



International Centre for
Trade Transparency
& Monitoring

White Paper

Supply Chain Transparency and Consumer
Expectations: Meeting the Demand for Ethical Products

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For permissions requests or further inquiries, please contact:

The International Center for Trade Transparency Limited
71-75, Shelton Street
Covent Garden, London, WC2H9JQ
United Kingdom
Phone: +44 20 4586 1690
Email: [info\[at\]icctm.org](mailto:info@icctm.org)
Website: <https://www.icctm.org>

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction..... | 4 |
| The Concept of Supply Chain Transparency | 7 |
| Consumer Expectations for Ethical Products | 10 |
| Impact of Supply Chain Transparency on Consumer Expectations..... | 13 |
| Meeting the Demand for Ethical Products | 16 |
| Case Studies | 19 |
| Conclusion | 22 |
| Bibliography | 24 |

Introduction

As consumers become more conscious of ethical and sustainable practices, supply chain transparency has become crucial for companies to maintain their reputation and meet consumers' expectations. Supply chain transparency refers to the ability of companies to trace and disclose information regarding the origins, production, and distribution of their products. Consumers want to know if the products they purchase are sourced ethically, if the laborers involved are paid fairly, if the production process is environmentally friendly, and if the product has been transported ethically. This demand for transparency has led to companies being held accountable for their actions and the impact they have on society and the environment. Thus, it is important for businesses to maintain supply chain transparency, not only for ethical reasons but also for the sake of their reputation and survival in an increasingly conscious market.

Definition of Supply Chain Transparency

The concept of supply chain transparency refers to the ability to trace the flow of goods and services along every stage of the supply chain, from the sourcing of raw materials to the final point of sale.

Transparency allows stakeholders to observe and understand the decisions, behaviors, and practices of each player in the supply chain, enabling them to assess the risks and opportunities associated with these activities. It involves sharing information and data about the production processes, the social and environmental impacts of the supply chain, and the working conditions of the people involved in the process. Transparency also includes the disclosure of information regarding the origin and quality of the product, such as its ingredients, composition, and properties, as well as its financial and legal status.

Supply chain transparency is a key element in promoting corporate accountability, ethical behavior, and sustainability, as it supports the identification and resolution of problems, including issues related to human rights, labor practices, and environmental impacts.

Importance of Ethical Products to Consumers

In today's society, consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of the impact their purchases have on the environment, communities, and individuals involved in the production process. For many consumers, purchasing ethical products is a way to make a positive impact on the world by supporting companies that align with their values. Ethical products are those that are produced in a morally sound manner, which oftentimes includes considerations such as fair labor practices, sustainable sourcing, and the use of non-toxic and eco-friendly materials. Consumers who prioritize ethical products have high expectations for transparency from companies regarding their supply chains, including details about the origin of materials and any potential negative impacts associated with their production. These consumers are willing to pay a premium for ethical products because they believe in supporting companies that prioritize ethical practices, and they understand that the true cost of a product goes beyond its price tag.

Significance of Supply Chain Transparency in meeting Consumer Expectations

One of the key benefits of implementing supply chain transparency is the ability to meet consumer expectations for ethical products. In today's marketplace, consumers are becoming more aware of the environmental and ethical impact of their purchases. As a result, they are increasingly looking for products that are produced in a sustainable and socially responsible way. By providing transparency about the various stages of the supply chain, companies can show their commitment to ethical practices. Such transparency also helps to build trust with consumers, who can feel confident that the products they are purchasing are not only of good quality but were also produced in a responsible manner. Ultimately, the adoption of supply chain transparency can lead to increased customer loyalty and goodwill, which benefits the company in the long run.

As transparency in supply chains becomes an important issue for consumers, companies are starting to realize the benefits of disclosing information about their sourcing and production practices. In addition to meeting consumer expectations, supply chain

transparency can also improve a company's reputation and increase customer loyalty. However, there are challenges in implementing supply chain transparency, particularly for companies with complex global supply chains. Companies need to not only disclose information about their own practices but also collect and verify information from their suppliers. This requires investing in technology and personnel, as well as establishing clear standards and expectations for suppliers. Despite the challenges, companies that prioritize supply chain transparency can differentiate themselves in the market and attract consumers who value ethical practices and sustainable products.

