This report looks at the following areas:

- How the rising cost of living affects consumers’ ethical consumption and shopping
- Consumer perceptions of what makes an ethical brand/company
- Ethical shopping behaviours over the last 12 months
- Motivators for ethical shopping practices
- Opportunities for retailers to promote ecologically and socially responsible products and services.

There is a large and diverse range of issues that can be considered to be “ethical” aspects of retailing. In France, 41% of consumers agreed that an ethical retailer can be defined by its efforts to promote sustainability and 35% by its fair treatment of workers. This variety of issues must be considered by all retailers, in part due to increasing legislation and regulation around the area, but also because of their growing importance for consumers.

The cost of living crisis is ongoing - at May 2023 44% of French consumers said they were worse off than a year ago. Shopping ethically can undoubtedly be more expensive, and the two most important factors that would encourage French consumers to choose an ethical product over a standard one both relate to price – 61% if they are affordable and 44% if they are on offer. Retailers looking to up their ethical credentials could look to position their products/services as either affordable or worth spending more on, identifying other aspects of value that can appeal to different consumer types.

One of the biggest problems for ethical retailers is the issue of trust – consumers are increasingly sceptical about the claims made by companies to improve the ethical aspects of their operations, and are demanding proof of the efforts being made and transparent measures of success.

This also creates a huge opportunity in retail. As and when the current economic squeeze subsides, ethical issues, such as sustainability, equality and...
diversity, will move higher up people’s agendas. Consumers will be willing to use their purchasing power to make a difference, and retailers whose efforts do not stand up to scrutiny risk being marginalised.
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