

# Responsible consumption and the environment: a systematic review from the perspective of education and social awareness

## Consumo responsable y medio ambiente: una revisión sistemática desde la educación y la conciencia social

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### Abstract

This study comprehensively addresses the complexity of the ethics of responsible consumption and its multifaceted impact on the environment. In this regard, it highlights the crucial importance of continuing consumer education and developing a deeper awareness of the interconnections between our consumption habits and the planet's natural systems. It also emphasizes the need for proactive and committed action by individuals, communities, and institutions to address current and future environmental challenges. Based on this perspective, the main objective is to promote ethical and responsible consumption, both through education and through social actions aimed at environmental protection. To this end, a systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA method, using the Scopus database as the primary source, from which a total of 34 relevant studies were identified. The results show that ethical and responsible consumption generates a positive impact not only on the environment but also on society at large. This approach encourages proactive actions, social responsibility, and ethical consumption practices, thus contributing to environmental protection. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of adopting sustainable practices and promoting innovation in products and services that minimize environmental impact.

**Keywords:** actions, responsible consumption, ethics, environment.

## Resumen

Este estudio aborda de manera exhaustiva la complejidad de la ética del consumo responsable y su impacto multifacético en el medio ambiente. En este sentido, destaca la importancia crucial de la educación continua para los consumidores, así como el desarrollo de una conciencia más profunda sobre las interconexiones entre nuestros hábitos de consumo y los sistemas naturales del planeta. Asimismo, enfatiza la necesidad de una acción proactiva y comprometida por parte de individuos, comunidades e instituciones para enfrentar los desafíos ambientales actuales y futuros. Con base en esta perspectiva, el objetivo principal es promover un consumo ético y responsable, tanto a través de la educación como mediante acciones sociales orientadas a la protección del medio ambiente. Para ello, se realizó una revisión sistemática siguiendo el método PRISMA, utilizando como fuente principal la base de datos Scopus, de la cual se identificaron un total de 34 estudios relevantes. Los resultados evidencian que el consumo ético y responsable genera un impacto positivo no solo en el medio ambiente, sino también en la sociedad en general. Este enfoque fomenta acciones proactivas, responsabilidad social y prácticas de consumo ético, contribuyendo así a la protección ambiental. Además, el estudio subraya la importancia de adoptar prácticas sostenibles y promover la innovación en productos y servicios que minimicen el impacto ambiental.

**Palabras clave:** acciones, consumo responsable, ética, medio ambiente.

## Introduction

Ethical consumption is defined as a conscious choice based on individual moral beliefs. In recent years, the growing concern for this type of consumption has driven notable interest in eco-friendly products (Chi, 2022). Consequently, public interest in sustainable development has intensified, and various stakeholders are promoting initiatives that reflect environmental responsibility in order to build a better world for present and future generations (Ogiemwonyi & Jan, 2023). A key aspect of the relationship between humans and the environment is the tendency toward inertia in consumption habits (Anser et al., 2024), as current environmental issues are closely linked to human behavior, making individual actions a fundamental element in their resolution (Borg et al., 2024).

In this context, the connection between care and environmental responsibility fosters a more conscious lifestyle. Researchers and experts have shown significant interest in understanding how these factors influence ethical and ecological consumption (Banwell & Eggert, 2024). Therefore, both the academic sphere and society at large must support initiatives that shift the responsibility for reducing pollution toward effective changes in lifestyle and the relationship with the natural environment (Daly, 2022). Environmental ethics plays a fundamental role in regulating the interaction between humans and nature, based not on familial ties but on facts, science, and the interdependence between both (Saka et al., 2009). Although a growing number of conscious consumers promote sustainable purchasing practices, there is still a long way to go to ensure that all individuals can enjoy a safe and healthy environment (Srividya et al., 2024).

In this regard, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) establish a framework for assessing and mitigating the negative impacts of consumption and production, with the aim of promoting responsible and sustainable models (Shaikh et al., 2024). Furthermore, in light of the increasing evidence of climate change effects, there is an urgent need to educate the population about sustainable practices that reduce their environmental impact (Zhao & Cheah, 2023). In the realm of agricultural development, utilizing the water footprint of crops, along with their spatial and temporal distribution patterns and associated determinants, can optimize agricultural production designs. This optimization not only enhances production and water use efficiency but also contributes to controlling environmental pollution (Roibás et al., 2018). On the other hand, in the tourism sector, there is an increasing focus on environmental care for both local inhabitants and visitors in order to preserve the image of tourist destinations.

