



DARAKSHAN SERAJ

DO CONSUMERS REALLY CARE? INVESTIGATING THE ROLE
OF B CORP CERTIFICATION IN SHAPING BRAND PERCEPTION
FOR SMALL TEA BRANDS.

CRANFIELD SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
MSc in Management

MSc Thesis
Academic Year: 2024 - 2025

Supervisor: Namita Shete
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the degree of MSc in Management

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Academic integrity declaration

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Abstract

This thesis explores how B Corp certification shapes the way consumers think and feel about small wellness tea brands, focusing on Mother Cuppa Tea Ltd as a case study. While big, well-known brands have been widely studied, far less is known about how this certification influences trust and buying behaviour in small, niche markets like herbal tea.

To fill this gap, the study used a mixed-methods approach, combining a quantitative survey with semi-structured interviews analysed through the Means–End Chain (MEC) technique. A pilot survey showed that many consumers had little or no awareness of B Corp. As a result, the main survey and interviews added a short, neutral explanation to ensure everyone had the same basic understanding before sharing their views.

The results show that once people understand what B Corp stands for, it becomes a powerful signal of trust and authenticity. It makes consumers more willing to consider or try a brand, but doesn't automatically make them pay more, which still depends on taste, everyday use and product quality. The MEC analysis revealed that B Corp's credibility through independent audit, transparency and accountability that connects deeply with values such as integrity, wellbeing and environmental care.

The study suggests that small ethical brands can make the most of certification by pairing it with clear communication, easy first-trial offers and regular proof of real progress. When these elements come together, B Corp certification becomes more than a label; it becomes a living promise of credibility and purpose.

Keywords:

Consumer Trust, Ethical Branding, Sustainability Marketing, Greenwashing, Brand Authenticity, Consumer Literacy, Certification Awareness, Wellness Tea, Ethical Consumption, Credibility Cue, Brand Differentiation, Purchase Behaviour.

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This journey from a completely different career into management has been one of the most transformative experiences of my life. It wasn't easy, there were challenges, doubts and plenty of long nights, but every step taught me something new. I learned to think differently and to keep moving forward with resilience and curiosity.

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List of Abbreviations

BIA	B Impact Assessment
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
HVM	Hierarchical Value Map
MEC	Means–End Chain
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TBL	Triple Bottom Line
WTP	Willingness to Pay
DTC	Direct-to-Consumer
UK	United Kingdom
B Lab	Benefit Corporation Lab (non-profit certifying body)

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Company

Mother Cuppa Tea Ltd. is a women's wellness herbal tea brand based in the United Kingdom, dedicated to crafting organic, functional blends that support various stages of a woman's life. Founded on principles of health, sustainability and community, the company embodies a purpose-driven belief that extends beyond profit. Its mission is not only to provide high-quality wellness products but to do so in a manner that is ethically responsible and environmentally sound. The brand's commitment to using organic ingredients, eco-friendly packaging and fostering a transparent supply chain aligns with the modern consumer's growing demand for brands that contribute positively to society and the planet (*Mother Cuppa Tea: Positive Social Impact, n.d.*).

Currently, Mother Cuppa is embarking on a major strategic journey: pursuing B Corp Certification. This is not just about adding a new logo to its packaging but about embedding its values into its corporate structure. The process involves a rigorous B Impact Assessment (BIA) that evaluates performance across five key areas: Governance, Workers, Community, Environment, and Customers. My internship at Mother Cuppa centres on analysing existing practices, identifying gaps, and implementing strategies to improve its BIA score. This hands-on experience provides a strong practical foundation for the thesis, offering an insider's view of the challenges and opportunities a small wellness brand faces when validating its ethical claims.

1.2 The Sustainability Imperative and the Rise of Ethical Certification

Today's business world is shaped by a strong focus on sustainability. It is no longer a niche topic but a key part of business strategy, influenced by government regulations, changing consumer expectations and the growing understanding that environmental, social and economic factors must be built into everyday operations (Brunner et al., 2024; Porter & Derry, 2012). This holistic approach,

conceptualised by the triple bottom line (TBL) framework, emphasises that companies should be measured not just on their financial performance, but on their social and environmental impact as well (Elkington, n.d.).

For consumers, this change has led to the growth of ethical consumerism - a way of buying where people choose brands that match their personal values, such as fair labour, animal welfare, social justice, and environmental protection (Carrington et al., 2021; Lewis, 2011). Research shows that more consumers are willing to pay higher prices for products made ethically, but this depends on one key factor, trust (Kutaula & Gillani, 2018). However, increasing claims of corporate sustainability have led to widespread consumer scepticism, with many brands being accused of greenwashing, where companies exaggerate their environmental efforts without taking real action (Nygaard, 2023).

This credibility gap has increased the need of robust, independent certifications. Schemes like Fairtrade, Organic and most notably, B Corp, have emerged to make sustainability claims more consistent, reduce misinformation and provide third-party proof that helps build consumer trust (Mori Junior et al., 2016; Stoian, 2025). The B Corp Certification is distinguished by its comprehensive nature. It moves beyond product-level attributes to assess a company's entire operational impact, requiring a legal change to consider all stakeholders, not just shareholders (Hiller, 2013). This demanding process makes it one of the most trusted signs of a company's genuine commitment to doing good.

1.3 The Research Problem and Justification

Although research on B Corp certification is growing, a clear gap still exists. Previous studies show that certification can strengthen brand trust, perceived authenticity and purchase intent for large or well-known companies in the food and beverage industry, such as Danone and Tony's Chocolonely (Finan, 2020). Similar positive effects have been found for certified brands in the clothing sector (Muess, 2024). However, these studies provide broad, general insights across different industries.

There is a critical lack of research focused on small brands in niche markets such as the wellness tea sector. Brands like Mother Cuppa face unique challenges: limited marketing budgets, difficulty standing out in a crowded market, and the constant need to build credibility amid consumer scepticism (Agu et al., 2024; Papaoikonomou et al., 2024). For them, a certification like B Corp could be transformative, serving as a key competitive differentiator (Poponi et al., 2019). However, it remains unclear whether consumers in this niche recognise the certification, understand its meaning, or how it shapes their perceptions and purchase decisions. With overall awareness of B Corp still low, small brands must invest additional effort in educating consumers to translate certification into genuine trust (*Insights Series: B Corp Brand Awareness - Infogram*, n.d.). The experiences of larger, mainstream B Corps may not directly apply.

Although pioneering B Corps such as Pukka Herbs (UK) have been discussed in case studies for their successful brand-building (Finan, 2020) and other small UK tea companies like Bird & Blend Tea Co. and Tea pigs have also gained certification, the academic research has not specifically examined whether the consumer trust and premium linked to B Corp status work in the same way for all small brands in this industry.

This thesis seeks to fill this gap. It is not known whether the significant investment of time and resources required for small brands to achieve B Corp certification translates into tangible benefits in terms of consumer perception and behaviour within their specific market context. This research is both timely and essential, providing detailed insights to help a small wellness brand like Mother Cuppa navigate the challenges of ethical branding and building consumer trust.

1.4 Research Aim and Objectives

This thesis aims to critically examine whether and how B Corp certification influences consumer perceptions of ethics, trust and shapes purchasing behaviour towards a small tea brand. Using Mother Cuppa Tea as a foundational case study, the research will explore the core question: (Figure 1)

- How does B Corp certification influence consumer perceptions of ethical credibility and trustworthiness for a small wellness herbal tea brand like Mother Cuppa Tea Ltd and how does it impact consumers' purchasing behaviour?

This is explored through the following sub-questions:

1. What is the level of consumer awareness and understanding of B Corp certification among herbal tea brand buyers?
2. In what ways does B Corp certification shape perceptions of a small tea brand's ethical credibility and trustworthiness?
3. Does the presence of B Corp certification influence consumers' willingness to try or switch to a brand?
4. Are consumers willing to pay a higher price for products from B Corp-certified brands like Mother Cuppa Tea Ltd?

