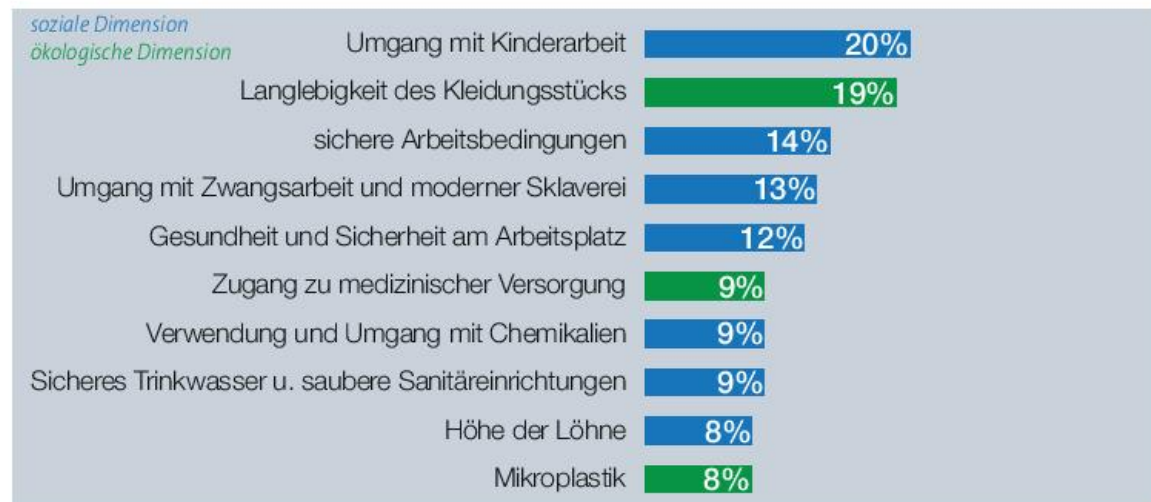


The Code for More Transparency / Kirsten Reinhold – TextilWirtschaft 28/02/24

Sustainability communication could be as simple as this: with an automated integration of information from the seal providers into the webshop. And to the POS. A project for the future that incidentally shows what consumers really want. You can't do it alone anyway, says Stephanie Hansen. Joint solutions are the order of the day for the Senior Manager Sustainability at Breuninger. That's why she didn't think twice when the request came from the Fraunhofer Institute for a project funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment together with ConPolicy and the German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence. And with many practice partners. Retailers such as Amazon and Avocadostore, Otto Group, Bergfreunde and Breuninger. manufacturers such as Vaude, Lovéco and Green Earth. I was immediately interested in seal providers such as Fairwear, Blue Angel, FairTrade, Ökotex and GOTS.Es because they are about a common data interface. And this is one of my favorite projects on the way to more sustainability. I thought it was good that for the first time the sealers were also included. For Claudia Brück, board member of Fairtrade Germany, this was also one of the main reasons for participating in the project with the somewhat unwieldy name "Better Access and Visibility of Sustainability Information" – or "ZuSiNa" for short: "We very much welcome the retailers' desire for more transparency towards consumers," says Brück. Safeguarding via an interface to the seal organisations makes sense so that consumers can make an informed purchase decision at the end of the day. Finding out exactly what they want was also part of the project, which has since been completed.

DER UMGANG MIT KINDERARBEIT ZÄHLT

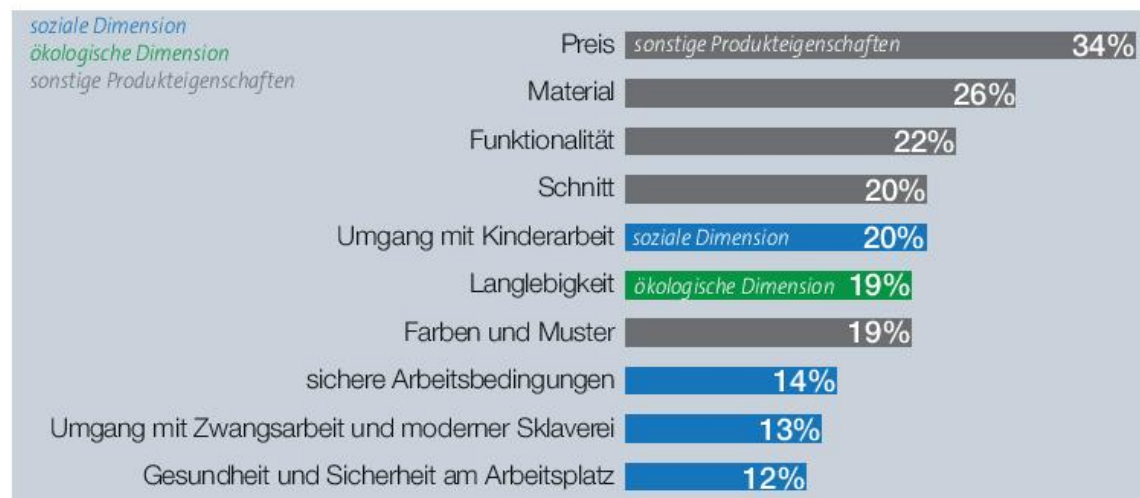
Welche fünf nachhaltigen Eigenschaften sind für Ihre Kaufentscheidung am wichtigsten?



Quelle: ZuSiNa

DER PREIS IST AM WICHTIGSTEN

Welche fünf Eigenschaften sind für ihre Kaufentscheidung am wichtigsten?



