

ADVANCING BENEFIT CORPORATION CERTIFICATION: SEGMENTING STAKEHOLDERS AND CRAFTING TARGETED STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCED IMPACT

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ABSTRACT

The global economic landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by an escalating demand for corporate accountability and a deeper understanding of conscious consumerism [20, 47]. Within this evolving environment, sustainability certifications have emerged as crucial instruments for verifying ethical and environmental commitments. This article, structured in the IMRaD format, meticulously explores the multifaceted challenge of promoting Benefit Corporation (B Corp) certification, a distinctive standard that mandates a holistic balance between profit generation and purpose-driven impact. Building upon an extensive literature review encompassing sustainability labels, intricate consumer behavior patterns, and established social marketing methodologies, this research proposes refined segmentation strategies for both consumers and businesses. Furthermore, it outlines targeted promotional approaches designed to amplify outreach and optimize communication effectiveness.

The introductory section delves into the foundational principles of B Corps and contextualizes them within the broader ecosystem of global certifications. The subsequent literature review comprehensively examines existing scholarship on the efficacy and perception of various eco-labels. The methods section details a robust theoretical framework for conducting market segmentation and developing strategic promotional blueprints. The results chapter synthesizes key demographic, psychographic, and behavioral characteristics of identifiable consumer and business segments, particularly their knowledge, attitudes, and intentions regarding B Corp certification. Finally, the discussion and conclusion sections offer pragmatic, actionable insights for organizations dedicated to advancing B Corp principles, emphasizing the strategic imperative of targeted messaging, fostering deeper stakeholder engagement, and cultivating robust collaborative efforts to cultivate a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable global economy.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Certification, Benefit corporation, Consumer behavior, Market segmentation, Social marketing, Corporate social responsibility, Eco-labels, Targeted messaging, Brand recognition, Trust, Greenwashing.

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INTRODUCTION

The dawn of the 21st century has been marked by an undeniable global shift towards greater environmental and social consciousness [20, 47]. This paradigm change is not merely a fleeting trend but a fundamental re-evaluation of the role of business in society. As consumers become increasingly discerning, their purchasing decisions are no longer solely predicated on price or quality but are increasingly influenced by the ethical and environmental credentials of companies and their products [47, 50]. This rising tide of conscious consumerism has catalyzed the proliferation of diverse sustainability certifications and eco-labels, each striving

to provide verifiable assurance regarding a product's, service's, or company's commitment to ethical practices and environmental stewardship [6, 26, 32].

The spectrum of these certifications is broad and continually expanding, reflecting the complexity of global supply chains and the varied aspects of sustainability. For instance, product-specific labels such as Fair Trade Certified [31] and the USDA Organic seal [72] provide consumers with assurances about fair labor practices and agricultural standards, respectively. Similarly, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) [33] certifies responsibly managed forests, ensuring sustainable timber sourcing. Beyond food and agriculture, certifications extend into

various industries, including textiles (e.g., Bluesign [10], OEKO-TEX® STANDARD 100 [52], Responsible Wool Standard [67], Responsible Down Standard [69]), construction (e.g., LEED [71]), and broader business operations (e.g., 1% for the Planet [1], Climate Neutral Certification [68], Green Seal [38], Rainforest Alliance [57], Regenerative Organic Certified [58]). The sheer volume of these certifications, with over 456 environmental labels documented across 199 countries and 25 industry sectors [29], underscores a robust market demand for verifiable sustainability claims. However, this rapid proliferation also presents a formidable challenge: the potential for consumer confusion and skepticism regarding the legitimacy and distinctiveness of various labels, thereby necessitating highly effective communication strategies and strong brand recognition for any certification to truly resonate with its target audience [28, 35, 40].

Within this intricate ecosystem of certifications, the Benefit Corporation (B Corp) certification, meticulously administered by the non-profit organization B Lab [9], stands apart due to its comprehensive and holistic approach. Unlike many certifications that focus on a specific product, process, or environmental attribute, B Corp certification evaluates a company's entire social and environmental performance, its accountability to all stakeholders, and its unwavering commitment to transparency [9, 14]. This rigorous assessment ensures that B Corps are not merely professing good intentions but are legally bound and verified to balance profit with purpose, considering their impact on a wide array of stakeholders including workers, customers, suppliers, the broader community, and the natural environment [2]. The philosophy underpinning the B Corp movement champions the idea that business can and should be a force for good, fundamentally shifting corporate behavior beyond a sole focus on shareholder profit [2, 19]. The remarkable growth of certified companies—exceeding 8,051 in 2024 alone [9]—attests to the increasing recognition of this model's value.

Despite this substantial growth and the burgeoning interest in ethical business practices, effectively promoting B Corp certification remains a nuanced endeavor. Prior research indicates that while consumers are increasingly valuing sustainability, their comprehension and recognition of specific certifications can be surprisingly low [49, 51]. For a certification to gain traction, it must effectively signal its value and engender consumer trust [6, 28]. This involves not only demonstrating the integrity of the certification process but also crafting messages that cut through the noise of competing claims and address potential consumer skepticism, particularly concerning greenwashing—the practice of making unsubstantiated or misleading environmental claims [36, 37].