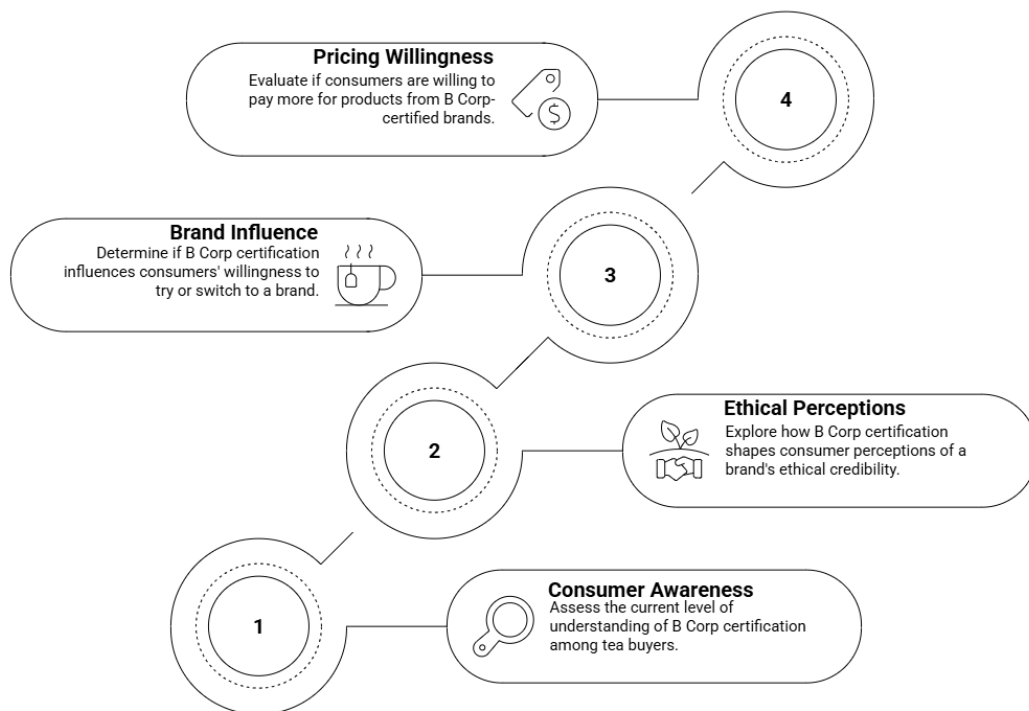


Figure 1 Understanding B Corp Impact on Consumer Behaviour

The thesis is structured as follows: (Figure 2)

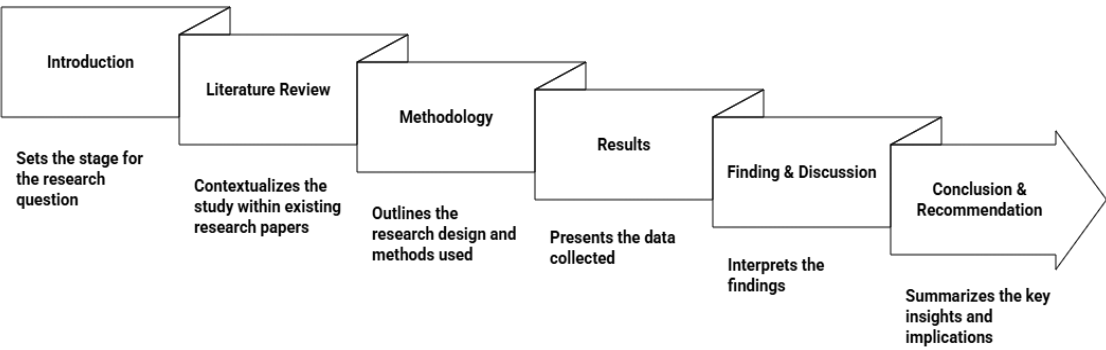


Figure 2 Thesis Structure Sequence

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

To build a strong theoretical and practical foundation, the literature review drew on both academic literature and practitioner resources. Academic materials included peer-reviewed journal articles accessed through databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Sage Journals and Scopus. Key search terms used were “B Corp certification,” “consumer trust,” “ethical consumerism,” “sustainability branding,” “small brand strategy,” and “wellness tea sector.” The review focused on studies published between 2010 and 2025 to capture the development of B Corp certification and recent shifts in consumer behaviour.

To complement academic theory and ensure practical relevance, practitioner resources and industry materials were also examined. These included reports from B Lab (UK and global) on certification impact, case studies and marketing materials related to certified tea companies such as Tea pigs, Bird & Blend Tea Co. and Pukka Herbs and articles from trade publications like Food Navigator and Speciality Food Magazine discussing sustainability in the beverage sector. The B Impact Assessment (BIA) framework itself was also reviewed to understand the specific criteria against which Mother Cuppa would be evaluated.

This integrated approach ensured that the literature review combined conceptual understanding with applied industry insight, helping identify the knowledge gap around small wellness brands and guiding the direction of this research.

2.1 Introduction to Sustainability in Business

Sustainability has become central to modern business, driven by regulations, consumer expectations, and the need to balance environmental, social, and economic goals (Brunner et al., 2024). Companies now embed sustainability in their strategies to build brand value, trust, and long-term growth (Porter & Derry, 2012). The concept extends beyond the environment to include social equity and economic stability, forming the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework (Elkington, n.d.). Furthermore, Radzi et al. (2023) highlight that Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) factors are critical drivers of company performance,

demonstrating that firms prioritising ESG principles often achieve improved financial outcomes and stakeholder trust, reinforcing the strategic importance of sustainability.

However, the growth of sustainability claims has also led to scepticism, with consumers questioning the authenticity of such declarations (Nygaard, 2023). This scepticism underscores the importance of credible third-party certifications in verifying ethical and sustainable claims, thereby bridging the gap between business objectives and consumer trust. The key findings are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of the foundational drivers and outcomes of business sustainability

Framework	Key Outcomes	Description	Sources
Regulatory Demands	Compliance, risk reduction	Laws, policies, and market pressures motivating sustainable change	(Brunner et al., 2024)
Customer Expectations	Brand loyalty, trust	Shift in values and preferences toward ethical/environmental business practices	(Porter & Derry, 2012)
Strategic Integration	Long-term viability, differentiation	Balancing environmental, social, and economic objectives in decision-making	(Petrini & Pozzebon, 2010)
Triple Bottom Line	Social equity, economic resilience	Balancing environmental, social, and economic objectives in decision-making	(Elkington, n.d.)
ESG Principles	Improved financial outcomes, stakeholder trust	Focus on Environmental, Social, and Governance performance for business operations	(Radzi et al., 2023)
Third-Party Certification	Enhanced credibility, consumer trust	Independent verification of sustainability and ethics claims	(Nygaard, 2023)

2.2 Branding for Sustainability: Trends and Integration

As sustainability becomes embedded in business models, its influence on branding is profound (Hicks , 2013). Sustainability branding is not limited to promoting green product features; it represents a strategic effort to communicate authentic values, purpose, and corporate identity (Du et al., 2010). Brands increasingly link their narratives to social impact, aligning with shared societal values and expectations (Agu et al., 2024). Purpose-driven branding is now recognised as a vital approach, illustrated by initiatives that prioritise ethical supply chains, community benefit and transparent partnerships (Hicks, 2013).

Ethical branding strategies rely on frameworks such as the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) and ESG principles, both of which guide organisations to balance profit with environmental protection and positive social outcomes (Chungyalpa & von Rosing, 2025; Hall, 2015; Tomşa et al., 2021). Recent scholarship also highlights the emerging preference for holistic branding strategies among younger, activist consumers (Goucher-Lambert & Cagan, 2015; Kutaula & Gillani, 2018). The key trends are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 Key Trends in Sustainability Branding

Trend	Description	Supporting References
Purpose-Driven Narratives	Brands emphasizing social impact and values over products	(Agu et al., 2024; Hicks, 2013)
ESG Integration	Incorporating Environmental, Social, Governance factors into branding.	(Lewis, 2011; Tomşa et al., 2021)
Consumer Alignment	Targeting activist demographics like millennials and Gen Z.	(Goucher-Lambert & Cagan, 2015; Kutaula & Gillani, 2018)

2.3 Sustainable Consumption and Ethical Consumerism

The rise of ethical consumerism reflects a shift in buying behaviour, with consumers choosing brands that align with their values (Carrington et al., 2021). Ethical consumption covers environmental issues, fair labour, animal welfare, and social justice (Lewis, 2011). Research shows that many consumers are willing to pay more for ethically produced goods when they trust the brand's claims (Kutaula & Gillani, 2018).

However, Tomşa et al. (2021) note that sustainable attitudes do not always lead to ethical purchases because of higher prices, limited information, or concerns about quality. Conversely, Goucher-Lambert & Cagan (2015) find that clear sustainability communication can increase product appeal, suggesting that certifications like B Corp help consumers make confident ethical choices.

