

# What sustainability attributes drive consumer behaviour?

A systematic review of the research on sustainable consumption

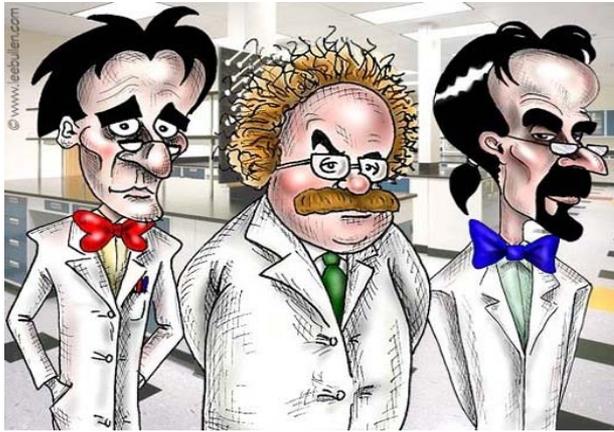
Tom Ewart, Managing Director  
Research Network for Business Sustainability  
[www.SustainabilityResearch.org](http://www.SustainabilityResearch.org)

Based on the research of:

Drs. June Cotte and Remi Trudel, Ivey Business School



# The RNBS bridges the gap between industry and academia



**Academics** produce valid, reliable and objective research

**Practitioners** need relevant and actionable knowledge



# Key conclusions from the body of research

- Do not compromise product functionality
- Fear punishment, but don't expect a reward
- Drivers: efficacy, context, etc... attributes?
- No more surveys



# Will consumers purchase based on social attributes?



44% of Germans are LOHAS consumers (Ipsos 2009)

84% of French are willing to pay 10% premium (Globescan 2007)

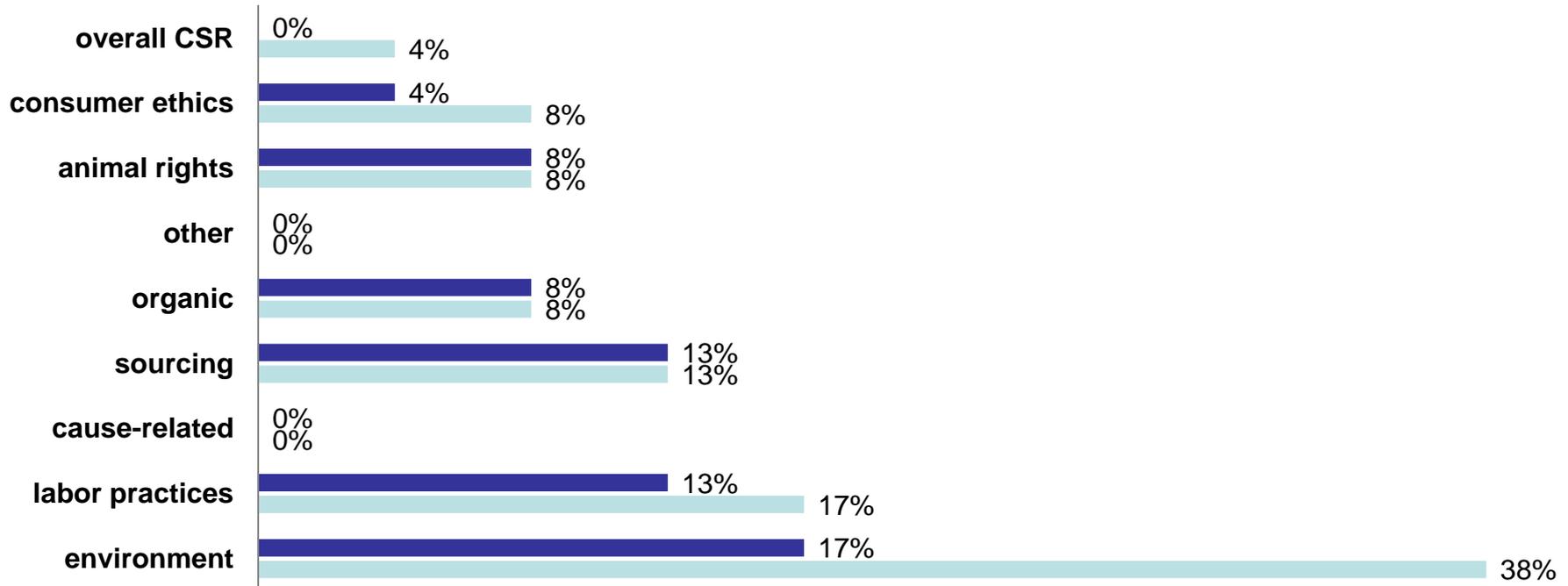
**... but little evidence on behaviours!**