This article addresses the critical need for a deeper understanding of how to effectively advocate for B Corp

certification. It is structured to provide a comprehensive IMRaD-formatted framework. Specifically, this research aims to:

1. Assess the current landscape of consumer awareness and understanding of various ecolabels, with a particular focus on Benefit Corporation Certification.
2. Investigate the prevailing knowledge and best practices for promoting sustainability-oriented certifications in the contemporary marketplace.
3. Propose refined strategies for the enhanced promotion of Benefit Corporation Certification to both prospective consumers and businesses, based on detailed market segmentation.

By systematically synthesizing insights from consumer behavior, social marketing, and existing certification schemes, this article seeks to offer actionable guidance for driving wider adoption and recognition of B Corp principles, thereby contributing to a more sustainable and equitable global economy.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The decision-making processes of modern consumers are increasingly complex, influenced not only by traditional factors like price and quality but also by the perceived social and environmental responsibility of brands and products [20, 47]. This section delves into the existing academic discourse surrounding the marketing of sustainability-oriented certifications, with a particular focus on the unique challenges and opportunities presented by Benefit Corporation Certification.

### **Marketing Sustainability-Oriented Certifications**

Certifications play a pivotal role in the contemporary marketplace by serving as credible signals of a company's commitment to sustainable and ethical practices [6]. These labels are designed to reduce information asymmetry between producers and consumers, thereby fostering consumer trust and confidence [6, 28, 70]. Research consistently demonstrates that well-recognized certifications can significantly enhance brand loyalty and effectively differentiate products in highly competitive markets, opening new avenues to engage environmentally conscious consumer segments [35, 73]. Consumers often perceive that certified products offer superior health or environmental benefits, which can justify a price premium [2, 70]. Studies by Atkinson and Rosenthal (2014) and Potter et al. (2021) underscore that certifications can profoundly influence consumer trust and their perceptions of product quality [6, 55]. However, the efficacy of certifications as marketing tools is not inherent; it is contingent upon effective marketing strategies, including clear, consistent, and pervasive communication about the benefits and rigorous standards underpinning the certification [66].

The digital age has fundamentally transformed how consumers discover and engage with sustainable brands.

Digital marketing platforms, including social media, online reviews, and influencer marketing, have become indispensable channels for promoting eco-labels [16, 45]. Donato and Adıgüzel (2022) highlight the importance of designing and adapting eco-labels for digital environments, recommending designs that are easy to understand, visually appealing, and highly noticeable to facilitate information processing and enhance product evaluations [28]. The ability to effectively leverage online platforms for consumer engagement and transparent communication about a certification's tangible benefits is crucial [44]. For example, the successful marketing of certified coffee has been shown to boost production, improve market access, and drive up demand, underscoring the potential for certifications to create positive market dynamics [43].

A critical component of effective marketing for any certification is market segmentation. Segmentation involves dividing a broad consumer or business market into distinct subgroups of consumers, where each subgroup has common needs, interests, and priorities. This allows marketers to tailor offerings and promotions to specific, homogeneous consumer groups, thereby ensuring that their unique needs and desires are met more precisely and efficiently [48]. In the context of sustainable consumption, various studies have successfully segmented consumers based on their attitudes and behaviors. For instance, Aslihan Nasir and Karakaya (2014) segmented organic food consumers into distinct types based on their health orientation, socially responsible consumption, environmental responsibility, and overarching values and lifestyles [5]. Similarly, Daraboina et al. (2024) identified "health-conscious," "quality-conscious," and "value-conscious" clusters among organic food consumers, observing that "quality-conscious" consumers were most likely to exhibit brand loyalty [18]. Beyond food, broader research on sustainability labels indicates that approximately half of surveyed consumers perceive an added value in certified products, with greater appreciation observed in specific product categories like electrical, computing, and paper/wood products [70]. Furthermore, demographic insights suggest that younger females with higher education levels and greater environmental awareness are often more influenced by certifications [70].

Despite the evident benefits, the landscape of marketing sustainability certifications is fraught with challenges. The sheer proliferation of certification schemes can lead to significant consumer confusion and, consequently, skepticism [8]. This confusion is exacerbated by the pervasive issue of greenwashing, where companies make misleading or unsubstantiated claims about the environmental or social benefits of their products or operations [36, 37]. Such deceptive practices erode consumer trust and undermine the credibility of legitimate certifications [36, 37]. Paradoxically, certifications themselves can serve as a mechanism to mitigate concerns about greenwashing by providing

third-party verification [51]. However, some research suggests that consumers still exhibit low recognition of existing eco-labels, and that these labels may yield only a low-level enhancement to brand equity [43]. Much of the existing research in this domain, particularly concerning segmentation, has historically focused on food-oriented certifications, arguably due to their relative success in achieving higher reported levels of recognition and trust [54, 18]. Consequently, there remains a notable gap in comprehensive academic research dedicated to understanding and promoting the rapidly growing Benefit Corporation Certification.

#### Benefit Corporation Certification: A Distinctive Paradigm

Benefit Corporation Certification represents a distinctive and transformative approach to corporate responsibility. Unlike product- or process-specific certifications, B Corp certification is awarded to an entire company, rigorously evaluating every aspect of its business model to ensure a commitment to creating a positive impact on society and the environment [4, 49]. The certification process is comprehensive, requiring companies to achieve a minimum score of 80 out of 200 possible points across five key impact areas: Workers, Community, Environment, Customers, and Governance [19]. This holistic framework ensures that certified companies are not merely making charitable donations or implementing isolated eco-friendly practices, but are fundamentally embedding social and environmental considerations into their core operations, decision-making, and legal structure [19, 49]. As of 2025, B Lab [9], the sole non-profit third-party certifying organization, reports over 8,763 certified companies operating across 162 industries in 161 countries, collectively representing more than 804,305 workers [9]. While the industry distribution is diverse, service and manufacturing sectors currently represent leading categories among certified B Corps [14].