Thus, to promote responsible consumption in our society, it is essential to have the financial backing of companies committed to environmental preservation. This collaboration can significantly contribute to fostering ecological behaviors among consumers (Almustafa et al., 2023). Additionally, proper food packaging management can reduce food waste by up to 20% by minimizing excessive handling and allowing the marketing of damaged products (Paiva & Ugaya, 2023). Therefore, it is imperative to explore new approaches that enable objective assistance from authorities to improve our systems and, consequently, the environment. Promoting energy equality

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and seeking strategies to reduce inequalities in the distribution of natural resources are fundamental to ensuring sustainable and ethically responsible development (Li et al., 2024).

Moreover, it has been observed that environmental awareness positively impacts the promotion of responsible energy consumption (Jaciow et al., 2022). In the pursuit of sustainable development, it is crucial to enhance quality of life without depleting natural resources, thereby promoting greater respect for the environment (Hospido et al., 2010). Hence, it is necessary to implement environmental education and signage strategies that promote the conservation of rivers, cities, tourist complexes, and green areas. In a society where environmental preservation is increasingly relevant, sustainable consumption measures emerge as a key perspective for addressing environmental and social challenges (Estrada & Araoz, 2024). Nevertheless, despite the efforts of social and governmental entities, progress in sustainable consumption remains insufficient (Hamza et al., 2023).

In this context, responsible consumption stands out as a pathway for economic growth and social development, capable of addressing future resource scarcity issues and mitigating climate change (Guzmán et al., 2021). To tackle these environmental and social challenges, it is essential to change consumption patterns so that new consumers understand that their actions are both a cause and part of the solution (Palacios & Chamorro, 2020). In this regard, it is important to emphasize that responsible consumption represents a social response to current environmental degradation, with individuals adopting these habits in various ways. Thus, this article describes the negative factors affecting responsible consumption, proposes solutions for improving consumption practices, and highlights the positive effects of adopting appropriate measures to favorably impact the environment.

Socially responsible consumption reflects the political and ethical behavior of consumers, whose evaluation varies according to socioeconomic and cultural context. To analyze these differences, measurement tools have been developed to capture the diverse characteristics of consumer behavior on a global scale (Villa-Castaño et al., 2024). In this sense, some entities work to ensure sustainable patterns of production and consumption that promote resource use efficiency, energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure development, access to basic services, environmental support, decent work, and ultimately a better quality of life for society (Pérez et al., 2020). Understanding food consumption patterns is essential for designing strategies that promote responsible and conscious consumption (Leyva-Hernández et al., 2024). Various studies have indicated that responsible consumption is influenced by sociodemographic factors such as gender, age, educational level, and employment status. Therefore, evaluating the prerequisites for socially responsible consumption involves identifying and understanding the different types of consumer behavior (Ríos-Rodríguez et al., 2021).

For all these reasons, this study analyzes the relationship between sustainable consumption habits and the perceptions, practices, and characteristics of responsible consumption of both products and producers (Cristancho Triana et al., 2024). In light of the irresponsible behavior of some consumers who prioritize satisfying their needs without considering environmental preservation, the objective of responsible consumption is to raise awareness about the negative impact that our purchasing and consumption decisions can have on the environment, society, and the economy. Finally, this research aims to sensitize readers to the existing social deficiencies in the implementation and enforcement of responsible consumption measures, as well as to highlight the positive effect that these actions can exert on environmental protection.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach aimed at understanding and analyzing the impact of ethical responsible consumption on the environment. To achieve this, a systematic review of the scientific literature was conducted using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model, ensuring transparency, methodological rigor, and reproducibility in the selection of the analyzed studies.

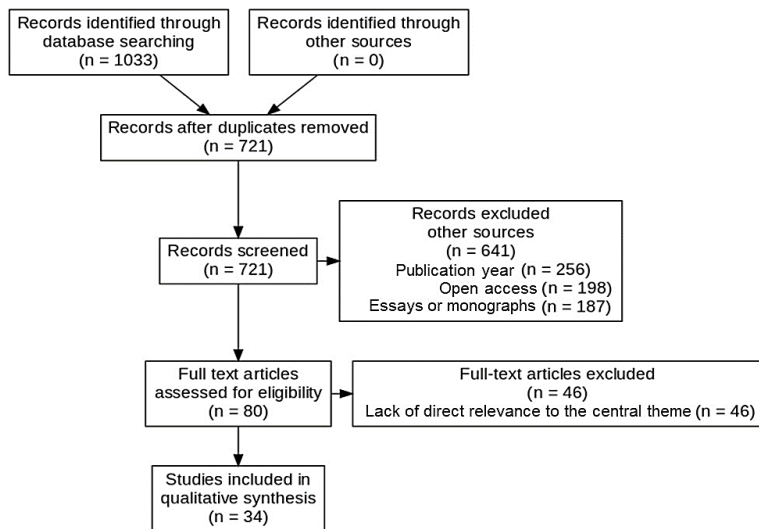
The information search was performed in the Scopus database, chosen for its extensive multidisciplinary coverage and the high quality of its sources. Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) were employed alongside key descriptors such as "responsible consumption," "ethics," "environment," and "sustainable consumption," among others. The search routes were defined in both English and Spanish, restricting results to documents published between 2014 and 2024.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) articles published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, or French; (2) studies focused on the ethics of responsible consumption and its relationship with the environment; (3) empirical, descriptive, or systematic review research; and (4) publications indexed exclusively in Scopus. Conversely, articles that were open access without scientific validation, monographs, essays, and documents lacking direct relevance to the central theme were excluded.