Conscious consumers play a key role in driving demand for sustainable products (Kwok et al., 2021). They depend on certifications as signals of trust (Hoek et al.,

2013). Yet issues such as “greenwashing,” where companies exaggerate their environmental actions, continue to undermine credibility (Nygaard, 2023). This tension between ethical ideals and market realities highlights the need for credible certification systems like B Corp.

2.4 Trust, Ethics, and Brand Credibility in Consumer Behaviour

Trust plays a vital role in ethical consumption, shaping both brand loyalty and purchase intentions (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021). Hovland & Weiss (1951) classic work on source credibility explains that trust develops through perceived expertise and reliability, both of which certifications can strengthen. For example, Wang et al. (2021) found that brands with strong Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) credentials are seen as more credible, which in turn increases consumer loyalty.

In sustainability contexts, trust often declines when companies make unclear or inconsistent claims (Brach et al., 2018). Mohd Suki (2016) notes that trust strongly influences green purchasing decisions, and that certifications can enhance it by offering independent validation. Similarly, Lee et al. (2020) show that environmental labels and eco-symbols significantly affect buying behaviour when consumers view them as credible.

B Corp certification helps address this trust gap by setting rigorous, transparent standards that assess a company’s full social and environmental impact (Diez-Busto et al., 2022). It not only demonstrates genuine ethical commitment but also helps brands stand out in competitive markets (Bianchi et al., 2020). The key findings are summarised in Figure 3.

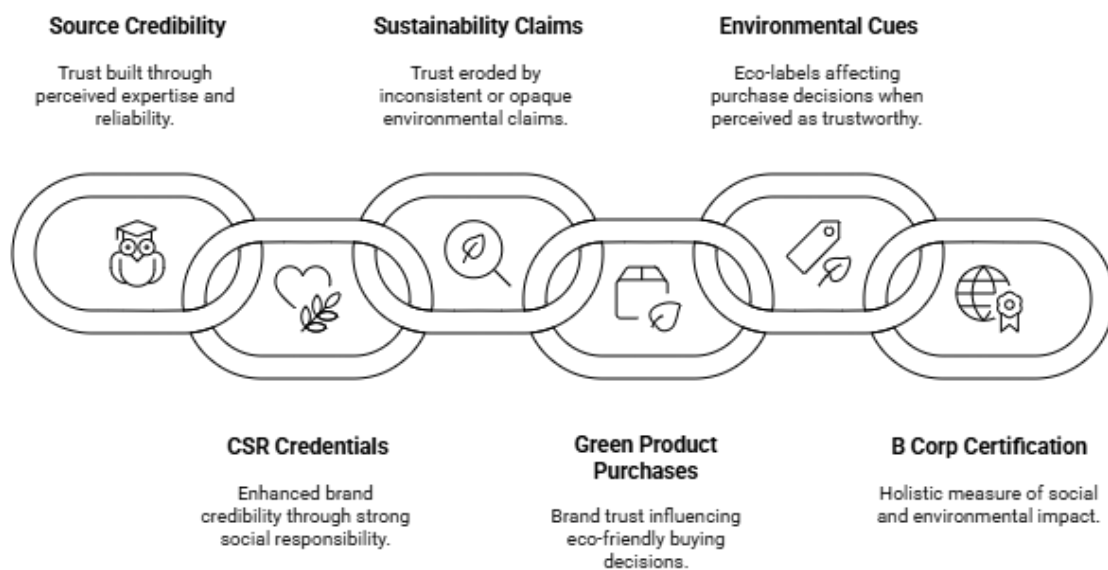


Figure 3 Building Consumer Trust

2.5 Sustainability Certification Schemes: Overview and Impact

Certifications play a key role in making sustainability claims more consistent and reducing information gaps between companies and consumers (Mori Junior et al., 2016). Eco-labels, organic certifications, and Fairtrade seals are widely recognised, though their impact differs across industries and consumer groups (Prell et al., 2020). Third-party certifications are especially valuable because they reduce the risk of greenwashing through independent audits (Stoian, 2025).

However, having too many labels can weaken their overall influence, leading to what is known as certification fatigue (Brach et al., 2018). Nygaard (2023) warns that without strong monitoring and transparency, certifications may lose credibility. This highlights the importance of schemes like B Corp, which require regular recertification and public reporting of social and environmental performance.

2.6 B Corp Certification: Principles, Processes, and Market Role

B Corp certification, administered by the nonprofit B Lab, evaluates companies across five dimensions: governance, workers, community, environment, and customers, see Figure 5. Unlike traditional CSR, B Corps must meet stringent

performance requirements and legally amend their governance to balance profit and purpose, see Figure 4 (Gazzola et al., 2019).

The process involves completing a detailed B Impact Assessment (BIA), with results made publicly available (Silva et al., 2022). This level of transparency strengthens credibility. Harjoto et al. (2019) found that such rigour helps B Corps attract ethically conscious consumers and investors. However, some critics argue that the certification can be costly and may appear exclusive to smaller businesses (Kim, 2021).