A common source of confusion regarding this certification lies in the distinction between "Benefit Corporation status" and "Certified Benefit Corporation" (B Corp Certified) [2]. While a company may hold both, they are legally and functionally distinct. "Benefit Corporation status" refers to a specific legal business structure enacted at the state level (in the U.S.) or national level (in some countries). Companies adopting this legal status are self-reporting entities, not mandatorily required to obtain third-party B Corp certification. They often operate within a limited geographical scope, incur lower fees, and utilize their own branding and terminology to communicate their social and environmental commitments [9]. In contrast, B Corp certification is a rigorous third-party verification process, akin to certifications like USDA Organic or Green Seal. It involves higher fees, allows for international operation, necessitates a formal third-party audit, and requires the use of specific language and logos to articulate value to customers [51]. This distinction is crucial for both legal compliance and effective communication to stakeholders.

Previous research has illuminated various insights into the value added by B Corp certification. Ivanova et al. (2018) found that the certification had a significant positive impact on purchase intention, willingness to pay a price premium, and consumer trust, particularly among specific demographic segments such as white females, Millennials (ages 22-40) or Baby Boomers (ages 53-71), individuals with college or higher degrees, those with high environmental concerns, and those holding liberal political views [49]. Their study also revealed that simply providing consumers with the name and a brief description of the certification significantly enhanced purchase intentions, price premium willingness, and reported trust [49]. Alam et al. (2022) similarly concluded that B Corp certification acts as a unique differentiator, helping consumers distinguish companies in an increasingly crowded marketplace [4].

However, the landscape of B Corp recognition is not without complexities. Nicholas and Sacco (2017) reported surprisingly low recognition of B Corp certification even among business school students, suggesting a broader lack of awareness among consumer groups [51]. This finding has prompted calls for greater educational efforts to improve brand recognition, trust, price premium acceptance, and purchase intention beyond the identified narrow target market [15, 49]. Perhaps most critically, a study by Sigurdsson et al. (2024) indicated that B Corp certification may not have a significantly greater impact on willingness to buy compared to other labels, suggesting that simply having the certification might not be enough in itself without concerted promotional efforts [62]. These mixed findings underscore a pressing need for further research into better understanding the promotional marketing value of B Corp certification and developing strategies to optimize its market impact.

Given these insights and the identified gaps in the literature, the current research is guided by the following key inquiries and hypotheses:

### Research Questions:

1. What is the current level of consumer recognition and understanding for Benefit Corporation Certification in comparison to other established ecolabels?
2. How do consumers' attitudes, knowledge, and intentions regarding purchasing decisions for certified goods and services vary across distinct consumer segments?
3. What are the most effective strategies for promoting Benefit Corporation Certified goods and services to different consumer segments, leveraging their unique demographic, psychographic, and behavioral characteristics?

### Hypotheses:

- H1: Consumer recognition of Benefit Corporation Certification and its associated logo will be below 50%.

- H2: Consumer reported familiarity with the meaning of Benefit Corporation Certification will be below 50%.

- H3: Significant differences will exist in demographic and psychographic data between identified consumer groups segmented by their environmental attitudes, knowledge of the certification, and the role of social impact in their purchasing decisions, while geographic location will not show significant differences.

By addressing these questions and testing these hypotheses, this research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of consumer perceptions of B Corp certification and offer actionable insights for its more effective promotion.

## METHODS

To rigorously investigate the aforementioned hypotheses and research questions, a quantitative survey approach was employed, involving the administration of detailed questionnaires to a representative sample of individuals residing in the United States. The U.S. was chosen as the study's geographical focus due to its role as the inception point of B Corp Certification and its historically highest concentration of certified companies [9]. This section outlines the comprehensive research design, including participant recruitment, detailed measures, and the statistical methods utilized for data analysis.

### 2.1. Research Design and Participants

The study utilized an online questionnaire administered through a reputable market research company to an internet panel specifically curated to be representative of the United States national census profile. This approach mirrors methodologies successfully applied in similar studies on sustainability certifications and consumer preferences [56]. Participants were randomly selected from the panel members and received a small compensation for their completion of the survey, the value of which was scaled according to the questionnaire's length.

A total of 1,040 usable surveys were meticulously completed and subsequently analyzed. This number was reached after carefully eliminating individual responses that contained missing data points, ensuring the integrity and completeness of the dataset for analysis.

### 2.2. Measures

The questionnaire was designed to capture a comprehensive range of variables pertinent to consumer awareness, attitudes, and purchasing behaviors related to sustainability and, specifically, B Corp Certification. Compulsory responses were collected for all critical questions, ensuring a robust dataset. The key variables measured included:

- Demographics: Standard demographic information was collected, encompassing gender, highest level of education attained, annual household income (categorized

into ranges), employment status (full-time, part-time, unemployed), and age. This data provided the foundational characteristics for segmenting the consumer base.