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The diagram presented in Figure 1 illustrates the systematic process followed for the selection of studies in this qualitative synthesis. Initially, 1,033 records were identified through database searches, with no additional records found in other sources. After removing duplicates, the number of records was reduced to 721. These were subjected to a review process, during which 641 records were excluded for various reasons: 256 for not meeting the publication year requirement, 198 for not being available in open access, and 187 for being essays or monographs. Subsequently, 80 full-text articles were evaluated for eligibility, resulting in the exclusion of 46 studies for lack of direct relevance to the central theme. Finally, 34 studies were included in the qualitative synthesis.

**Figure 1**  
Document selection diagram



## Results

**Table 1**  
*Articles included in the systematic review*

No.	Author and Year	Results
1	Chi (2022)	Ethical consumption involves making conscious decisions based on individual moral beliefs. In recent years, growing concern for this type of consumption has increased interest in eco-friendly products.
2	Ogiemwonyi & Jan (2023)	As a result, social orientation toward sustainability has become more evident, with various actors beginning to promote environmental protection initiatives and demonstrate ecological responsibility, aiming for a habitable planet for present and future generations.
3	Anser et al. (2024)	A relevant aspect of the relationship between humans and the environment is the tendency to maintain consumption habits by inertia.
4	Borg et al. (2024)	Currently, environmental issues are closely linked to human behavior, making individual actions an essential part of the solution.
5	Banwell & Eggert (2024)	The connection between care and environmental responsibility promotes a healthier lifestyle. Researchers and experts have shown significant interest in understanding how these factors influence the adoption of ecological and ethical practices.

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6	Daly (2022)	Both the scientific community and society at large should support proposals that shift the responsibility for reducing pollution toward effective changes in lifestyles and the relationship with the environment.
7	Saka et al. (2009)	Environmental ethics plays a fundamental role in regulating the relationship between humans and nature, based on facts and scientific evidence rather than familial ties, highlighting interdependence between both.
8	Srividya et al. (2024)	Although there is a small group of eco-conscious consumers who insist on sustainable purchasing, much remains to be done in this direction. Promoting cleaner production and greater environmental sustainability is essential since everyone has the right to live in a healthy and safe environment.
9	Shaikh et al. (2024)	The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been designed to assess and mitigate the environmental impacts of consumption and production, with the goal of promoting responsible and sustainable models.
10	Zhao & Cheah (2023)	In conclusion, as the effects of climate change become increasingly evident, there is an urgent need to educate the population on how to live sustainably and reduce their environmental impact.
11	Roibás et al. (2018)	In agriculture, using the water footprint of crops, along with analyzing their spatial and temporal distribution patterns and associated determinants, can help optimize production systems, improve water use efficiency, and control environmental pollution.
12	Almustafa et al. (2023)	To foster responsible consumption in our society, it is important to have the economic support of environmentally committed companies, as this can incentivize ecological behaviors among consumers.
13	Paiva & Ugaya (2023)	Proper management of food packaging can reduce food waste by up to 20% by minimizing excessive handling and facilitating the marketing of damaged products.
14	Li et al. (2024)	It is necessary to implement new methods that allow for objective support from authorities to improve environmental systems. Promoting energy equality and reducing inequalities in the distribution of natural resources is essential for ensuring sustainable and ethically responsible development.
15	Jaciow et al. (2022)	It is concluded that environmental awareness positively influences responsible energy consumption.
16	Hospido et al. (2010)	To achieve sustainable development in our society, it is crucial to seek well-being and quality of life without depleting natural resources. Improving these aspects is key to achieving greater harmony with the environment.
17	Van Horne et al. (2023)	Attention to indigenous care ethics opens the possibility of learning from non-dominant groups, promoting values such as connection, interdependence, collectivity, and contextual problem-solving, in contrast to the hegemonic Western approach that privileges universality and objectivity.
18	Gaytán & Flores (2017)	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a recurring topic in academic, business, and institutional debates. This concept encompasses various dimensions, including business practices, environmental sustainability, labor and commercial relations, as well as commitment to social initiatives.