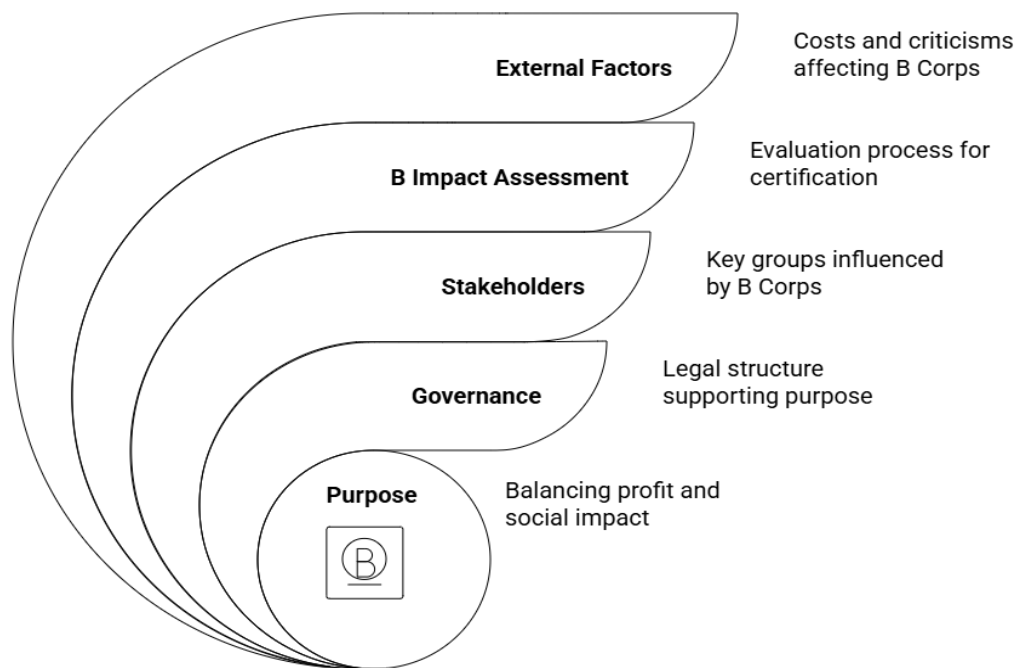


Figure 4 B Corp Certification Structure

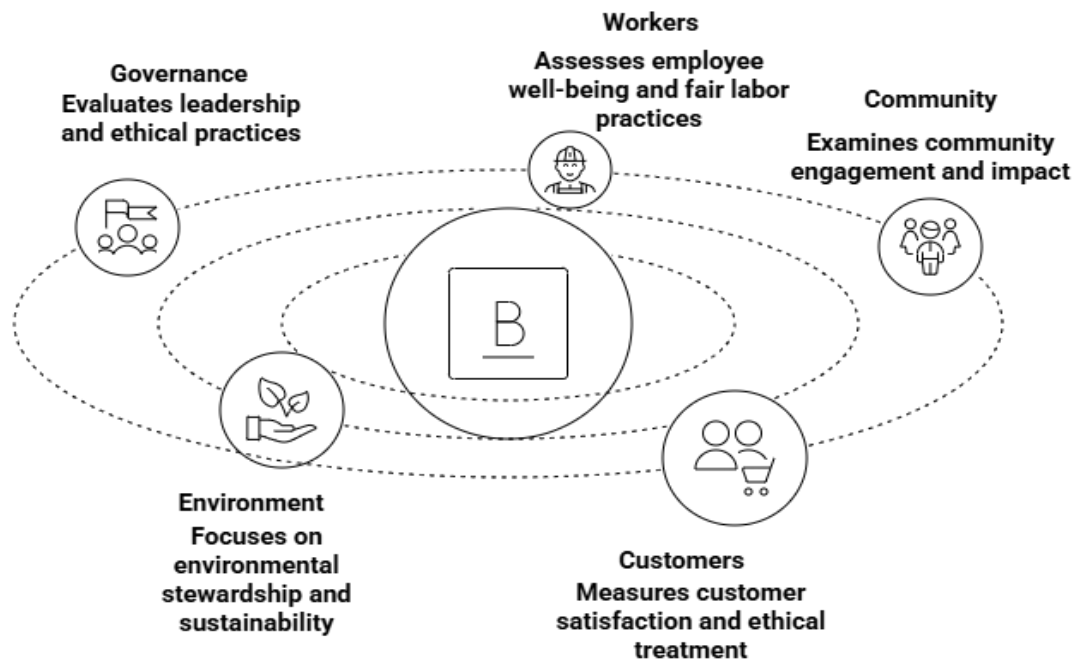


Figure 5 Understanding B Corp Certification

2.7 Influence of B Corp Certification on Consumer Trust and Brand Perception

Empirical research shows that B Corp certification strengthens consumer trust and brand perception (Muess, 2024). Ivanova et al. (n.d.) found that certified brands achieve higher purchase intent and price premiums, especially among younger consumers such as millennials and Gen Z. Colamartino (2025) adds that B Corps are viewed as more authentic than non-certified competitors, helping them stand out in crowded markets (Bianchi et al., 2020).

Beyond consumer perception, B Corps are recognised for their innovative approaches to improving social and environmental outcomes. Finan (2020) notes that certified firms in the food sector work on sustainable sourcing, waste reduction and community engagement. Similarly, Liute & De Giacomo (2022) found that UK-based B Corps achieve better environmental performance through efficient resource use and lower carbon output. These measurable results make

the certification more credible by proving real progress. Escudero et al. (2023) show similar effects in fast fashion, where B Corp status builds legitimacy and trust (see Figure 6). However, limited consumer awareness remains a challenge; Sooter et al. (2023) highlight the need for broader education to increase recognition, yet low consumer awareness remains a challenge (Poponi et al., 2019).

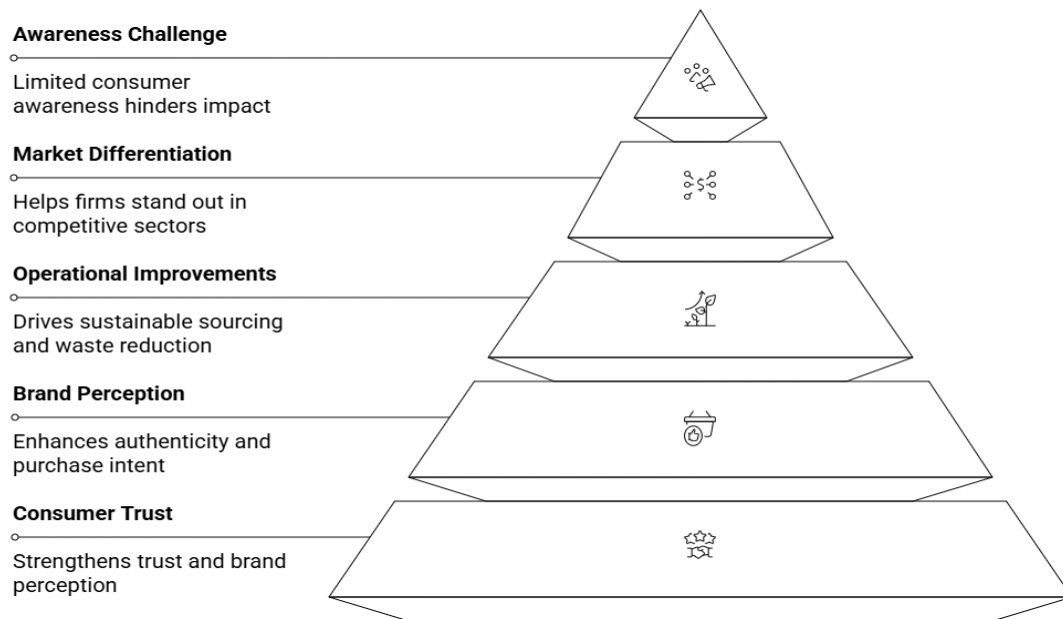


Figure 6 B Corp Certification Impact

2.8 The Wellness Tea Sector: Small Brand Challenges and Opportunities

Small wellness tea brands compete in a fragmented and highly saturated market where differentiation is crucial. Consumers increasingly expect not only sustainability but also authenticity and transparency from the brands they support (Hicks, 2013; Nascimento & Loureiro, 2024). For these smaller firms, certifications provide credibility with sceptical consumers, open access to new markets, and reduce reputational risks linked to greenwashing (Du et al., 2010; Lewis, 2011).

However, limited marketing resources make it difficult for small tea brands to effectively communicate their ethical values (Agu et al., 2024). B Corp certification offers a way to bridge this gap by serving as a trusted ethical symbol, though its impact depends on consumer understanding and awareness (Papaoikonomou et al., 2024). Within the food and beverage industry, B Corps have been shown to foster innovation in sustainable sourcing, waste reduction, and community engagement practices that can build credibility for smaller tea firms (Finan, 2020). Examples such as Tea pigs and Numi demonstrate how certification can communicate transparency and responsibility (SustainabiliTEA: B-Corp Certified Tea Companies – Eustea Reads, n.d.). Persistent sustainability challenges in the global tea trade, including labour rights and environmental degradation, further highlight the importance of credible certifications like B Corp in promoting trust and accountability (van der Wal, 2008).

2.9 Conclusion and Research Gaps

In summary, despite the comprehensive literature on sustainability, branding, and certification, significant gaps persist. Most notably, studies rarely examine how B Corp certification specifically affects consumer perceptions and behaviour within niche sectors, such as small wellness tea brands. Most of the research is concentrated on large enterprise contexts or offers generalised insights that may not translate to speciality brands with limited resources and distinct market needs.

While B Corp certification shows promise in enhancing brand trust and consumer behaviour, gaps remain in understanding its impact on small tea brands. Existing literature focuses on large corporations or generic sectors, neglecting niche markets like wellness tea. This review sets the stage for investigating how B Corp certification influences ethical perceptions and purchasing behaviour in this underexplored context.

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology used to examine how B Corp certification influences consumer perceptions of ethics, credibility, trust and purchasing behaviour within the niche market of small herbal tea brands, using Mother Cuppa Tea Ltd as a case example. The study adopts a primary data approach through a mixed-methods design that combines both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

3.1 Primary Data

Primary data collection involved semi-structured interviews with consumers of herbal tea and a quantitative consumer survey to gather empirical evidence on consumer awareness, perceptions and behavioural intentions regarding B Corp certification.

3.1.1 Consumer Survey

The research first employed a consumer survey to gather quantitative insights into awareness, perceptions and behavioural intentions related to B Corp certification. A pilot version of the survey was initially distributed to 11 participants to test the clarity and logic of the questions. Feedback from the pilot revealed areas for improvement, leading to revisions in the questionnaire design and the introduction of conditional branching to adapt questions based on participants' prior awareness of B Corp certification. After these refinements, the final survey was launched and received 84 valid responses. To deepen understanding and complement the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were later conducted. Using both methods within a mixed-methods design enhanced the reliability and validity of the research through triangulation of results (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

Survey Design

The survey was administered via the Qualtrics platform and structured into the following sections (Appendix C):

- **Demographics:** Age, gender, and education to profile the sample and enable subgroup analysis.
- **Certification Awareness:** Respondents indicated familiarity with certifications such as Organic, Fairtrade, B Corp, and Rainforest Alliance.
- **Conditional Branching:** In anticipation of low consumer awareness of the niche B Corp certification, the survey employed a branching design. Respondents who indicated familiarity with B Corp were questioned on their existing perceptions. Those unfamiliar with the certification were first presented with a neutral, factual explanation before proceeding to the perception and behavioural intention sections. This design allowed the research to capture both the impact of pre-existing awareness and the potential influence of B Corp as a communicative tool.
- **Perception Measures:** Likert-scale items assessed perceptions of small brands carrying the B Corp logo (e.g., ethical responsibility, trustworthiness, transparency).
- **Behavioural Intentions:** Questions gauged willingness to try or switch to B Corp-certified brands and willingness to pay a price premium.
- **Scenario-based items:** Respondents evaluated hypothetical purchase situations involving Mother Cuppa Tea as a certified B Corp.
- **Open-ended responses:** Space for participants to express additional views on how B Corp certification influences trust and purchase decisions.