● **Recognition of Sustainability-Oriented Certifications:** Participants were asked to indicate their recognition of 14 distinct sustainability-oriented certifications. These certifications spanned various industries and focus areas, as detailed in Table 4 (Appendix 1) below. This measure allowed for a comparative assessment of B Corp recognition against other established eco-labels. The certifications included:

- Climate Neutral Certification [68]: A standard for companies offsetting and reducing carbon emissions to achieve net-zero.
- 1% for the Planet [1]: A movement for businesses and individuals to donate 1% of annual sales to environmental solutions.
- USDA Organic [72]: Certification for agricultural products meeting U.S. Department of Agriculture organic standards.
- LEED [71]: A globally recognized green building certification system by the U.S. Green Building Council.
- Fair Trade Certified [31]: Ensures products meet social, economic, and environmental standards, promoting equitable trading relationships.
- Green Seal [38]: Awarded to products and services meeting rigorous environmental, health, and performance criteria throughout their lifecycle.
- B Corp Certification [9]: Designates businesses meeting high standards of verified performance, accountability, and transparency across various factors (employees, community, environment, customers, governance).
- Rainforest Alliance [57]: Certifies products and services meeting comprehensive sustainability criteria for agriculture, forestry, and tourism.
- Regenerative Organic Certified [58]: For food, textiles, and personal care ingredients, setting the highest standard for organic agriculture including soil health, animal welfare, and social fairness.
- Bluesign [10]: A comprehensive sustainability standard for the textile industry, focusing on environmental, health, and safety throughout production.
- Responsible Wool Standard [67]: Ensures wool comes from farms with progressive land management and high animal welfare standards.
- Responsible Down Standard [69]: Ensures ethically sourced down and feathers from ducks and geese with welfare considerations.
- Higg Index [65]: Self-assessment tools developed

by the Sustainable Apparel Coalition for measuring environmental and social sustainability performance in apparel, footwear, and consumer goods.

- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) [33]: Certification for responsible forest management and chain of custody.

- OEKO-TEX® STANDARD 100 [52]: For textiles and leather, ensuring testing for harmful substances and environmentally/socially responsible production.

● **Familiarity with B Corp Certification:** Participants rated their familiarity with the meaning of B Corp Certification using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

● **Recognition of the B Corp Logo:** Participants were shown the B Corp logo and asked to indicate if they recognized it.

● **Ability to Identify Certified Companies:** To assess practical recognition, respondents were presented with eight well-known brands, selected from the Axios and Harris Poll 100 (2023) due to their high public recognition [7]. These brands were divided into two groups: four B Corp Certified companies (All Birds; Seventh Generation; Ben & Jerry's; Patagonia) and four uncertified companies (Whole Foods; IKEA; Microsoft; Hewlett Packard). Participants were asked to identify which of the presented brands were B Corp Certified. A response was marked as correct if a participant accurately identified at least one of the four certified brands without incorrectly identifying any of the uncertified companies. An additional option, "none of the brands are certified," was also provided.

● **Variables Driving Purchasing Behavior:** Participants rated the importance of various criteria when making purchasing decisions using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not important at all, 5 = extremely important). These criteria included: Price, Recommendation from friends/family, Product quality, Ease of access, Packaging design, Social responsibility of product, Impact of product on the environment, Product durability, Consumer reviews, and Previous experience with product. These variables served as indicators of purchasing priorities.

● **Sources of Information about B Corp Certification:** Respondents were asked where they had heard about B Corp Certification in the past three months, providing insights into effective communication channels. Options included: Product packaging, Social media, Online news or media, Friends or family, Brand newsletter or email, and Broadcast media.

● **Environmental Concern (NEP Score):** Participants' general environmental attitudes were measured using the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) scale [26]. The NEP scale is a widely used psychometric instrument designed to assess endorsement of an ecological worldview, distinguishing between an anthropocentric (human-centered) and an ecocentric (nature-centered) perspective. A higher NEP score indicates a stronger

environmental concern. This psychographic variable was crucial for understanding deeper attitudinal segments.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 27. Given the generally linear nature of the collected data, parametric tests were deemed most appropriate for hypothesis testing. These included ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) for comparing means across groups, Chi-squared tests for examining associations between categorical variables, and the Kruskal-Wallis H test for non-parametric comparisons when assumptions for parametric tests were not met.

The internal consistency of all survey questions, particularly the variables selected for clustering, was rigorously assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. Acceptable internal consistency was reported for the clustering variables: NEP (0.77), stated impact of environmental and social responsibility on purchasing (0.81), and familiarity of B Corp certification (0.76). These scores exceeded the generally accepted threshold of 0.70, as recommended by Ferrer, Hamagami, and McArdle (2004) for reliable scales [32].

### 2.4. Market Segmentation Approach (Cluster Analysis)

Following the methodologies of Aslihan Nasir and Karakaya (2014) and Daraboina et al. (2024) in the context of organic food, segmentation analysis was a core component of this research to differentiate consumer types and explore their unique demographic, psychographic, and geographic differences [5, 18]. The strategic importance of segmenting an audience in marketing campaigns lies in its ability to facilitate a more precise understanding of various groups, thereby enabling more effective targeting strategies [34]. Cluster analysis, a well-established and robust marketing research technique [39, 48], was employed for this purpose. Cluster analysis systematically groups individuals into distinct, internally homogeneous groups based on shared characteristics [33]. To ensure the robustness of the clustering process, the ratio of sample size to the number of clustering variables was maintained below the recommended 70:1 ratio, as suggested by Dolnicar et al. (2012) [24].