The Concept of Supply Chain Transparency

Businesses can increase their supply chain transparency through various means, such as audits and inspections, certification programs, and social media engagement. Audits and inspections ensure that all suppliers and manufacturers are adhering to the ethical standards set by the company. Certification programs provide an external verification of the company's ethical practices and values. Social media engagement allows consumers to interact with the company and voice their concerns and opinions regarding the supply chain. By being transparent and open about their supply chain practices, companies can create a sense of trust and loyalty with their consumers and strengthen their brand reputation. Moreover, supply chain transparency can lead to a more sustainable and ethical business model, as it allows for continuous improvement and accountability for all parties involved. Thus, the importance of the concept of supply chain transparency cannot be overstated, as it is a crucial aspect of meeting the demand for ethical products.

Supply chain transparency refers to the visibility and traceability of the various stages involved in the production and distribution of goods and services. It involves disclosing detailed information about suppliers, processes, and practices to all stakeholders, including customers, regulators, and investors. This information can include the origin of raw materials used, manufacturing practices, environmental impact, and working conditions of employees throughout the supply chain. Supply chain transparency facilitates accountability, empowers consumers to make informed decisions about the products they buy, and encourages companies to operate ethically and sustainably. Lack of transparency can lead to unethical practices, such as forced labor, environmental degradation, and poor working conditions. To meet evolving consumer expectations for ethical products, companies must prioritize transparency and establish robust systems to monitor and manage their supply chain operations.

Examples of Supply Chain Transparency Initiatives

Several initiatives have been introduced over the past few years to promote supply chain transparency. In 2013, the Fair Factories Clearinghouse (FFC) was established to provide a central platform for global brands and suppliers to share information about labor conditions in factories. In the same year, the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety was signed by over 200 global brands to ensure the safety of workers in Bangladesh's garment factories. In 2015, the Open Apparel Registry (OAR) was launched, a global database where brands can map their supply chains and track the factories they source from. More recently, blockchain technology has been introduced to ensure transparency and traceability of every step in the supply chain. Moreover, there have been many third-party certifications such as Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, and Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), which organizations can use to demonstrate their ethical and sustainable practices throughout the supply chain.

Importance of Supply Chain Transparency for Businesses

Supply chain transparency has become critical for businesses, as it enables them to comply with laws, regulations, and ethical norms. In today's highly competitive market, consumers are increasingly aware of the impact of their choices on the environment, society, and human rights. Thus, they demand more information about the products they buy, including their origin, components, production methods, and disposal. Supply chain transparency can help businesses build trust and credibility among their customers, as it demonstrates their commitment to sustainability and responsibility. Moreover, it can enhance their reputation and brand value, by differentiating them from their competitors. Additionally, supply chain transparency can reduce risks associated with regulatory compliance, ethical scandals, and supply disruptions. Businesses that adopt transparent supply chain practices can also benefit from improved operational efficiencies, cost savings, and innovation. Therefore, supply chain transparency is not only a matter of ethical responsibility but also a strategic imperative for businesses that want to stay competitive and relevant.

As supply chain transparency becomes an increasingly important issue for consumers, companies must recognize the value of meeting the demand for ethical products. This requires a commitment to sustainability and social responsibility practices throughout the supply chain, from sourcing materials to manufacturing and distribution. It's not enough to simply make ethical claims about products; companies must provide evidence of their sustainability efforts through public reporting and independent audits.

Consumers are willing to pay a premium for ethical products, but they need to trust that companies are following through on their commitments. By promoting supply chain transparency and implementing sustainable practices, companies can build trust with consumers, differentiate themselves in the market, and ultimately contribute to a more sustainable future.

Consumer Expectations for Ethical Products

Consumer expectations for ethical products continue to rise as more information becomes available about the environmental and social impacts of production practices. A growing number of consumers are looking beyond price and quality to consider the ethical implications of the products they purchase. They are seeking out products that are manufactured in a socially and environmentally responsible way and are willing to pay a premium for them. This shift in consumer behavior is creating a new market for ethical products, which businesses that prioritize supply chain transparency can capitalize on. However, meeting these consumer expectations requires companies to engage in ethical business practices, including sustainable sourcing, fair labor practices, and transparent supply chain management. It also requires a commitment to communicating these practices to consumers in an honest and transparent way, so they can make informed decisions and feel good about their purchases.