Distribution Strategy

To maximise ecological validity and reach, the survey was disseminated across multiple channels:

- Mother Cuppa Tea's ambassador contacts, email list, and social media platforms (Instagram, LinkedIn).
- Online communities focused on ethical consumption, organic living, and specialty tea.
- Academic institutions, broadening reach to diverse consumer groups.
- The researcher's direct contacts, extending sample diversity.

This multi-channel approach was designed to capture both consumers already exposed to the Mother Cuppa brand and the wider population of UK herbal tea drinkers.

3.1.2 Semi-structured Interviews: A Means-End Chain Approach

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 consumers of herbal tea to generate rich, qualitative insights into their perceptions and decision-making processes. This method was chosen for its ability to balance a predefined thematic structure with flexibility to explore emerging themes in depth, allowing a natural conversational flow (Bryman, A., & Bell, E., 2015)

The interview protocol was designed using the Means-End Chain (MEC) theory and employed the soft laddering technique (Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015)(Appendix D). This approach enabled exploration beyond surface-level attitudes to uncover how and why B Corp certification may influence consumer reasoning and motivation. Like the survey design, a form of conditional branching was applied during interviews. Participants who were unfamiliar with B Corp certification were first provided with a brief, neutral explanation before being guided through follow-up questions. This ensured that all participants, regardless of prior awareness, could engage meaningfully with the topic while maintaining consistency across interviews.

Justification for Method

- **Uncovering motivations:** Ethical consumption is often driven by personal values and authenticity (Carrington et al., 2021; Kutaula & Gillani, 2018). MEC enables mapping of connections between product Attributes (e.g., B Corp logo, organic ingredients), Consequences (e.g., trust, “making a difference”) and underlying Values (e.g., social justice, environmental stewardship) (Borgardt, 2020; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988).
- **Addressing low awareness:** Anticipating that some participants would have little or no prior awareness of B Corp certification, the interviews incorporated a light explanatory element where needed. In these cases, participants were provided with a short, neutral description of the certification before the discussion moved into perceptions, consequences

and values. This ensured comparability between informed and less-informed participants while still allowing the soft laddering technique to guide them towards their own reflections.

- **Alignment with objectives:** This method directly addresses the research objectives by examining awareness (Sub-question 1), perceptions of ethical credibility (Sub-question 2) and value-level drivers of willingness to switch or pay a premium (Sub-question 3 and 4).

Interview Protocol

Questions followed the MEC framework:

- Open-ended: To elicit general tea-purchasing habits and awareness of ethical certifications.
- Probing (Soft Laddering): E.g., “Why is it important that a brand is B Corp certified?” to ladder from attributes to consequences and values.
- Scenario-based: Hypothetical comparisons between B Corp and non-B Corp brands to explore decision-making.
- Reflective: Encouraged participants to connect choices to broader personal values.

This structure enabled the systematic construction of Hierarchical Value Maps (HVMs). Interviews were conducted online and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy for MEC analysis.

Participant Recruitment

10 Participants were recruited through:

- Snowball sampling beginning with the researcher’s contacts who are avid herbal tea consumers.
- Mother Cuppa Tea's Ambassador Programme, providing access to existing brand customers.

This two-pronged approach offered insights from both general herbal tea consumers and individuals already engaged with the case study company. Efforts were made to include participants of different ages, genders, and purchasing

behaviours. Nonetheless, reliance on brand ambassadors may have introduced bias towards ethically minded consumers. This limitation was mitigated by triangulating interview findings with the quantitative survey, which provided complementary breadth and generalisability.

Critical Considerations

The survey ensured comparability between those familiar and unfamiliar with B Corp certification, thereby addressing the awareness gap identified in the literature. However, the inclusion of Mother Cuppa's ambassador network may have skewed responses toward ethically minded consumers. To mitigate this, subgroup differences were analysed, and survey findings were cross-referenced with the 10 interview insights, ensuring balanced interpretation.

3.2 Methods of Data Analysis

3.2.1 Quantitative Survey Analysis

Quantitative data from the consumer survey were analysed directly within the Qualtrics platform, which provides integrated descriptive analysis tools. The dataset was first cleaned to remove incomplete responses and variables were labelled and organised before exporting frequency distributions and mean scores.

Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages and mean values were automatically generated by Qualtrics for each closed-ended question. Mean values were calculated by assigning numerical values to response options on Likert-type scales (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), allowing central tendency to be summarised across perception items such as trust, authenticity and ethical responsibility.

The analysis focused on descriptive interpretation rather than inferential testing, reflecting the exploratory nature of the research and the limited sample size (N = 84).

Visual outputs, such as bar charts and radar plots, were exported directly from Qualtrics and refined for clarity. These outputs formed the basis of the quantitative results presented in Chapter 4, complementing the qualitative insights from the interview analysis.

This descriptive approach allowed for clear, data-driven insights into consumer awareness, perceptions of ethical credibility and behavioural intentions related to B Corp certification.

3.2.2 Qualitative Survey Analysis

The 10 interview transcripts were analysed using the Means-End Chain (MEC) framework. Following Reynolds & Gutman (1988) laddering approach, participant statements were coded into three hierarchical levels:

- Attributes (e.g., B Corp logo, organic ingredients).
- Consequences (e.g., perceptions of trust, sense of positive impact).
- Values (e.g., fairness, environmental stewardship, peace of mind).

The codes were reviewed and refined through several refinements to ensure consistency and reliability. A soft laddering analysis was then used to identify connections between attributes, consequences, and values. Based on these linkages, Hierarchical Value Maps (HVMs) were created to visually illustrate the main cognitive pathways shaping consumer perceptions of B Corp certification.

To maintain rigour, multiple rounds of coding were conducted and findings were compared across participants to identify recurring themes and differing viewpoints. This process helped reveal the underlying motivational structures that influence consumer decision-making.

3.3 Ethical Considerations arising out of the Research Design

This research was conducted in strict adherence to ethical principles. All interview and survey participants were provided with a detailed information sheet and were asked to consent before the survey and interview.

- Anonymity and Confidentiality: All survey responses were anonymous. Interview participants were guaranteed confidentiality and are referred to by pseudonyms in the thesis. Any commercially sensitive information was omitted.
- Right to Withdraw: Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.
- Data Security: All digital data (transcripts, survey data) is stored on a password-protected university server in compliance with GDPR.

4 RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings from the mixed-methods study, aligning the quantitative survey results with qualitative interview insights to address the research aim: understanding how B Corp certification shapes consumer perceptions of ethics and trust, and its influence on trial, switching, and price-premium behaviours for a small herbal tea brand like Mother Cuppa Tea.

4.1 Survey Results (Quantitative)

4.1.1 Sample Demographics and Profile

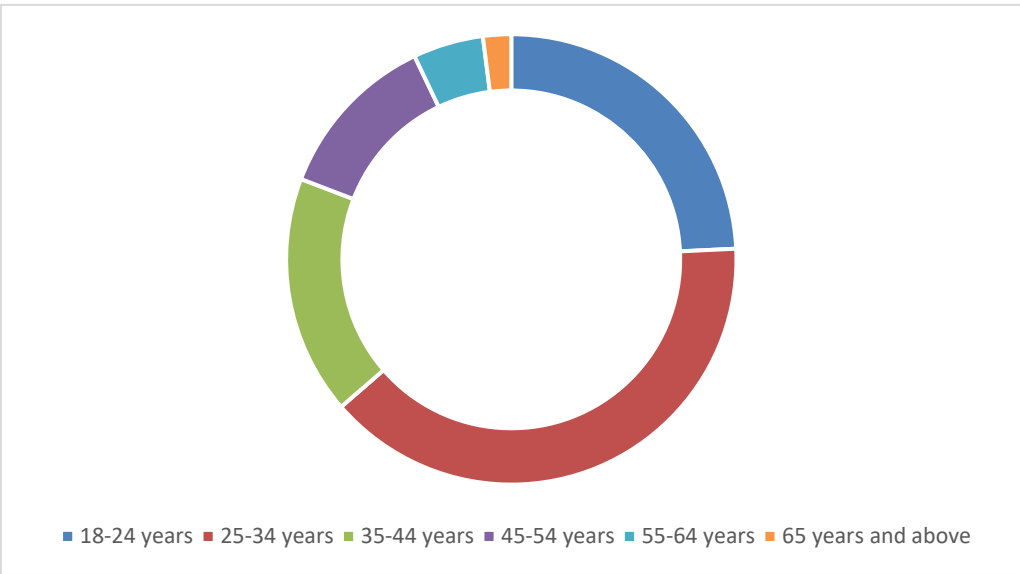
The survey collected a total of $N = 84$ valid responses. The demographic profile shows a strong representation of younger (See Charts 1) and more highly educated participants, reflecting a segment that literature identifies as particularly engaged with ethical and sustainable consumption. Specifically, 67% of respondents were aged between 18 and 34 years and 73% held a postgraduate degree (Table 3).