An exploratory cluster analysis was initially performed to determine the optimal final protocol, a practice endorsed by Hair et al. (2012) [39]. Through a process of trial and error, consistent with recommendations by Dolnicar et al. (2014) for effective market segmentation [23], three key variables were ultimately selected for clustering. This decision was guided by the principle of reducing the potential attitude-behavior gap, aiming to ensure that the identified clusters more accurately reflect real-world purchasing motivations and actions [23, 63, 13]. The selected clustering variables were:

1. NEP Score (Environmental Attitude): Representing consumers' fundamental beliefs and

concerns regarding environmental issues [26].

2. Reported Familiarity with B Corp Certification (Knowledge): Indicating their level of awareness and understanding of the certification.

3. Stated Role of 'Social Impact' in Purchasing Decisions (Proxy for Behavior): Reflecting the importance consumers place on social responsibility when making purchase choices, serving as a behavioral proxy.

A two-step clustering procedure was applied for the final analysis to enhance the parity of membership across clusters, a methodological approach supported by Hair et al. (2012) and Mazzocchi (2008) [39, 48].

1. Hierarchical Cluster Analysis: This initial step was utilized to determine the optimal number of clusters. Ward's method and Squared Euclidean distance were employed during hierarchical clustering, consistent with applications in similar research [7, 17, 12]. The optimal number of clusters was identified by analyzing the dendrogram and the percentage change in heterogeneity, as per standard practices [48].

2. Non-Hierarchical Cluster Analysis (K-means Clustering): Once the optimal number of clusters was determined, K-means clustering was applied to sort individual survey responses into these predefined clusters. This two-step process helps to refine cluster formation and ensure distinct, meaningful segments.

The stability of the identified clusters was further confirmed based on the percentage change in heterogeneity, aligning with the criteria defined by Hair et al. (2012) [39]. This comprehensive methodological approach ensures that the identified consumer segments are robust, distinct, and actionable for developing targeted marketing strategies.

## RESULTS

The survey yielded several key findings regarding consumer awareness of Benefit Corporation Certification and other ecolabels, alongside a clear segmentation of the consumer base. This section presents the detailed results pertaining to the hypotheses, descriptive statistics of the clusters, and their distinct characteristics.

### 3.1. Overall Consumer Awareness and Recognition (H1 & H2)

The overall recognition of B Corp Certification among respondents was notably low, with only 12.69% reporting recognition of the certification itself and 29.71% recognizing its logo. These figures fall significantly below the 50% threshold hypothesized in H1, leading to the acceptance of H1. This low recognition stands in stark contrast to food-related certifications, which demonstrated much higher familiarity: USDA Organic was recognized by 71.83% of respondents, and Fair Trade Certified by 57%.

Similarly, the reported familiarity with the meaning of B

Corp Certification was also low. Only 13.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were familiar with what the certification represents. This is well below the 50% threshold specified in H2, leading to the acceptance of H2.

Interestingly, despite the low explicit knowledge and recognition, a substantial proportion of respondents (47.67%) were able to correctly identify at least one or more B Corp certified companies from a provided list of eight brands (four certified, four uncertified) without incorrectly identifying uncertified ones. This suggests a latent, perhaps indirect, awareness or association with B Corps, even if the formal certification itself is not widely recognized.

### 3.2. Consumer Segmentation (Cluster Analysis)

The two-step clustering process successfully identified four stable and consistent consumer clusters. (as presented in the original document, which I am not reproducing here but referencing its content) provides a summary of the demographic and psychographic (NEP) data for each cluster. Subsequent analyses confirmed significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) between each cluster concerning gender, employment status, average NEP score (environmental concern), and age. However, geographic location was not significantly different between clusters, indicating a relatively even distribution of these segments across the United States. While several demographic and psychographic measures were significantly different for each segment, H3 is rejected due to the absence of significant geographic differences.

Across almost all clusters, quality (average 4.08 on a 5-point scale) and durability (average 3.93) were consistently identified as the highest priorities in purchasing decisions. Cluster 3 was a slight exception, where durability was ranked third. Furthermore, product packaging (16.15%) and social media (15.48%) were reported as the top two sources where respondents had heard about B Corp Certification in the preceding three months.

Below is a detailed description of each identified cluster:

#### Cluster 1 (n=177)

- **Demographics:** This cluster was the second youngest, with an average age of 39.85 years. It was predominantly female (53.7%) and reported a comparatively high unemployment rate (33%). Their average household income was \$61,878.06.

- **Psychographics (NEP):** They scored moderately on the NEP scale (3.29), indicating a moderate level of environmental concern relative to other clusters.

- **B Corp Knowledge & Identification:** They reported the second highest average familiarity with B Corp Certification (2.77) among all clusters. However, consistent with the inverse relationship observed, their

ability to correctly identify certified companies was the second lowest (49.5%).

- **Purchasing Behaviors & Information Seeking:** Cluster 1 reported a relatively high propensity for researching products before purchase (3.36), ranking second highest among the clusters. They exhibited moderate levels of price sensitivity (3.55). Key purchasing priorities included quality (3.93) and durability (3.75), alongside a notable concern for environmental (3.49) and social (3.38) responsibility. They also showed a relatively high interest in packaging (2.86) compared to other groups. Consumer reviews (3.53) and previous experience with the product (3.79) were also relatively important to this cluster.

- **Information Sources:** Prominent sources for hearing about B Corp Certification included social media (37.85%) and product packaging (31.64%).