# Attributes: Environment appears to be a driver

## Consumer Acceptance CSR Dimensions: Behavior-Based Studies

- Percentage of studies showing willingness to pay premium
- Percentage of studies showing willingness to change behavior



# Trade-offs: It appears that consumers will not trade off product functionality

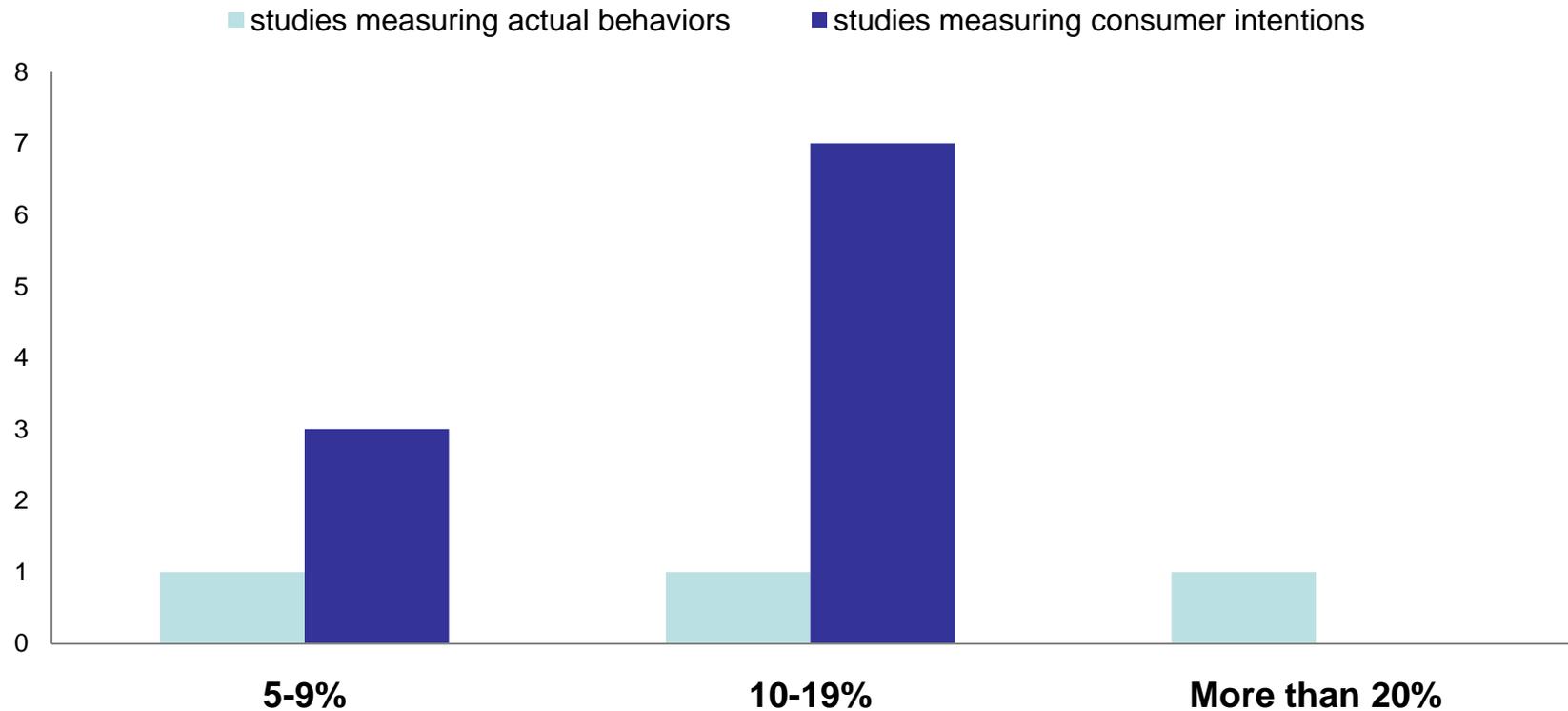
“[Some consumers] are willing to pay a premium for social attributes but will not sacrifice product functionality.”

