van lading, implementeren van afvalbeheer en deelnemen aan emissiereductieprogramma's.? Zijn er specifieke milieuvriendelijke initiatieven die een verschil voor jullie kunnen maken?

Sociale Duurzaamheid:

10. Hoe belangrijk vinden jullie het dat het transport van [Bedrijfsnaam] jullie goederen bijdraagt aan sociale duurzaamheid, zoals de verbetering van arbeidsomstandigheden voor chauffeurs? Een transportbedrijf kan sociale duurzaamheid bevorderen door te zorgen voor veilige werkomgevingen, eerlijke lonen, opleidingsprogramma's, diversiteit en inclusie, gezondheidsinitiatieven en betrokkenheid bij de lokale gemeenschap.

Samenspel tussen Duurzaamheid en Klantbeleving:

11. Welke duurzaamheidsinspanningen zijn voor jullie het belangrijkste en hoe zouden jullie dat terug willen zien? Bijvoorbeeld, Lean werkwijze, verminderde milieubelasting, verbeterde arbeidsomstandigheden, of andere duurzaamheidsinspanningen?
12. Zouden extra duurzaamheidsinspanningen een concurrentievoordeel opleveren en waarom?
13. Hoe denk je dat de duurzaamheidsinspanningen van [Bedrijfsnaam] in de toekomst jullie keuzes als klant kunnen beïnvloeden? Zijn er specifieke duurzaamheidsinitiatieven waarvan je hoopt dat ze worden geïmplementeerd?
14. Zie je [Bedrijfsnaam] als een innovator op het gebied van duurzaamheid in de transportsector? Hoe kunnen innovatieve duurzaamheidspraktijken de algemene klantbeleving verbeteren? (Hierbij gaat het dus om Economische, Milieu en Sociale Duurzaamheid)
15. Hoe vind je dat de duurzaamheidspraktijken van [Bedrijfsnaam] passen bij de waarden en doelen van jullie bedrijf, en hebben deze invloed op jouw algehele tevredenheid als klant?
16. Duurzaamheid vergt flinke investeringen. Zijn jullie als klant bereid om meer te betalen voor duurzaam transport?

Conclusie, Aanbevelingen en Verbeteringen:

17. Hoe zou je jullie algehele ervaring als klant van [Bedrijfsnaam] beschrijven?
18. Zijn er specifieke veranderingen of verbeteringen die je graag zou zien in de benadering van duurzaamheid door [Bedrijfsnaam] die zowel het bedrijf als de klanten kunnen helpen? Is er nog iets anders dat je wilt toevoegen of andere inzichten die belangrijk zijn?

Appendix C

Exemplary Quotes	Description	First-order themes
<p>Quote Company G: "No, for us, it's just business, yes, and with us, a certain price is set. But not just the price, it's not only the price that determines it but also the service. You see, I've seen many cases where we could transport for a few euros cheaper, but no."</p> <p>Quote Company H: "We switched to another transport company, but due to the excellent service from SustainableCare Logistics, we eventually returned to them as it suited us well."</p>	<p><i>Emphasizing that it's just business, setting a certain price, and considering not only the price but also the service as a determining factor.</i></p>	<p><i>I a. Service Excellence</i></p>
<p>Quote Company D: "The aspects that we consider important, particularly reliability, learning from reliability in combination with, well, first of all, the coverage throughout the Netherlands, but also the coverage in Europe."</p> <p>Quote Company C: "Beyond price, delivery reliability is crucial. Sustainability closely follows as a key factor. We are interested in understanding how you arrange things with your drivers, your ambitions for training, and staying updated on developments. Collaboration in these areas can strengthen both parties, making it more than just proclamations, but tangible actions."</p> <p>Quote Company F: "Well, sustainability hasn't been a big focus for us. If a noisy delivery disrupts our street, it's a concern. Quality is crucial for us, so we prioritize reliable and noise-free transportation. Transitioning to electric vehicles could be a positive step forward. It's good that they're making efforts, but it's not a game-changer for us."</p> <p>Quote Company J: "We rely on SustainableCare Logistics for all our needs, from handling packages to ensuring reliable and swift services. Being close by allows for quick issue resolution. It's a perfect partnership."</p> <p>Quote Company H: "Delivered cleanly, yes, those are the most important aspects for most of our customers, because we know that smooth delivery is crucial."</p>	<p><i>Expressing reliance on SustainableCare Logistics for various needs, emphasizing the partnership's perfection due to reliable and swift services, and highlighting the advantage of proximity for quick issue resolution.</i></p>	<p><i>I b. Importance of Reliability and Quality in partnership</i></p>