This profile aligns with studies indicating that younger consumers, particularly those from Millennial and Generation Z cohorts, are more likely to align their purchasing behaviour with values related to environmental and social responsibility (Lisboa et al., 2022; SAVIN et al., 2024). Moreover, higher educational attainment has been associated with greater awareness of ethical consumption and sustainability practices (Al-Nuaimi & Al-Ghamdi, 2022).

Accordingly, the demographic composition of this sample not only provides insights into a key target group for purpose-driven brands but also strengthens the relevance of the findings, as it mirrors a segment frequently identified as more responsive to sustainability-related cues in marketing and certification schemes.

Table 3 Sample Demographic Profile (N=84)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group (Q2)	25-34 years	32	41%
	18-24 years	20	26%
Gender (Q3)	Female	55	71%
Education (Q4)	Postgraduate degree	57	73%



Charts 1 A Demographic Overview

4.1.2 Certification Awareness and Prioritisation

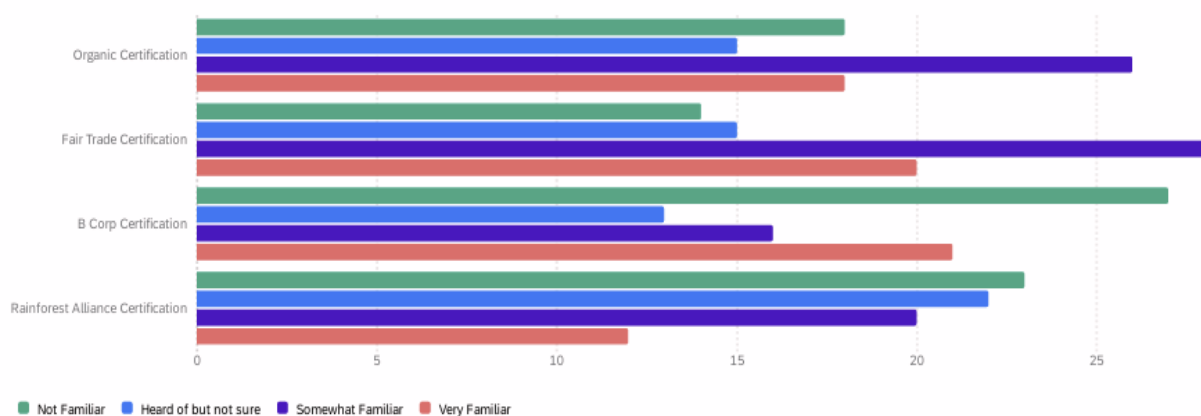
The analysis first measured baseline familiarity with various sustainability certifications, including Fairtrade, Organic, Rainforest Alliance and B Corp. Results in Table 4 show that B Corp recorded the lowest mean familiarity score (Mean = 2.40) and the highest proportion of “Not Familiar” responses (n = 27). This numerically supports existing literature noting that consumer awareness of B Corp remains limited compared to more established certifications (Finan, 2020; Muess, 2024).

Interestingly, when respondents were shown the B Corp logo, 86% (n = 32) of a smaller subset recognised it visually, even if they were unfamiliar with its meaning. This suggests that visual exposure to the logo may be higher than actual understanding, implying a gap between recognition and comprehension.

In a ranking task, Organic certification was most frequently chosen as the top priority (n = 44), reflecting its well-established connection with personal health and wellness motivations. Meanwhile, B Corp certification was selected as the first preference by 14 respondents, showing that although it remains a secondary factor, it still holds relevance for a segment of ethically motivated consumers.

Table 4 Comparative Certification Familiarity

Certification	Mean Familiarity (1=Not, 4=Very)	Count: "Not Familiar"
Fair Trade	2.70	14
Organic	2.57	18
B Corp	2.40	27
Rainforest Alliance	2.27	23



Charts 2 A Comparative Certification Awareness bar chart

The comparative certification awareness bar chart (Charts 2) helps demonstrate that while B Corp lags in familiarity, it still enjoys a baseline of logo recognition, supporting the idea that its brand recognition is growing gradually.

4.1.3 Perceptions of Ethical Credibility and Trust

Respondents were then asked to rate how B Corp certification influenced perceptions of a small brand's ethical attributes on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The results in Table 5 show that mean scores across all four dimensions - Socially Conscious (4.01), Environmentally Sustainable (4.00), Trustworthy (3.92), and Ethically Responsible (3.91) clustered closely between 3.9 and 4.0.

This demonstrates a uniformly positive perception shift after participants were provided with a neutral explanation of the certification, indicating that B Corp acts as a holistic credibility signal. These findings echo previous studies showing that certifications strengthen consumer trust and perceived authenticity (Kutaula & Gillani, 2018; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021).

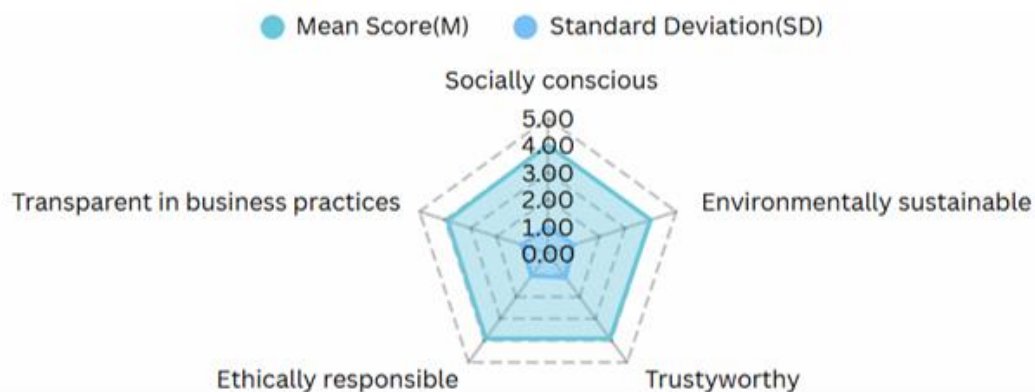
Statements of agreement further reinforce this trend:

- "B Corp certification makes a small brand seem more legitimate" (Mean = 4.07, SD = 1.04)
- "I am more likely to trust a small brand if it is B Corp certified" (Mean = 3.95, SD = 1.06)

Together, these results suggest that B Corp certification functions as a powerful trust-building mechanism, supporting prior research that links ethical assurance to enhanced brand credibility and purchase intent (Diez-Busto et al., 2022; Finan, 2020).

Table 5 Impact of B Corp on Brand Perceptions

Perception Dimension	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
Socially conscious	4.01	0.98
Environmentally sustainable	4.00	1.00
Trustworthy	3.92	1.11
Ethically responsible	3.91	1.03
Transparent in business practices	3.91	1.02



Charts 3 A Radar Chart displaying the Ethical Perception Profile based on mean scores and standard deviations.

The radar chart (Charts 3) clearly shows the even distribution of high perception scores across all ethical dimensions, reinforcing the argument that B Corp serves as a balanced signal of credibility.

4.1.4 Behavioural Intentions (Trial, Switching, and Willingness to Pay)

The practical influence of the certification was assessed through a scenario involving Mother Cuppa Tea.

Willingness to Try: The certification significantly increased the likelihood of initial purchase (Mean = 4.00, N = 84), with 81% of respondents (n = 80) reporting that they would be “somewhat” or “very likely” to try a B Corp certified brand. This indicates that the B Corp logo can function as an effective entry cue for trial among ethically aware consumers.

Switching Intent: When asked if they would switch from a non-certified to a B Corp certified brand, the mean score was 3.54, suggesting moderate switching interest. While 61% (n = 45) indicated they were “somewhat” or “extremely likely” to switch, a notable neutral segment (28%) highlighted that loyalty to established product performance still moderates certification influence.