(Auger *et al.* 2006; consistent with Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004)



# Reward: Few studies find consumers pay premiums

**Studies Showing  
Willingness to Pay as Percentage Increase**

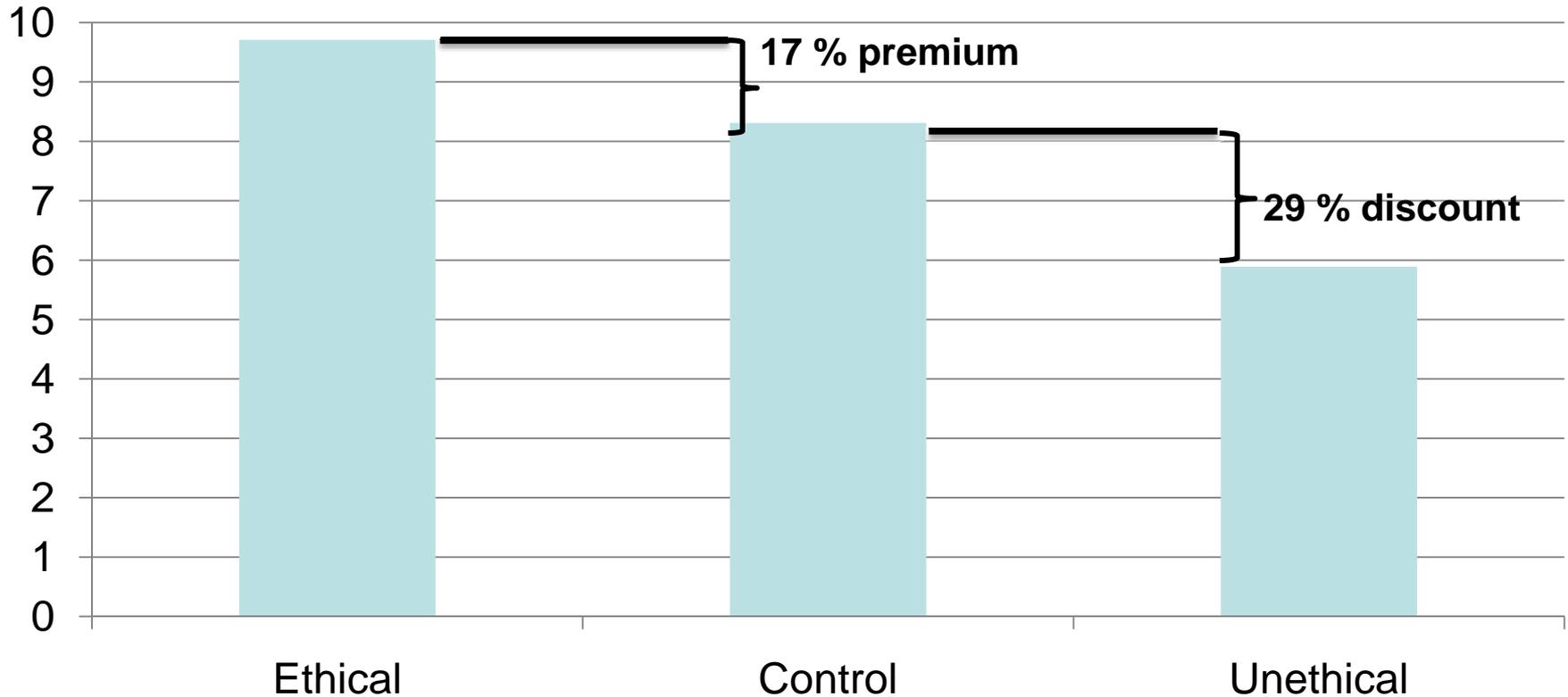


Note: based on a small set of the total studies that included specific increases (13/91).