<p>Quote Company K: "Flexibility is crucial for us, and we observe that many transporters in the Netherlands lack this, especially when it comes to ABC deliveries."</p>	<p><i>Highlighting the importance of flexibility, observing a lack of flexibility in many transporters in the Netherlands, especially concerning ABC deliveries.</i></p>	<p><i>I.c. Importance of Flexibility</i></p>
<p>Quote Company C: "We've had some negative experiences when deliveries go through partner depots. It's an aspect that needs improvement based on our past encounters."</p>	<p><i>Highlighting a significant difference in customer satisfaction based on the familiarity of regular drivers with the products.</i></p>	<p><i>I.d. Negative Experiences with Partner Depots and Improvement</i></p>
<p>Quote Company A: "Satisfaction lies in the dedicated network's efficiency, observing the planners' effective route planning with ample stops. I find it commendable."</p> <p>Quote Company A: "We dispatch a lot in your network. My suggestion is for you to consider delivering all customers to a specific postcode area every Tuesday. This could significantly improve delivery efficiency."</p> <p>Quote Company B: "I'm quite pleased and enjoy observing the impact of efficiency on the entire process... portal provides visibility on whether there are reports available regarding the CO2 impact."</p> <p>Quote Company D: "That was the decisive choice to choose for SustainableCare Logistics, for their network."</p>	<p>Emphasizing satisfaction in the network's efficiency and effective route planning, highlighting commendable practices.</p>	<p>I.e. Delivery Efficiency</p>
<p>Quote Company A: "Significant strides are still needed, especially in engagement. SustainableCare Logistics seems proactive, but our involvement is essential. Well, you have to assess things on a case-by-case basis and evaluate the costs and investments for sustainability in specific scenarios and business cases."</p>	<p>Highlighting the need for significant strides in engagement, acknowledging proactive efforts, and emphasizing case-by-case assessment for sustainability.</p>	<p>2a. Strides in Engagement and Case-by-case Sustainability Assessment</p>

<p>Quote Company C: "The era of prioritizing the cheapest option is over. We now seek partners with a compelling narrative, a forward-thinking approach, and a genuine commitment to sustainability. It's about more than cost; it's a fundamental aspect of our decision-making process."</p> <p>Quote Company I: "I foresee sustainability becoming more important in our partnerships. The eco-friendly practices of our transport partners significantly influence our decisions. If a transport company gains a reputation as non-sustainable, we might consider shifting our focus, especially if we lose customers due to their preference for environmentally conscious shipping."</p>	<p><i>Shifting priorities from the cheapest option to partners with compelling narratives, forward-thinking approach, and a genuine commitment to sustainability.</i></p>	<p>2b. Prioritizing Sustainability in Decision-making</p>
<p>Quote Company B: "Well, luckily, her automated tasks work well... the response from your customer service is prompt. Overall, things are going smoothly, with minimal issues or damage reports."</p> <p>Quote Company C: "Our interactions are consistently positive, especially with customer service and planning. Different individuals handle things well, and overall, we have a favorable experience."</p>	<p>Positive feedback on automated tasks and customer service</p>	<p>2c. Positive Customer & Planning interactions</p>
<p>Quote Company B: "Suppose you handle it separately. Add a one-euro surcharge for environmental investments to every invoice; I'm aware of that. Well, you know, I can agree to that."</p> <p>Quote Company I: "We're open to investing in sustainability, even with added costs. For example, we're willing to pay 5% more for pallets to support your fully electric operations. This initiative, if promoted on our website, could be well-received by our partners and customers."</p> <p>Quote Company K: "Yeah, that's a good point. Sustainability costs money, but I'm willing to pay a bit more for it, especially during a trial phase. In the long run, it's an investment that, if it's good, will pay off, and we want it to become a new standard for all carriers."</p>	<p><i>Expressing openness to invest in sustainability, citing a specific example of willingness to pay more for pallets to support fully electric operations, and recognizing the potential positive reception of such initiatives by partners and customers.</i></p>	<p>2d. Openness to Sustainability Investment</p>