Definition of Ethical Products

One way to understand ethical products is to consider the principles that guide their production, sale, and consumption. Ethical products are those that adhere to high standards of social, environmental, and economic responsibility. They are made with fair labor practices, using sustainable materials, and minimizing harm to people, animals, and the planet. Ethical products also support local communities, contribute to positive social change, and empower consumers to make informed choices. Moreover, ethical products are usually transparent about their supply chains, providing information on where materials come from, who produces them, and how they are processed, transported, and distributed. Ultimately, ethical products are about creating value not only for shareholders but also for society, promoting a more just and sustainable future.

Factors that Influence Consumer Expectations for Ethical Products

Another factor that influences consumer expectations for ethical products is trust, which is closely linked to transparency. When consumers trust companies and believe that their actions align with their stated values and mission, they are more likely to expect ethical behavior and products from them. Therefore, companies that are transparent about their supply chain practices and demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility can establish trust with consumers and meet their expectations for ethical products. On the other hand, companies that lack transparency or have been associated with unethical practices are likely to face distrust and skepticism from consumers, which can negatively impact their brand reputation and sales. To address consumer expectations for ethical products, companies need to prioritize transparency and accountability in their supply chain practices and demonstrate a genuine commitment to social responsibility.

Importance of meeting Consumer Expectations for Ethical Products

Meeting consumer expectations for ethical products is crucial for businesses operating in today's market. Consumers are becoming increasingly concerned about the social and environmental impact of their purchases and are demanding products that align with their values. Companies that fail to meet these expectations risk losing customers to competitors who are able to provide products that are ethically sourced and produced. Furthermore, not meeting ethical standards can also lead to negative publicity and damage to a company's brand reputation. By meeting consumer expectations for ethical products, businesses can not only retain their existing customers but also attract new ones who value sustainability and ethical practices. In addition, investing in ethical supply chain practices can also lead to cost savings, as it reduces the risk of supply chain disruptions and encourages better relationships with suppliers.

To meet the demand for ethical products, supply chain transparency has become a critical component for companies. Consumers are seeking greater clarity on the origins of their purchases and the impact on society and the environment. As a result, companies are

investing in technologies and strategies that track their supply chain from sourcing to delivery. This allows them to identify any unethical practices or risks and make necessary changes to ensure greater transparency. In addition, companies are working closely with suppliers and stakeholders to establish responsible and sustainable practices throughout the supply chain. However, achieving full transparency can be challenging, especially for complex global supply chains. Therefore, companies need to be proactive in communicating their efforts and progress to consumers and stakeholders in an effort to build trust and brand loyalty.

Impact of Supply Chain Transparency on Consumer Expectations

As consumers become increasingly concerned about the ethical and environmental implications of their purchasing decisions, they are demanding more information about products and their origins. Supply chain transparency is one way for companies to meet these expectations and gain a competitive edge. When consumers can see where their products come from, how they are made, and who was involved in their production, they are more likely to trust and support those brands. This transparency also allows consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions, as they can choose products that align with their values and beliefs. As a result, companies that prioritize supply chain transparency are poised to benefit from increased consumer loyalty and market share, while those that fail to meet these expectations may struggle to remain relevant in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

Benefits of Supply Chain Transparency to Consumers

One of the most significant benefits of supply chain transparency that can be enjoyed by consumers is the increased assurance in the ethical and socially responsible sourcing of the products they buy. As they become more conscious of the impact of their consumption on the environment and society, consumers demand more information about the supply chains behind the brands they support. Supply chain transparency enables them to make informed decisions about the products they purchase, ensuring that they align with their values and ethical standards. When consumers have the confidence that companies are accountable for their supply chains, they are more likely to trust and remain loyal to the brands. Moreover, by opening their supply chains, companies can collaborate with consumers, who may have suggestions to improve their policies and practices, thereby creating a stronger bond between the brand and its consumers.