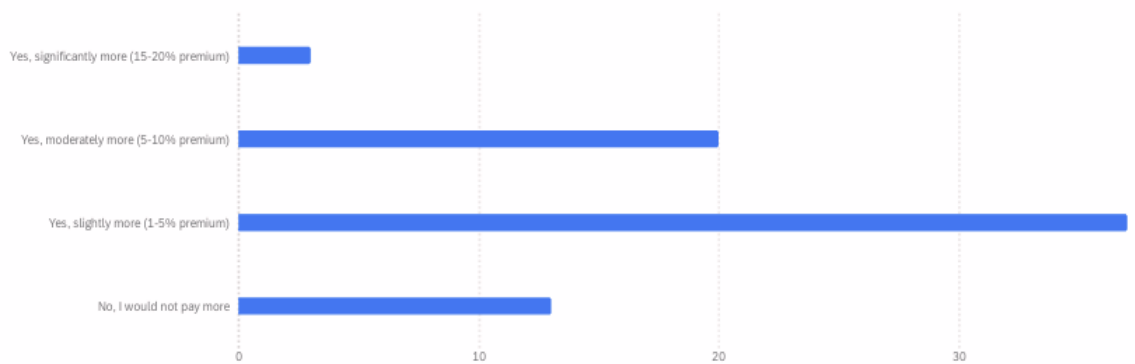
Willingness to Pay (WTP): WTP results show a strong monetary appreciation of the certification. As summarised in Table 6, 82% (n = 60) of respondents were willing to pay a premium for a B Corp certified product, with most (51%) concentrated in the 1–5% premium range. This supports prior research showing

that ethical labels can command modest price premiums when linked to trusted verification (Gorton et al., 2021).

These behavioural measures together suggest that B Corp certification can drive both trial and loyalty, though its economic influence is most effective when paired with strong product quality and performance.

Table 6 Willingness to Pay a Premium for B Corp

Premium Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Would not pay more	13	18%
Slightly more (1–5%)	37	51%
Moderately more (5–10%)	20	27%
Substantially more (10%+)	3	4%



Charts 4 A Colum Chart displaying the frequency distribution.

The column chart (Charts 4) reinforces that the highest concentration lies in the slight premium range, showing measurable but realistic consumer valuation of B Corp certification.

4.2 Semi-structured Interview result (Means-End Chain Analysis)

4.2.1 Coding of Consumer responses

The interview data were analysed using the Means–End Chain (MEC) approach, where responses were coded into attributes, consequences, and values. These categories are shown in

Table 7. In total, the analysis identified eleven attributes, eleven consequences, and five main values. To keep the findings, clear and focused, similar, or overlapping values were grouped into broader motivational themes, following the method used by Bianchi et al. (2020). This coding table forms the basis for the next stage of analysis - the implication matrix and Hierarchical Value Map (HVM), which together illustrate how the product features mentioned by participants connect to deeper consumer motivations and goals.

Table 7 Consolidated ACV Coding Table

Attributes (A)	Consequences (C)	Values (V)
A1: Taste & flavour	C1: Enjoyment, relaxation	V1: Personal wellbeing
A2: Price & affordability	C2: Value for money	V2: Health
A3: Organic / natural ingredients	C3: Health benefits	V3: Environmental responsibility
A4: Sustainable packaging	C4: Reduced waste, eco-friendly	V4: Ethical responsibility
A5: Fairtrade / ethical sourcing	C5: Support farmers, fairer practices	V5: Integrity & authenticity
A6: Certifications (B Corp, organic, Fairtrade)	C6: Trust, credibility	
A7: Transparency & honest messaging	C7: Connection, brand trust	
A8: Small independent brand	C8: Supporting small/local business	
A9: Convenience & access	C9: Saves time, easy to find	
A10: Wellness & functional blends	C10: Relaxation, digestion, energy	
A11: Design & packaging aesthetics	C11: Feeling special, motivated to try	

4.2.2 Implication Matrix

From the coding, an implication matrix was generated (Table 8) showing the frequency of direct ($A \rightarrow C$, $C \rightarrow V$) and indirect ($A \rightarrow V$ via consequences) links. Each cell of the matrix records the number of direct links, followed by indirect links (e.g., 7;0). For instance, the attribute taste (A1) was directly connected to the consequence enjoyment (C1) seven times across the interviews, which in turn was strongly associated with the value personal wellbeing (V1). This means that respondents consistently described taste as leading to immediate enjoyment, and this enjoyment was further interpreted as contributing to a broader sense of personal wellbeing. Similarly, the attribute sustainable packaging (A3) was linked to the consequence reduced waste (C5), which participants associated with the value environmental responsibility (V3), highlighting how concrete product features were cognitively connected to higher-order ethical values.

Table 8 Implication Matrix

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	Total
A1	7;0									2;0	1;0	0;7	0;2			0;1	10;10
A2		8;0										0;7					8;7
A3			6;0		3;0	1;0							0;6		0;3	0;1	10;10
A4				6;0		1;0								0;6		0;1	7;7
A5			2;0		5;0	1;0							0;2		0;5	0;1	8;8
A6						8;0	3;0									0;11	11;11
A7						3;0	5;0									0;8	8;8
A8						2;0		6;0							0;6	0;2	8;8
A9									4;0			0;4					4;4
A10	2;0		3;0							6;0		0;2	0;9				11;11
A11											4;0					0;4	4;4
C1												8;0					8;0
C2												7;0					7;0
C3													12;0				12;0
C4														7;0			7;0
C5															5;0		5;0
C6																12;0	12;0
C7																8;0	8;0
C8															6;0		6;0
C9												4;0					4;0
C10													9;0				9;0
C11																5;0	5;0
Total	9;0	8;0	11;0	6;0	8;0	16;0	8;0	6;0	4;0	8;0	5;0	19;20	21;19	7;6	11;14	25;29	172;88

4.2.3 Hierarchical Value Map (HVM)

The implication matrix showed many different links between attributes, consequences, and values, including some that appeared only once or twice. To keep the analysis clear and focused, a cut-off threshold of four was applied. This means that only the connections mentioned by at least four participants were included in the final Hierarchical Value Map (HVM), Figure 7. Setting this threshold helped to include the most important and frequently discussed ideas without making the map too crowded. Following Bianchi et al. (2020), both direct and indirect links that met the threshold were kept so that meaningful relationships (e.g., organic -> health) were not lost.