<p>Quote Company B: "We've encountered various situations where assistance was needed... large delivery to multiple branches... received help promptly to resolve the situation."</p> <p>Quote Company C: "One Planning Employee suggested figuring things out on our own, which left us expecting more assistance. We believe that if sustainability is being promoted, there should be a more supportive approach to help customers."</p>	<p><i>Expressing dissatisfaction with a lack of assistance despite the promotion of sustainability, emphasizing the need for a more supportive approach.</i></p>	<p>3a. Sustainability Promotion and Supportive Approach</p>
<p>Quote Company E: "Yes, and it's naturally almost government-regulated that we have to, you know, so we can't do otherwise, and that's good as well, I mean because I think it's important to focus on sustainability it is our responsibility."</p>	<p><i>Acknowledging government regulations and expressing support for focusing on sustainability.</i></p>	<p>3b. Government Regulations and Responsibility for Sustainability</p>
<p>Quote Company K: "Let me put it this way. Social sustainability with our transporter is important. However, I find this to be a characteristic that a transporter should handle themselves."</p> <p>Quote Company J: "How the transporter deals with its drivers is important to us. Yeah, and the driver here, well, he's nice, friendly, and it's good. That's okay for me."</p> <p>Quote Company L: "We believe that the employee who represents us should be able to live under good working and living conditions. So, in that sense, the social aspect weighs more heavily for us than the aspect of going green."</p> <p>Quote Company M: "I believe that the responsibility lies with the transporter itself, and we take good care of our employees. So, I expect a Dutch transporter to treat their staff well too."</p> <p>Quote Company A: "Drivers should find it pleasant to deliver a product from us to a customer. I mean completely, even in the truck."</p>	<p><i>Stating the importance of how the transporter deals with its drivers and expressing satisfaction with the driver's niceness, friendliness, and overall positive experience.</i></p>	<p>3c. Importance of Good Conditions, Social Aspect of drivers</p>

<p>Quote Company B: "Well, you reach a point where you face a crossroads... not feasible because I can't pass that cost on. In the end, it's the consumer who has to pay."</p> <p>Quote Company D: "Look, I wouldn't mind if SustainableCare Logistics goes completely green, but then we come to the next point: they shouldn't pass the costs on to me."</p> <p>Quote Company E: "Well, you see, you can, you can go along with sustainability up to a certain point. Can you allow the selling price of your glass to rise to a certain point in comparison to your competition, based on your cost price?</p> <p>Quote Company F: "Yes, on the one hand, being green is good, but on the other hand, you don't want to price yourself out of the market. Ultimately, that cost gets shifted through the entire chain, one way or another."</p> <p>Quote Company H: "I understand, as it involves significant investments. As a transporter, you would need to justify those expenses, and it could increase costs for us and our customers. Of course, we have our customers, and it would also make things more expensive for them. So, the customer often doesn't want it to be expensive.</p> <p>Quote Company L: "Yes, I do agree with that. I also believe that we need to leave a better world for the next generation. However, from a business perspective, the bottom line is crucial. It means making money, and in that aspect, commercial choices may differ."</p>	<p>Consideration of challenges in implementing green practices and associated costs</p>	<p>4b. Cost Considerations, Consumer Impact</p>
<p>Quote Company B: "No, well, in terms of economic sustainability, I don't see it immediately... I don't think there's a significant difference in that aspect compared to what competitors or colleagues would do."</p> <p>Quote Company G: "Specifically regarding the impact of transportation on our customers and their economic sustainability, personally, it's not a major concern for me. My primary emphasis is on obtaining the best price. Alright, that's my perspective."</p>	<p>Evaluation of economic sustainability and market competitiveness</p>	<p>4c. Economic Considerations</p>