How Supply Chain Transparency Impacts Consumer Purchasing Decisions

The concept of supply chain transparency has gained increasing attention in recent years. More and more consumers are expecting to know the source of the products they purchase, and the processes involved in their production. The lack of transparency in supply chains is often associated with unethical practices, such as exploitation of workers and damage to the environment. When consumers are informed about the supply chain of the products they purchase, they can use this information to make informed purchasing decisions that align with their values. They are more likely to choose products from companies that prioritize ethical and sustainable practices in their supply chain. Moreover, with the rise of social media, consumers are empowered to share their purchasing experiences with others, which can influence the purchasing decisions of their peers. Therefore, supply chain transparency can have a profound impact on consumer purchasing decisions.

The Role of Technological Advancements in Enhancing Supply Chain Transparency

One of the most significant technological advancements contributing to enhanced supply chain transparency is the use of blockchain technology. Blockchains provide permissioned access to a shared, tamper-evident digital ledger that records all transactions in near real time, making it difficult for any party to manipulate the data or hide relevant information. This technology enables stakeholders to monitor the flow of materials, products, and funds across each stage of the supply chain, from raw material sourcing to end-product delivery. It also allows for the tracking of compliance and certifications, thereby promoting ethical sourcing and operations. Another technological innovation is the use of Internet of Things (IoT) devices, sensors, and data analytics to monitor and track supply chain activity. These devices can provide real-time, granular data on factors such as temperature, humidity, and location, which are critical to ensuring product safety, quality, and transparency.

In order to build and maintain a transparent and ethical supply chain, there are a few key steps that companies must take. First, they must identify and prioritize the potential risks

within their supply chain, such as forced labor or environmental damage. Next, they should work to increase transparency and visibility throughout the supply chain, sharing information with suppliers, partners, and consumers about their practices and policies. This includes using technologies like blockchain to track products and verify their ethical credentials. Additionally, companies must work to establish clear guidelines and expectations for suppliers, including codes of conduct and audits to ensure compliance. Finally, ongoing monitoring and evaluation are key to identifying and correcting any issues that arise, and to continuously improving the transparency and ethical standards of the supply chain. Ultimately, building a transparent and ethical supply chain is a complex but necessary process for meeting the demands of modern consumers and ensuring a sustainable future for all.

Meeting the Demand for Ethical Products

One way for businesses to meet the growing demand for ethical products is to incorporate sustainability into their supply chains. This involves implementing practices that minimize negative impacts on the environment and ensure fair and safe labor practices. For example, companies can source raw materials from suppliers who adhere to sustainable agriculture practices, use renewable energy sources, and reduce waste by implementing recycling programs. Additionally, companies can establish stringent labor standards for their suppliers, such as providing fair wages, safe working conditions, and prohibiting child labor. By adopting these practices, companies can meet the expectations of increasingly socially conscious consumers and differentiate themselves in the marketplace. Furthermore, implementing sustainable supply chains can also have long-term benefits for businesses, such as cost savings and improved brand reputation.

The Challenges of Meeting the Demand for Ethical Products

One challenge in meeting the demand for ethical products is the issue of supply chain transparency. Consumers are increasingly concerned about the social, environmental, and labor conditions under which products are manufactured, and many are demanding information about the entire supply chain of the products they purchase. However, companies often struggle to obtain and communicate this information effectively, as supply chains can be complex and involve multiple intermediaries. Additionally, the costs associated with improving supply chain transparency and ensuring ethical practices can be significant, which may deter some companies from investing in these efforts. Finally, there may be competing demands between ethical production and other business priorities, such as cost reduction and profit maximization. By addressing these challenges, companies can better meet the demand for ethical products while also improving their reputation and increasing consumer trust.

Strategies for Businesses to Meet the Demand for Ethical Products

Businesses facing the challenge of meeting the demand for ethical products can adopt several strategies to address the issue. Understanding consumer preferences and values is the first step. This can be achieved through market research and engaging with the customer base. Companies can then identify the values and issues that are most important to their consumers and develop products that meet those needs. Other measures that businesses can take include investing in sustainable and ethical supply chains, building partnerships with socially responsible suppliers, engaging in fair-trade practices, and promoting ethical consumption through effective marketing campaigns. To enhance transparency, companies may also consider providing customers with detailed information about the sourcing and production processes of their products. Embracing these strategies not only helps businesses meet consumer demand for ethical products but also earn their trust and loyalty.