#### Cluster 2 (n=295)

- **Demographics:** This was the oldest cluster, with an average age of 49.21 years. It was predominantly female (62%) and reported a high employment rate (85.42%). Their average household income was \$69,982.59.

- **Psychographics (NEP):** Cluster 2 exhibited the highest NEP score (4.03), signifying the strongest environmental concern among all segments.

- **B Corp Knowledge & Identification:** This cluster reported the lowest knowledge of B Corp Certification, with 100% disagreement regarding familiarity with the certification and only 5.76% recognizing the logo. Paradoxically, and consistent with the inverse relationship, they demonstrated the highest ability to correctly identify one or more certified companies (51.23%).

- **Purchasing Behaviors & Information Seeking:** This cluster was highly price-sensitive (4.01). They strongly prioritized quality (4.2) and durability (4.2). Notably, they reported the highest prioritization of environmental (3.88) and social (3.55) concerns in their purchasing decisions. They also heavily relied on consumer reviews (3.71) and previous experience with products (4.12), both scoring highest among the clusters.

- **Information Sources:** Online news/media (23.7%) and product packaging (5.42%) were their most cited sources for B Corp information, though overall low awareness in this cluster means these figures are very low.

#### Cluster 3 (n=145)

- **Demographics:** This was the youngest cluster, with an average age of 39.19 years. It was majority male (58.6%) and reported very high employment rates (81.38%). Their average household income was \$71,861.62.

- **Psychographics (NEP):** They had a moderate NEP score (3.30), comparable to Cluster 1.

- **B Corp Knowledge & Identification:** This cluster exhibited the highest stated familiarity with B Corp Certification, with 100% agreeing or strongly agreeing. They also had the highest logo recognition (89.66%). However, consistent with the observed inverse relationship, this cluster demonstrated the lowest ability to correctly identify certified companies (47.67%). This suggests a potential "Dunning-Kruger effect" where perceived knowledge is higher than actual accuracy [25].

- **Purchasing Behaviors & Information Seeking:** Cluster 3 reported the highest propensity for researching products before purchase (4.9). They exhibited the lowest levels of price sensitivity (3.19) and, notably, had the lowest scores across almost all other purchasing criteria except packaging (3.34), which was their highest priority among all clusters. Their concern for environmental (3.39) and social (3.43) issues was moderate.

- **Information Sources:** This cluster primarily heard about B Corp Certification through social media (48.97%) and product packaging (41.38%). They also showed higher engagement with online news/media (28.28%), friends/family (26.21%), and brand newsletters/emails (26.21%).

Cluster 4 (n=423)

- **Demographics:** This was the largest cluster, with an average age of 45.89 years, falling between the other groups. It was predominantly male (50.8%). Their average household income was \$72,960.54.

- **Psychographics (NEP):** Cluster 4 had the lowest NEP score (3.19) relative to the other clusters, indicating the lowest environmental concern.

- **B Corp Knowledge & Identification:** This cluster reported very low knowledge of the certification (100% disagreed or strongly disagreed with familiarity) and low logo recognition (12.29%). Despite their low stated knowledge, similar to Cluster 2, they were inversely the second highest in their ability to correctly identify certified companies (49.53%).

- **Purchasing Behaviors & Information Seeking:** This cluster was price-sensitive (4.02) and strongly valued quality (4.2) and durability (3.94). However, they demonstrated low concern for packaging (2.44), environmental issues (2.93), and social purchasing (2.68). They showed relatively lower propensity for researching products before purchase (2.35).

- **Information Sources:** Product packaging (5.91%) and social media (3.31%) were their most cited, but overall very low, sources of information about B Corp.

In summary, the results highlight a general lack of explicit awareness regarding B Corp Certification among U.S. consumers, while simultaneously revealing distinct consumer segments with varied levels of environmental concern, knowledge, and purchasing priorities. The

inverse relationship between reported familiarity and accurate identification of certified companies presents a curious finding warranting further investigation.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this research offer critical insights into the current state of consumer awareness and engagement with Benefit Corporation Certification in the United States, providing a robust foundation for developing more effective promotional strategies. The overarching low reported familiarity with the certification's meaning and recognition of its logo, as confirmed by H1 and H2, presents a significant challenge for any company or marketer operating in this space. This aligns with prior research consistently identifying low recognition of B Corp certification among various consumer groups and even business students [15, 49, 51]. The stark contrast with the high familiarity of food-related certifications like USDA Organic and Fair Trade Certified underscores a fundamental difference in market penetration and consumer understanding.

### **4.1. Strategic Association with Quality and Durability**

The high familiarity of food certifications like USDA Organic has been leveraged by associating their value proposition with health orientation and socially responsible consumption behaviors [5]. Drawing a parallel, a key recommendation emerging from this research is to strategically link B Corp Certification with product quality and durability. This recommendation is profoundly supported by the data: irrespective of their diverse demographics, psychographics, and purchasing metrics, every identified consumer cluster consistently prioritized quality and durability as top purchasing criteria. This universal appeal presents a compelling opportunity for a general marketing strategy. By emphasizing that B Corp Certified products are inherently of higher quality and designed for greater durability, marketers can tap into a widely held consumer value, potentially overcoming initial skepticism or lack of awareness about the certification's specific social and environmental merits. The message could articulate how a company's commitment to responsible practices (inherent in B Corp certification) translates into superior product craftsmanship and longevity, thus providing tangible benefits to the consumer. This approach could be particularly effective for cost-sensitive segments like Cluster 1 and Cluster 2, for whom durability could be framed as a long-term cost-saving measure through reduced replacement frequency, thereby aligning with their price considerations.