<p>Quote Company I: "Remaining competitive in the market requires us to align with sustainability trends. If it becomes more important, we want our transport partners to meet certain standards, such as having a sustainability certification."</p> <p>Quote Company A: "It provides a competitive advantage, not necessarily in monetary terms, but in communication and the direction we, as a company and a world, are heading.</p> <p>Quote Company K: "Sustainability will become a competitive advantage, especially with an eye on the future. It's becoming a serious matter.</p> <p>Quote Company K: "If the transporter is more sustainable, it certainly contributes to a more positive customer experience. I believe there is an opportunity for you, as a decent-sized player in the Netherlands, to take on a pioneering role in promoting sustainability."</p> <p>Quote Company D: "Well, good, if the price difference is not very substantial. Yes, in that case, I would choose someone who is environmentally conscious."</p> <p>Quote Company J: "A more sustainable transport partner could be decisive for us. With our cars, we use a lot of biodiesel and appreciate a transporter that follows eco-friendly practices.</p>	<p><i>Expressing openness to invest in sustainability, citing a specific example of willingness to pay more for pallets to support fully electric operations, and recognizing the potential positive reception of such initiatives by partners and customers.</i></p>	<p>5a. Market Competitiveness, Alignment with sustainability</p>
<p>Quote Company A: "I am optimistic about the development of electric transport. However, to effectively market sustainability, leading the way is essential. We aim to be the first, as seen with our electric-powered dedicated truck in the East of the country."</p>	<p>Expressing optimism about electric transport, stressing the importance of the need to act first.</p>	<p>5b. Optimism in Electric Transport and leading in sustainability</p>
<p>Quote Company L: "Yes, currently, our customers don't inquire about or demand our carbon footprint or our efforts in greening. However, I foresee that this might change in the future, depending on your target market."</p> <p>Quote Company H: "At this point, it is not interesting for us whether a transport partner of ours is 100 percent green with another that isn't."</p>	<p><i>Stating the current lack of customer inquiries about carbon footprint or greening efforts, foreseeing potential changes in customer demands in the future, and recognizing dependence on the target market.</i></p>	<p>6a. Current lack of customer inquiries about sustainability</p>

<p>Quote Company L: "If another transporter, for instance, emphasizes extensive sustainability efforts, it wouldn't necessarily provide a competitive advantage for us, because sustainability does not actively add value to our decision-making process when choosing a transport partner."</p> <p>Quote Company M: "Our customer experience will not be positively influenced by a more sustainable transport partner. No, I don't think so, because we still prioritize price. It's the most crucial factor for us and plays a significant role."</p> <p>Quote Company G: "At the moment, our customers are not actively focused on sustainability. Their primary goal is to achieve the most cost-effective solution. We don't necessarily associate a more positive experience with a transport provider being more sustainable, at least that's what I believe."</p>	<p><i>Stating that extensive sustainability efforts by another transporter may not offer a competitive advantage, as sustainability does not actively contribute to the decision-making process for choosing a transport partner.</i></p>	<p><i>6b. Limited Impact of Sustainability on Competitive Advantage</i></p>
<p>Quote Company K: "I still see very few pioneers in terms of sustainability in the entire transport industry, but that might also be because I'm not looking in the right places."</p>	<p><i>Observing few pioneers in sustainability within the transport industry, acknowledging potential gaps in awareness or perspective.</i></p>	<p><i>6c. Observation of Few Sustainability Pioneers</i></p>
<p>Quote Company A: "In the long term, other carriers will offer more options for sustainable distribution. However, it's crucial to look ahead and distinguish ourselves with initiatives such as solar panels, reduced gas consumption, and social sustainability."</p> <p>Quote Company B: "Sustainability is becoming increasingly important, not just for us but for society as a whole... we can collectively make significant strides towards a more sustainable future."</p> <p>Quote Company I: "Sustainability is gaining importance, and though we haven't explored it extensively, we sense its significance in the market. Shortly, we plan to address questions like using electric trucks and other eco-friendly practices in response to growing consumer interest."</p> <p>Quote Company J: "Yes, sustainability is a trending topic right now. Our clients in the energy sector focused on achieving energy neutrality, are keen to inquire about our sustainability practices."</p>	<p><i>Recognizing the growing importance of sustainability, expressing plans to address sustainability questions, including the use of electric trucks and eco-friendly practices.</i></p>	<p><i>6d. Growing Significance of Sustainability and Future Plans</i></p>