Significance of Collaboration and Partnerships in Achieving Supply Chain Transparency

Organizations need to work collaboratively with suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders to create an open and transparent supply chain that can meet the demand for ethical products. Partnerships can help in sharing the cost of monitoring, enhancing transparency, and facilitating communication between different stakeholders. Through partnerships, organizations can also access the knowledge, skills, and resources that they need to achieve greater transparency. Collaboration with suppliers helps in improving supplier engagement, implementing sustainability practices, and building trust. Collaboration between organizations and certification bodies can lead to the creation of credible certification standards for social and environmental responsibility. Partnerships between organizations and NGOs can also improve the sustainability of a supply chain, create innovative solutions, and encourage industry-wide collaboration. Ultimately, collaboration and partnerships create a conducive environment for achieving greater supply chain transparency.

The concept of supply chain transparency has grown in importance in recent years due to increasing consumer demand for ethical and sustainable products. Companies must now ensure that their supply chains are transparent, with suppliers and their practices clearly outlined, to meet customer expectations. Consumers want to know where their products come from and the ethical standards that were maintained throughout the supply chain. Transparency throughout the supply chain not only benefits consumers, but it also assists companies to identify and address any issues that could impact their reputation. Supply chain transparency can be achieved through the use of traceability technologies, such as barcodes, blockchain, and radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags. As consumers continue to prioritize ethical consumption, businesses must ensure that they maintain clear and transparent supply chains to meet consumer expectations and remain competitive in the market.

Case Studies

Case studies are an essential tool in examining how a company's supply chain impacts their ability to meet consumer expectations for ethical products. These studies allow for a detailed examination of the challenges and successes experienced by companies in implementing supply chain transparency. For example, the case study of Patagonia demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive approach to supply chain transparency that includes not only tracking materials and labor but also addressing other important sustainability issues. The case of Nestle underscores the need for supply chain transparency both within the company and between the company and its suppliers. By examining these cases and others, we can learn from companies' experiences in addressing complex ethical supply chain issues and develop strategies for achieving greater transparency and consumer trust.

Examples of Businesses that have Successfully Implemented Supply Chain Transparency Initiatives

Several prominent businesses have taken bold steps to implement transparency initiatives in their supply chains, establishing themselves as leaders in the ethical manufacturing space. For instance, Patagonia, an outdoor clothing, and gear company, is committed to providing fair labor standards and transparency in its supply chain. The company hosts transparent discussions about labor ethics and sustainability on its website. Similarly, Tesla, the electric vehicle and clean energy company, has implemented transparency efforts in its cobalt supply chain, one of the most significant components in its car batteries. Tesla is only sourcing its cobalt from well-established and respected members of the industry, and the company requires full traceability from the source mine to the battery. By demonstrating their commitment to supply chain transparency, businesses like Patagonia and Tesla have set new industry standards that serve as a case for other companies to follow.

Analysis of their Impact on Meeting Consumer Expectations for Ethical Products

The call for transparency in the supply chain is a significant step towards meeting consumer expectations for ethical products. Through this shift, consumers can now fully assess the production processes behind the products they purchase, thus empowering them to make informed choices. In turn, businesses can increase their brand reputation, meet their corporate social responsibility objectives, and gain a competitive edge in the market. Moreover, regulatory bodies and industry organizations can work together to implement consumer-friendly laws and establish standard guidelines for supply chain transparency which can help in identifying gaps in compliance, addressing them promptly, and thus promoting a culture of corporate responsibility. With the growth of technology and the availability of information, the transparency in the supply chain is now a vital aspect of ethical business practices, vital for businesses that aim to meet consumer expectations for ethical products and succeed in the marketplace.