19	Estrada & Araoz (2024)	In a society where environmental preservation is increasingly relevant, sustainable consumption measures consolidate as an essential perspective for addressing environmental and social challenges.
20	Hamza et al. (2023)	Various experts and researchers have highlighted the urgent need to advance toward sustainable consumption. However, despite the efforts of social and governmental entities, progress in this area remains insufficient.
21	Guzmán et al. (2021)	Responsible consumption presents itself as an alternative for economic growth and social development, as it can help resolve future resource scarcity issues and contribute to preventing and mitigating climate change.
22	Palacios & Chamorro. (2020)	To address the environmental and social challenges faced by humanity, it is essential to modify consumption patterns, recognizing that individual actions are both part of the cause and part of the solution.
23	Villa-Castaño et al. (2024)	Socially responsible consumption reflects the political and ethical behavior of consumers, whose evaluation depends on the socioeconomic and cultural context. Therefore, measurement tools have been developed to identify different characteristics of consumer behavior globally.
24	Pérez et al. (2020)	Various entities seek to ensure sustainable patterns of production and consumption that promote resource efficiency, energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure, access to basic services, environmental support, decent work, and a better quality of life for society.
25	Leyva-Hernández et al. (2024)	To design strategies that promote responsible consumption, it is essential to understand food consumption patterns. In this sense, the purpose of this study is to segment consumers of socially responsible foods.
26	Ríos-Rodríguez et al. (2021)	Some studies indicate that responsible consumption is influenced by sociodemographic factors such as gender, age, educational level, and occupation. Additionally, assessing the prerequisites for socially responsible consumption requires identifying different types of consumer behavior.
27	Cristancho Triana et al. (2024)	This study examines the relationship between sustainable consumption habits and the perceptions, practices, and characteristics of responsible consumption of products and producers.
28	Allahham et al. (2024)	Consumer environmental behavior plays a key role in the connection between environmental awareness and ecological outcomes. The study's findings suggest that FinTech incentives can effectively promote more environmentally friendly decisions, positively impacting environmental behavior. These results provide valuable insights for policymakers and companies interested in developing robust environmental strategies and fostering sustainability in the manufacturing industry.
29	Anuja et al. (2024)	The overall reduction of food waste can generate significant benefits for both society and the environment.
30	Jensen et al. (2024)	The importance of adopting a plant-based diet, especially vegetables, is emphasized as a measure to reduce the environmental impact of food consumption. Furthermore, organic farming is promoted as a key tool to achieve greater environmental sustainability and preserve biodiversity.
31	Régis et al. (2021)	Research on the relationship between consumer purchasing decisions and their psychological concerns about health, the environment, and ethics has not yet reached a clear consensus regarding the importance and direction of these concerns, although the ethical dimension is particularly highlighted.

Ramos Hernández, R., Contreras Rivera, R., & Ramos Hernández, G. (2026). Responsible consumption and the environment: a systematic review from the perspective of education and social awareness. *Revista InveCom*, 6(1). 1-11. <https://zenodo.org/records/15605655>

32	Niedek & Krajewski (2021)	Considerable attention has been dedicated to improving consumption to make it more responsible and beneficial for both the planet and society. However, the authors address ethical consumption within the regulatory framework of sustainable consumption, representing the practical application of the concept of sustainable development.
33	Bumin Doyduk (2018)	Beyond meeting what is considered ethical, adopting socially responsible and sustainable practices has become essential in light of changes in the ecological and social environment. Nature's warning signs, such as environmental disasters and climate change, demonstrate that it is no longer viable for companies or individuals to maintain traditional behaviors.
34	Wang & Wu (2024)	It is crucial to foster environmental awareness among entrepreneurs to effectively address the issue of plastic pollution. To promote environmental responsibility in this sector, it is essential to analyze generational changes in attitudes toward the environment, as these can provide valuable perspectives for this purpose.

## Discussion

The findings of this systematic review highlight the multiple benefits of promoting an ethics of responsible consumption, both in educational and environmental contexts. In this regard, various authors agree that professional training should incorporate a strong ethical and social dimension, capable of forming critical citizens committed to their environment. For instance, Monzón Troncoso et al. (2022) emphasize the growing relevance of social responsibility in university training processes, noting that higher education institutions are adopting comprehensive models aimed at developing a sense of responsibility focused on collective well-being.