# Punishment: There may be a greater discount for 'unsustainability'

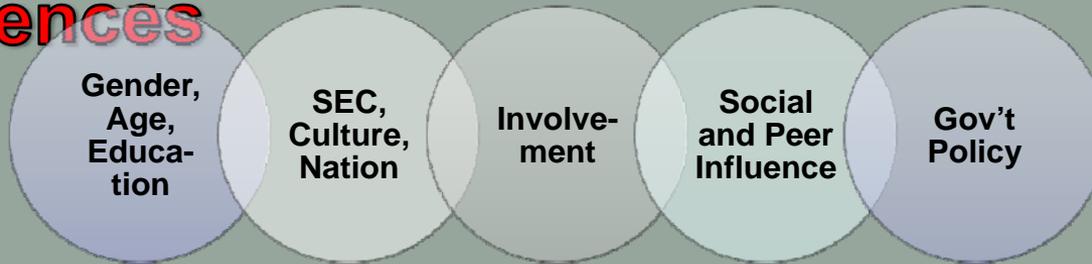
## Willingness to Pay



Source: Trudel and Cotte, 2009, SMR



# Influences



Firm CSR Actions

Consumer Attitudes towards CSR Actions

Consumer Behavioral Intentions

Willingness to Change Behavior

Willingness to Pay a Premium

Willingness to Punish

### Impediments:

- Contradictory firm actions
- Prior negative consumer knowledge or attitude re: firm

### Enhancements:

- Consumer knowledge of action
- Consumer understanding
- Prior positive consumer attitude re: firm
- Company / issue fit

### Impediments:

- Negative consumer attributions (why? greenwashing)
- Effect on perceived quality
- Negative perceptions of consumer efficacy
- Consumer sacrifice

### Enhancements:

- Positive perceptions of consumer efficacy
- Acceptance of firm and consumer responsibility

### Impediments:

- Competitive actions
- Confusion at POP
- Habit
- Misleading packaging
- Required trade-offs

### Enhancements:

- Clear benefit
- Prior small commitment
- Consistency/fit with brand
- Salience of issue
- Simplified claims/labels
- In-store education

# Enhancements and Impediments

# Stay informed. Join the Network

[www.SustainabilityResearch.org](http://www.SustainabilityResearch.org)

[tom@SustainabilityResearch.org](mailto:tom@SustainabilityResearch.org)

RESEARCH NETWORK *for*  
BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

- ▶ PEOPLE
- ▶ KNOWLEDGE
- ▶ OPPORTUNITIES
- ▶ DIALOGUE
- ▶ NEWS & EVENTS
- ▶ ABOUT THE NETWORK

EDIT YOUR PROFILE SEARCH  > GO

LATEST NEWS

[Sign up](#) for the newsletter. [Join](#) the Network (includes newsletter).

Free [interdisciplinary student conference](#) at Carleton University

The March 2009 [newsletter](#) is out.

[Member in the news](#): Peggy Cunningham

Students making an [Impact](#) at inaugural sustainability conference.

Read the [summary reports](#) from the recent forums on conscious consumerism and climate adaptation.

Network Knowledge Project [findings presented](#) at two upcoming Conference Board events. Registration discount available.

Network Executive Director wins '[business school Oscar](#)'

**Best Practices on Engaging the Community**: A PPT presentation and

People | Knowledge | Opportunities | Dialogue | News & Events | About the Network  
Contact | Home

All information on this site is protected by Copyright © 1999-2007,  
Research Network for Business Sustainability

Database of sustainable consumption research  
coming this fall...