Lessons Learned from Successful Case Studies

Successful case studies provide valuable insight into effective strategies for achieving supply chain transparency and meeting consumer expectations for ethical products. Transparency is key, as it allows consumers to make informed purchasing decisions and fosters trust in the supply chain. Successful companies have implemented a variety of approaches, including supplier audits, third-party certifications, and online supply chain mapping tools. Collaborating with suppliers and fostering a culture of ethical responsibility throughout the supply chain is also critical. Additionally, companies should prioritize transparency not only in their supply chain operations, but also in their communication with consumers. Successful companies have demonstrated the importance of proactively communicating about their ethical practices and the measures they take to ensure transparency in their supply chains. Overall, successful case studies highlight the importance of transparency, collaboration, and proactive communication in achieving supply chain transparency and meeting consumer expectations.

In today's market, consumers are increasingly demanding transparency in the supply chain of the products they purchase. This is often rooted in concerns about sustainability and ethical sourcing, as customers seek assurance that their purchases do not come at the expense of the environment or human rights. Companies must now contend with both legal and consumer pressure to disclose their supply chain practices and demonstrate a commitment to ethical behavior. Consumer expectations for transparency extend beyond simply knowing the origin of the products they buy. Buyers now expect to see a comprehensive understanding of the entire production process, including labor practices, safety standards, and environmental impact. With the rise of social media and online information sharing, companies that fail to meet these expectations risk reputational damage that can have a long-lasting impact on their bottom line. As such, supply chain transparency has become a critical aspect of maintaining consumer loyalty and ensuring long-term success in a rapidly changing marketplace.

Conclusion

The demand for ethical and sustainable products has never been more critical than it is today, and it is essential that companies recognize this change and work towards meeting the needs of consumers. Moreover, transparency should be at the forefront of all supply chain operations, as consumers are increasingly requiring full disclosure of where products are sourced, made, and transported. Companies that fail to be transparent risk losing consumer trust, which can have significant financial and reputational effects on their business. In addition to meeting consumer expectations, supply chain transparency also brings about a host of benefits, including improved sustainability, ethical labor practices, and reduced risks of environmental damage. As such, businesses need to prioritize transparency and sustainability, both for the good of consumers and for the long-term health of the industry.

Recap of Key Points

In summary, this White Paper has explored the importance of supply chain transparency in meeting consumer expectations for ethical products. First, we discussed the negative consequences of unethical supply chains, which include human rights violations, environmental damage, and reputational damage. We then traced the history of supply chain transparency initiatives, beginning with sweatshop scandals in the 1990s and culminating in the current era of multi-stakeholder collaboration and global standards. Throughout, we emphasized the need for companies to take a proactive approach to transparency, engaging with suppliers, consumers, and civil society groups to improve performance and address shortcomings. Lastly, we examined the potential benefits of transparency, including enhanced trust and reputation, increased efficiency, and reduced risk. Overall, we conclude that transparency is a critical component of responsible business practice in the 21st century.

Recommendations for Businesses to Meet Consumer Expectations for Ethical Products

In order to meet consumer expectations for ethical products, businesses should take a number of steps. Firstly, they need to communicate more openly with their customers about the origin and production process of their products. They should also explore ways to improve transparency, such as by enabling consumers to track the source of key materials and ingredients in their products. Secondly, businesses should develop new standards for supply chain evaluation, which can be used to certify the ethical standards of different producers and suppliers. A related step is to invest in the development of new technologies, which can help improve supply chain transparency and traceability. Finally, businesses should focus on engaging consumers directly, by establishing ethical product marketing campaigns and encouraging social activism around key issues. By taking these steps, businesses can begin to meet growing consumer demand for ethical products and help to drive wider social change towards a more sustainable future.

Future Prospects of Supply Chain Transparency and Consumer Expectations

With the increasing popularity of ethical consumption and conscious consumerism, more and more consumers are becoming interested in the sources of their purchases. This trend is becoming more evident in virtually all sectors of the economy, and supply chain transparency is becoming a requisite and not an option. From mandatory disclosures and audits of corporate supply chains to blockchain technology, it is apparent that companies are making efforts to make their supply chain transparent. Furthermore, consumers are also becoming increasingly interested and invested in sustainable and ethical practices and are willing to pay more for products that reflect their values. The future is looking bright, and with a growing interest in ethical and sustainable practices, transparency in supply chains will continue to be a vital part of meeting consumer expectations and creating a more sustainable and compassionate world.

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