Complementarily, Martín-Fiorino (2020) underscores the fundamental role that professions play in social and environmental transformation, arguing that ethical training of professionals is essential for their impact to be responsible and innovative. López & Zavala (2019) contend that the social responsibility of professionals is key to addressing challenges arising from the interaction between industry and ecosystems, promoting an equitable distribution of value within organizations. In a broader approach, Göçmen (2023) invites reflection from a social ecology perspective, positioning human society as a central actor in the environmental crisis and emphasizing the importance of developing an ethics that also recognizes the intrinsic value of non-human beings in this ecological framework.

Moreover, ethical consumption and its impact on the environment have been analyzed from various perspectives. Vos et al. (2019) propose adopting conscious food choices, such as prioritizing plant-based and local products, as well as reducing the consumption of animal-based foods due to their larger ecological footprint. These recommendations align with the findings of Baudry et al. (2018), who demonstrate that diets based on organic and plant-based foods not only reduce environmental impact but also improve nutritional quality and contribute to maintaining a healthy body mass index.

However, while promoting responsible consumption is widely recognized as a key strategy for mitigating environmental impact, some studies note limitations in its practical effectiveness. For instance, Frings et al. (2018) found that responsible consumption messages (RCMs) do not always directly influence consumer behavior, especially in visually stimulating or "rich" contexts where these messages tend to go unnoticed. This finding suggests that, although the content of the messages may be appropriate, their effectiveness largely depends on the context and communication design.

In this line, Meseguer-Sánchez et al. (2020) highlight that the effectiveness of awareness messages about responsible consumption is conditioned by multiple factors, such as the target audience, the environment in which they are delivered, and the way they are presented. Despite these limitations, the authors acknowledge a progressive increase in social awareness regarding the importance of ethical consumption, which represents a valuable opportunity for implementing more strategic and tailored educational programs and campaigns.

From an applied perspective, the ethics of responsible consumption translates into concrete practices that promote sustainability, such as opting for eco-friendly, organic, or fair trade products; adopting habits of recycling, reusing, and reducing unnecessary consumption; and supporting companies that implement transparent and ethical policies in their supply chains. Additionally, community involvement through local markets, goods exchanges, or promoting clean technologies contributes to creating more sustainable environments, both environmentally and socially.

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The benefits derived from these practices are multiple and significant. Firstly, responsible consumption directly contributes to reducing the ecological footprint by promoting products and services with low environmental impact, which helps mitigate ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss. Furthermore, by preferring cleaner industrial processes, air and water quality improve, and greenhouse gas emissions decrease, generating positive effects on public health and the preservation of aquatic ecosystems.

On the other hand, responsible consumer behavior drives business innovation. The growing demand for sustainable products has encouraged companies to develop more efficient technologies and processes, opening new market opportunities and strengthening their corporate reputation. This trend, in turn, promotes a more just and sustainable economic development model.

Finally, ethical consumption supports the local economy and fosters fairer trade relationships, as seen in fair trade practices. Communities that adopt this approach report social benefits, such as greater community cohesion, economic equity, and decent working conditions. Additionally, education around responsible consumption acts as a catalyst for broader cultural change, fostering sustainable habits in individuals and communities, thereby strengthening social commitment to the environment and enhancing a positive multiplier effect in society.

## Conclusions

The study of ethics in responsible consumption allows for the exploration of new ways to utilize resources, always with a focus on environmental protection and ecological balance. This analysis fosters greater recognition and appreciation for the value of nature, as well as prioritizing collective well-being over individual interest, leading to a positive change of immeasurable value for humanity.

Moreover, by developing a moral awareness regarding various social issues—such as limited education and poor nutrition in low-resource regions, animal cruelty, technological advancement, international politics, and other globally relevant matters—it enables a deeper understanding and more committed action in these areas.

In this sense, a potential improvement in research could involve identifying and promoting more sustainable consumption alternatives, such as using recycled or reusable products, reducing plastic consumption, and preferring local products, with the aim of decreasing the carbon footprint associated with the transportation of goods. Similarly, disseminating information about companies and brands that practice ethical and sustainable policies can empower consumers, allowing them to make more informed decisions when making purchases.

In conclusion, the findings of the research highlight that responsible consumption has a positive impact on environmental preservation by encouraging society to adopt a more conscious and committed attitude toward protecting our environment. This awareness and the values promoted benefit individuals by fostering a sustainable future for upcoming generations without harming the environment. Ultimately, responsible consumption constitutes a fundamental environmental care strategy, and it is necessary to continue advancing in this area to address the environmental and social challenges facing humanity.

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