

Businesses can build trust with consumers by unlocking data about their practices

May 28 2020, by Sylvie Albert



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Recent public demonstrations against climate change, human rights violations and industry practices that harm the environment reveal a growing public desire to participate in discussions about sustainability, safety and citizen's rights.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted industry practices—both good and bad—and offered [consumers](#) with new perspectives on priorities and how they choose to move forward.

That transition to a greater global awareness and sustainability should be informed by data that will give citizens the power to make decisions that are aligned with their values. Artificial intelligence technologies open the door to digest, decipher patterns and feed back data to consumers so they can make decisions that are more in line with their values.

A [white paper](#) from the [Geneva Peace Building Platform](#) highlights how the rapid expansion of information, communication and networking technologies is changing the dialogue and allowing citizens to make more values-based choices. The movement toward [values-based decision-making](#) is about giving more than lip service to your values—it means using [personal values](#) as a moral and ethical compass to make decisions that are better aligned with what we believe in, what we want to support.

Building and growing trust

As a result, we can expect that all organizations, whether for-profit or non-profit, will need to pay more attention in their strategic planning and day-to-day decision-making to build trust and demonstrate some level of transparency and commitment to meeting sustainability goals.

[Traceability technologies](#) have made the news during the pandemic because governments have wanted to track people infected with COVID-19 to limit the spread of the disease.

In an increasingly integrated world where products are sourced globally, these types of technologies will play an increasing role in values-based decision-making. They can accurately identify where products come from, provide data on the level of corporate social responsibility of the

organizations involved in production and pass the information along to the consumer on apps and devices.

[Values-based decision making](#) will hopefully lead more organizations away from a focus purely on margins and investments. Commitment to values has already been demonstrated to yield significantly better [financial results](#) and so there is an economic argument for being good.

When consumers demand a fuller picture of the products and services they are buying, organizations will need to increase their focus on what they are measuring, and how they better inform customers of their efforts. Transparency and values-based practices must then become key issues for organizations.

There are already ways to report on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other good business practices. For example, the Global Reporting Initiative's [Global Reporting Standards](#) provides a practical guide for businesses. The UN has developed online widgets that companies can install on their websites to report on [how they contribute to the SDGs](#).

Providing accountability

Data can tell us whether a company treats stakeholders fairly, if it pays its taxes, if it uses dangerous materials and how organic its products really are. This information is being made available through new [mobile apps that allow us to shop according to our values](#).

But we also need more aggregated data so that we can make decisions based on industry-level practices. Documentaries on Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and other film distributors are helping to educate us on some industry practices, but we need more.

Shared consumer ratings on products and services help to a degree, but they usually relate to service standards. The complexity of global issues, initiatives, practices and [information sources](#) need to be fed back so that consumers can be better informed and allowed to [give voice to values](#).

Finding reliable data and avoiding fake news can be daunting. Reports on industry ethics are widely adopted by professional associations, but these do not translate into a holistic system of trust, openness and sustainable practices that would allow consumers to easily make informed decisions.

It is clear that practices such as those reported by researchers and news reporters worldwide and on YouTube by informed citizens need to be better shared with consumers.

We need to turn the table around on data to include discussions of not only the ownership and protection of personal data, but also on the rights of consumers to access more extensive and digestible data sources to make values-based decisions. This is an important element in our individual and collective efforts to make a difference on the climate crisis, take actions to protect ourselves and make our personal mark on other important societal challenges.

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