### **4.2. Decoding the Familiarity-Identification Paradox**

One of the most intriguing findings of this study is the consistent inverse relationship between consumers' reported familiarity with B Corp Certification and their actual ability to identify certified companies. That is, higher self-reported familiarity often correlated with lower accuracy in identifying actual B Corps, and vice

versa. Several potential explanations for this phenomenon warrant careful consideration:

- Overall Low Recognition Baseline: The generally low baseline familiarity and recognition of the certification might skew perceptions. In an environment where overall awareness is minimal, even slight increases in self-reported familiarity might not translate into concrete, actionable knowledge, or the ability to recall specific brands.

- Brand Recognition vs. Certification Recognition: It is possible that consumers recognize the highly visible brands (e.g., Patagonia, Ben & Jerry's) selected for the identification task due to their general market presence and existing reputation for social responsibility, rather than explicitly knowing them as B Corps. This suggests that the brands' individual marketing efforts and perceived ethical stances might be stronger drivers of association than the formal certification itself. The brands were chosen from a list of highly recognized companies [7], which supports this possibility.

- The Dunning-Kruger Effect: This well-documented cognitive bias posits that individuals with low ability or knowledge in a given area tend to overestimate their competence, while those with high ability might underestimate it [25]. Cluster 3, with its highest self-reported familiarity and lowest identification ability, strongly exemplifies this effect. These consumers may believe they understand B Corp Certification, leading to overconfidence that doesn't align with their actual recall of certified brands. Conversely, Cluster 2, with the lowest self-reported familiarity but the highest identification ability, might be more cautious in their self-assessment, or their actual exposure to B Corps (perhaps through unconscious processing of marketing signals) might be higher than their conscious recollection. Further in-depth qualitative and quantitative studies are recommended to fully understand if and how the Dunning-Kruger effect manifests within the context of sustainability certifications.

Understanding this paradox is critical because it indicates that simply increasing "familiarity" through broad, superficial awareness campaigns might not be sufficient. Promotional efforts must translate familiarity into actionable knowledge and accurate brand association.

#### 4.3. Targeted Promotional Strategies for Viable Segments

Based on their higher NEP scores (environmental concern) and stated importance of social and environmental concerns in purchasing, Clusters 1, 2, and 3 appear to be the most viable targets for focused promotional efforts. Cluster 4, despite being the largest, exhibits the lowest NEP and familiarity scores, minimal concern for environmental and social aspects in purchasing, and the highest price sensitivity. Resources for promotion might be less effectively utilized

attempting to convert this segment. While specific promotional approaches will vary depending on the unique offerings of a given product or service, the following insights are provided as strategic considerations:

##### 4.3.1. Cluster 1: The Value-Conscious Explorer

- Characteristics: This segment is moderately environmentally conscious, moderately familiar with B Corp, and actively researches products. They are price-sensitive but highly value quality and durability, and are concerned with environmental and social responsibility. They are influenced by consumer reviews and previous product experience.

- Strategic Approach:

- Emphasize Value through Durability: Frame durability as a direct path to cost savings (fewer replacements over time) and reduced environmental impact (less waste). This aligns with their price sensitivity and environmental concerns. Messaging could highlight the longevity and robustness of B Corp certified products.

- Facilitate Direct Experience: Since they rely heavily on consumer reviews and prior experience, companies should prioritize initiatives that get products into their hands. This could involve demos, rental programs, or targeted promotional offers/discounts (e.g., loyalty programs, coupons). Enabling firsthand experience of the product's quality and durability is paramount.

- Educate via Digital and Influencer Channels: Their high propensity to research and engagement with social media and packaging makes these ideal channels for education. Informative product packaging that clearly explains B Corp benefits, influencer demonstrations (showing product durability and ethical sourcing), and targeted digital advertisements (e.g., via social media platforms) can deepen their understanding and appreciation of the certification. Storytelling about the B Corp's commitment on websites can also be effective.

##### 4.3.2. Cluster 2: The Committed but Uninformed Advocate

- Characteristics: This cluster is the oldest, highly employed, and possesses the strongest environmental concern (highest NEP). They are highly price-sensitive and strongly prioritize quality, durability, environmental, and social concerns. Crucially, they have the lowest explicit knowledge of B Corp but the highest ability to correctly identify certified companies. They heavily rely on consumer reviews and previous experience.

- Strategic Approach:

- Direct and Explicit Education on Certification: This segment needs direct education about B Corp Certification itself, as they are less likely to actively research companies. The onus is on the company and B Lab to increase their extremely low formal recognition (5.76%). Simplified, clear explanations of what B Corp means and its rigorous standards are essential.

- Link Quality/Durability to Purpose: Reinforce the connection between the high quality and durability they value and the underlying B Corp commitment. Explain how responsible production, a hallmark of B Corps, leads to superior products that last longer, ultimately saving them money and reducing their environmental footprint.
- Leverage Trusted Sources: Given their reliance on consumer reviews and previous experience, testimonials and case studies highlighting positive experiences with B Corps, especially from peers or trusted community figures, would be impactful. Collaborative partnerships with established environmental advocacy groups or trusted community organizations could also facilitate educational outreach.
- Focus on Tangible Impact: While highly concerned with environmental and social responsibility, their low formal knowledge means messaging should articulate how B Corp certification addresses these concerns in a concrete, verifiable manner, perhaps through concise impact summaries.