Quelle: ZuSiNa

Almost exactly one year after the first meeting, the common conclusion is: Technically, many things are already possible today. "One way is to transmit seal information via the product number of individual clothing articles, the so-called GTIN," summarizes project manager Marie Lena Heidingsfelder. However, the feasibility for the broad market is still difficult. This is mainly due to the sealers. With the exception of Fairtrade, they are not yet in a position to provide the corresponding data sets that are necessary to be able to check and map the seal information at product level. "The installation of the interface we have developed is a certain development effort, but it would be possible. The ball is now in the court of the sealers," says the project manager.

Brück takes him in. "What is needed is a software solution for brands, retailers and seal initiatives in order to be able to automatically check the certification information and display it on platforms such as Amazon," explains the Fairtrade boss.

She also sees the most promising solution as the addition of the information stored in the barcode, as described by Heidingsfelder and tested as part of the project. "By adding another data field,

sustainability information could be stored in the barcode. Here, too, however, the technical implementation is still missing," says Brück. The long-term goal is for the brand owner to store sustainability information for his product in the EAN/GTIN code in addition to common data such as material and packaging size." Only if we manage to ensure that other labelling initiatives can also collect sustainability data from their products and automatically make it available to third-party providers will online retail become more transparent in the long term," Brück sums up. For them, the comprehensive project has first and foremost shown where the industry stands and what the customer actually wants.

Marlene Münsch, project manager at ConPolicy, an institute for consumer policy, and her team surveyed more than 1800 consumers. They should select and rank the five most important criteria for their purchase decision. "The results show that, in addition to classic product characteristics such as price, material and cut, information about social production conditions is of great interest. Topics that are highly emotionally charged, such as how to deal with child labor or forced labor, are considered to be particularly relevant," says the ten-page detailed evaluation. When asked exclusively about sustainability-relevant characteristics, the handling of child labor and longevity are most important to consumers. Topics that are discussed as much as the level of wages and the problem with microplastics have the least importance (graphs on page 20). "In the ecological sector, those characteristics that directly affect consumers, such as the durability of a garment and the use of chemicals in production, are particularly relevant for purchase. Indicators that play a major role in environmental assessment but are not directly related to consumers, such as greenhouse gas emissions, play a much smaller role in purchasing decisions," the authors conclude.

But how exactly do customers really want to know? Pretty much exactly, even if it doesn't go that way, Münsch sums up. For example, 66% of respondents said that information about negative characteristics of garments – such as high water consumption – is important for their purchasing decision. And how deep should manufacturers and retailers go? The rule of thumb is that consumers want about two to four sentences per feature. And this applies to all respondents, regardless of socio-demographic characteristics such as income, level of education or personal environmental attitudes. For Münsch, this is also one of the major learnings of the project: "We tend to distinguish which customers are sustainability-oriented and which are not. But you can't make such a general statement, because it always depends on the topic and the context." This leads directly to the next big question – how should the information be prepared? For example, could a sustainability score for textiles or product recommendations promote sustainable purchasing decisions and increase the credibility of an online retailer? To this end, a representative online experiment with more than 2000 people ran in a simulated webshop in the summer.

It showed that labeling T-shirts with a textile score and a clickable legend with additional information increased the purchase intention for sustainable textiles the most. In this group, 71% of the participants opted for the fairly produced T-shirt. The green claim "sustainable" alone – which the EU now wants to ban – motivated 60% of people to buy. "Sustainability information that was communicated with a textile score with a legend was rated as the most credible by the respondents," the respondents concluded. The second purchase situation in the simulated online shop was carried out on product recommendations. When is the customer more likely to reach for a sustainable sweater even though the conventional one is already in the shopping cart? The answer was unequivocal: the recommendation of the fair alternative is most effective if it comes with an eco-label and is highlighted in green. This combination motivated 82% of respondents to choose the more sustainable product. Most of them opted for the sweater with the Fairtrade label (35%), followed by the Blue Angel (25%), Oeko-Tex (21%) and GOTS (19%).

For Miriam Bodenheimer, however, seals are only a communication tool. The head of the Sustainability Competence Center, which is based at the Fraunhofer Institute, is looking to Brussels – and is calling for the same as Otto and Zalando: "We need even more data and, above all, industry-wide tools that enable the individual products to be compared at the POS. Political support is absolutely necessary for this."

The results would result in clear recommendations for action. Bodenheimer is thinking of the planned "Digital Product Passport", which should contain statements on social sustainability topics in addition to environmental information. Also in view of the new EU Green Claims Directive, social statements would have to be taken into account more and not, as currently planned, only ecological claims. The authors of the study already have a new word for this, which could replace or supplement the new era

of "greenhushing". The term, coined by the operators of the sustainability website Treehugger, describes the phenomenon of companies deliberately not communicating about their sustainability initiatives for fear of increased controls or shitstorms. If politicians do not create a uniform basis, the initiators of the ZuSiNa project now see the danger of increased "socialwashing" – misleading advertising with statements about particularly socially acceptable behaviour, which is not the case in the EU. practice lacks the necessary basis. This is one of the reasons why those involved, especially Breuninger's Head of Sustainability Hansen, hope that the results of the project will not end up in a drawer. "I still see the biggest problems in communication. A level playing field on how to advertise ecological sustainability aspects will also create more clarity for consumers, both online and directly at the stationary POS." And on platforms like Zalando.