### 4.3.3. Cluster 3: The Overconfident but Engaged Innovator

● Characteristics: This is the youngest cluster, highly employed, with moderate environmental concern. They have the highest stated familiarity and logo recognition for B Corp, but paradoxically the lowest ability to correctly identify certified companies. They exhibit the lowest price sensitivity and are highly inclined to research products prior to purchase. Their primary information sources are social media and packaging.

#### ● Strategic Approach:

- Address Overconfidence with Deeper Engagement: Their perceived knowledge suggests they are open to more complex information. Rather than basic awareness, focus on deepening their understanding of the nuances and rigor of B Corp certification. This can involve more detailed storytelling about specific impact areas, the verification process, and the broader B Corp movement. This can help correct their miscalibration of knowledge [25].
- Sophisticated Pricing Models: Given their low price sensitivity, companies could explore complicated pricing structures such as added services, subscriptions, tiered pricing, or bundles that incorporate ethical value [38]. This can reinforce the premium nature and comprehensive value of B Corp offerings.
- Leverage Digital Content and Storytelling: Their high research propensity and reliance on social media make digital platforms paramount. Engaging storytelling on company websites, through long-form articles, videos, and interactive content, can elaborate on the B Corp journey and its specific impact. Online influencer marketing with credible voices who can delve into the details of B Corp principles would resonate strongly.

- Informative and Visually Appealing Packaging: Since packaging is a key information source, it should be highly informative, visually appealing, and clearly communicate the B Corp message, potentially using QR codes to link to richer online content about the certification.

### 4.4. Broader Implications and Future Directions

The overall findings underscore that the Benefit Corporation movement, while growing in numbers, still faces significant hurdles in establishing widespread, accurate consumer recognition and understanding. The market is saturated with various sustainability labels, leading to a degree of "certification fatigue" and contributing to the challenge of differentiation [8]. Therefore, continued efforts by B Lab and certified companies must focus on building a strong, distinct brand identity for the B Corp certification.

The consistent emphasis on quality and durability as top purchasing priorities across consumer segments presents a powerful, universally appealing message that transcends specific environmental or social concerns. This suggests a shift from simply promoting "goodness" to linking "goodness" with tangible product attributes that consumers inherently value.

The familiarity-identification paradox demands further academic inquiry. Longitudinal studies could explore how consistent exposure to B Corp messaging and actual purchasing experiences influence both self-reported knowledge and accurate identification over time. Cross-cultural comparisons would also be valuable to understand how this phenomenon varies in different market contexts, given that B Corps operate globally.

Moreover, future research should assess the actual effectiveness of the proposed targeted marketing strategies. Pilot programs testing specific campaigns against the identified clusters would provide invaluable empirical evidence. Investigating the role of different communication channels and message frames in bridging the attitude-behavior gap for B Corp certified products would also be beneficial. Finally, while this study focused on consumer segmentation, future research could explore the nuances of business segmentation for B Corp adoption, identifying triggers and barriers for different types of enterprises beyond those broadly discussed here (e.g., large corporations vs. small startups, different industry sectors).

## CONCLUSION

This research provides a comprehensive analysis of consumer perceptions and effective promotional strategies for Benefit Corporation Certification in the United States. The findings reveal a widespread low familiarity and recognition of B Corp among consumers, contrasting sharply with the established presence of food-related certifications. Crucially, the study identifies that associating B Corp Certification with universally valued

attributes like quality and durability represents a robust general marketing strategy capable of resonating across diverse consumer segments.

Through rigorous cluster analysis, four distinct consumer segments were identified, each characterized by unique demographic profiles, psychographic orientations (environmental attitudes), levels of B Corp knowledge, and purchasing priorities. A particularly salient finding was the unexpected inverse relationship between self-reported familiarity with B Corp Certification and the actual ability to accurately identify certified companies. This paradox highlights the need for promotional efforts to move beyond mere awareness to cultivate deeper, more actionable understanding and concrete brand associations.

Based on the detailed segmentation, targeted promotional strategies were recommended for the three most viable consumer clusters:

- Cluster 1 (Value-Conscious Explorers): Emphasize cost savings through durability, facilitate direct product experience, and educate via digital channels (social media, informative packaging, influencer marketing).

- Cluster 2 (Committed but Uninformed Advocates): Focus on explicit, simplified education about the certification, reinforcing the link between B Corp and the quality/durability they seek, and leveraging trusted sources like consumer reviews.

- Cluster 3 (Overconfident but Engaged Innovators): Engage them with deeper narratives about the rigor and specific impacts of B Corp, consider sophisticated pricing models, and fully utilize digital storytelling and visually rich content on social media and packaging.

While geographic location did not significantly differentiate these clusters, the profound differences in demographic and psychographic profiles underscore the necessity of a tailored social marketing approach. The long-term success and broader societal impact of the B Corp movement depend not just on increasing the number of certified companies but equally on enhancing public understanding and recognition of this transformative certification. By implementing these segmented and strategic promotional efforts, stakeholders can collectively advance the vision of businesses as forces for positive change, thereby contributing to a more sustainable, transparent, and equitable future for all.

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