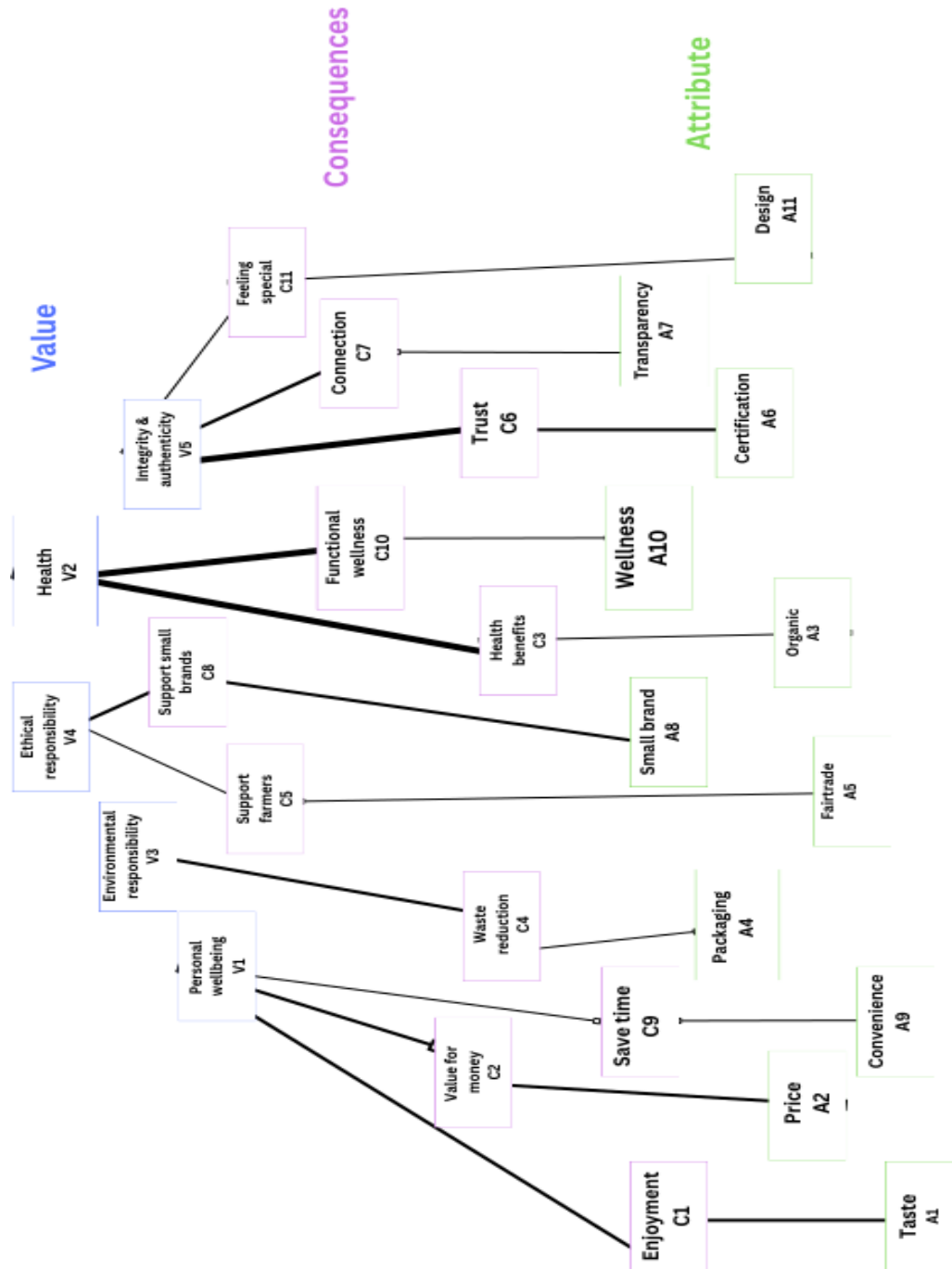


Figure 7 Hierarchical Value Map

Note: (a) HVM was drawn based on the results of a laddering analysis using the Canva; (c) Only chains containing at least one attribute, one consequence and one value were drawn on the map; (d) The thickness of the line represents the total number of relations.

The HVM demonstrates that consumer motivations are not dispersed but rather cluster around five overarching values: personal well-being, health, environmental responsibility, ethical responsibility, and integrity/authenticity. These values capture both self-oriented benefits (comfort, security, health) and other-oriented concerns (sustainability, fairness, authenticity), showing that purchase decisions are guided by a mix of personal and ethical drivers.

5 DISCUSSION

This chapter integrates the survey and interview findings to explain how B Corp certification shaped perceptions of ethical credibility and trust in the wellness tea context, and how those perceptions related to consideration, trial, switching and potential premiums. This discussion is organised into four main parts. First, it brings together the main findings from both the survey and the interviews. Second, it explains these findings using theories of source credibility, information gaps, and consumer literacy. Third, it reflects on the role of the pilot study and explains why the survey used conditional branching with a short, neutral explanation of B Corp. Finally, it outlines practical recommendations, the study's limitations, and areas for future research. Each part is linked back to the literature reviewed in earlier chapters.

5.1 Integrative synthesis of the main findings

Across both the survey and interviews, a clear pattern emerged: once people understood what B Corp means, the certification acted as a strong signal of credibility and trust. It reduced perceived risk and increased authenticity. In the pilot survey, awareness and understanding were inconsistent, reflecting wider evidence of low B Corp literacy among consumers (Sooter et al., 2023). To address this, the main survey used conditional branching, where respondents unfamiliar with B Corp first read a short, neutral explanation before answering perception and intention questions. The same method was used in the interviews to keep understanding consistent. This approach, as explained in Chapter 3, helped address the literacy gap noted in previous research (Papaoikonomou et al., 2024).

Once participants had a basic understanding, they connected B Corp with features such as independent audit, accountability, and full-company assessment, reflecting the structure of the B Impact Assessment and B Lab's legal framework (Hiller, 2013). These attributes led to perceived benefits like reduced greenwashing risk, easier decision-making, and greater confidence to try new products. Interviews revealed that these outcomes linked to deeper personal values, such as integrity, environmental responsibility, and well-being.

This mirrors the Attributes -> Consequences -> Values chain from the MEC analysis and supports research showing that certification reduces information asymmetry through trusted third-party verification (Mori Junior et al., 2016).

Behavioural intentions appeared stage based. The biggest influence was seen at the consideration and first-trial stages, while willingness to pay more remained cautious and depended on taste, convenience, and daily fit. This aligns with the survey (section 4.1.4, Table 6) and interview results (section 4.2.1,

Table 7) and echoes findings that certifications mainly reduce risk at the entry stage, while premiums depend on proven quality (Muess, 2024). Younger, values-driven consumers were especially responsive to credible ethical signals, consistent with this study's demographic profile and prior research (Kutaula & Gillani, 2018).

5.2 Interpreting the mechanism with literature

The findings align with both classic and modern views of source credibility. According to Hovland & Weiss (1951) persuasion depends on perceived expertise and reliability. Recent research extends this to sustainability, showing that third-party verification increases brand credibility and loyalty, while unverified claims create scepticism (Lee et al., 2020). B Corp's strict assessment, transparent scoring and legal accountability provide visible proof that turns ethical claims into a trusted signal. The rise in trust and authenticity after the literacy primer supports the idea that credible, whole-firm certifications help counter greenwashing by replacing vague claims with verified information (Diez-Busto et al., 2022).

Consumer literacy also plays a crucial role. Studies show that when consumers cannot understand a label, even strong certifications lose impact (Nygaard, 2023). This was clear in the pilot survey, where the neutral literacy primer gave participants, the context needed to evaluate B Corp correctly. This reflects real buying situations, where short on-pack or online explanations often accompany certification marks. The improvement after the primer reflects better

understanding, not persuasion, supporting earlier findings that simple education is key to label effectiveness (Brach et al., 2018).

The small-brand context is equally important. In the crowded wellness tea market, credible certification helps small firms overcome legitimacy gaps but cannot replace strong fundamentals. As shown in the interviews (section 4.2.1,

Table 7), loyalty centred on flavour reliability, appealing packaging, and convenience, while survey data (section 4.1.4, Table 6) showed certification encouraged trial but not willingness to pay more without proven product quality. This supports earlier studies noting that the B Corp logo works best when backed by real actions such as responsible sourcing and waste reduction, turning symbolic assurance into visible accountability (Finan, 2020).

5.3 Methodological reflection: pilot and conditional branching

The pilot survey showed a validity issue often seen in low-awareness certifications. Without a shared understanding of B Corp, some responses were inconsistent. To fix this, the main survey used conditional branching, giving a short neutral description only to those unfamiliar with B Corp. This improved accuracy and better reflected real buying settings where short label explanations appear (Chapter 3). The same primer was used in interviews to ensure the MEC laddering captured genuine thinking, not misunderstanding. This follows mixed-methods best practice, treating literacy as a factor shaping label impact rather than as bias (Bryman, A., & Bell, E., 2015).

The MEC analysis then mapped links between attributes, consequences, and values using an implication matrix and a cut-off threshold (Bianchi et al., 2020). This showed clear pathways from certification features to trust-related consequences and integrity values. The Hierarchical Value Map confirmed the survey results, showing that trust and authenticity move consumers from awareness to consideration and trial.

The intention–behaviour gap in willingness to try, switch, or pay more reflects a common challenge in ethical consumption studies (Carrington et al., 2021).

Without behavioural data, such intentions indicate potential rather than actual purchase.

5.4 Recommendations for practice

The findings suggest three main actions for small wellness brands using B Corp certification, shown in Figure 8 and Figure 9.

First, add a short literacy layer wherever the B Corp logo appears. Even a brief, neutral explanation helps consumers understand the certification and builds trust, reducing confusion from multiple eco-labels (Nygaard, 2023). Simple factual text, such as *“Certified for verified social and environmental performance,”* should appear on packaging, websites, and displays, linking to a short impact page.

Second, focus on building trust and trial before testing premium pricing. B Corp increases willingness to try but not to pay more until product quality and fit are proven. Research supports that certifications reduce uncertainty early on, while premiums require proven impact (Muess, 2024).

Third, keep credibility through regular updates. Sharing one verified improvement per cycle, such as in sourcing or waste reduction that turns certification into a living proof of progress, strengthening trust and transparency (Finan, 2020). Brands should share one verified improvement per reporting cycle, such as in sourcing, waste reduction, or employee well-being. This turns certification into a continuing accountability story, not a one-time badge, reinforcing the literacy layer and keeping communication grounded in evidence (Bianchi et al., 2020).

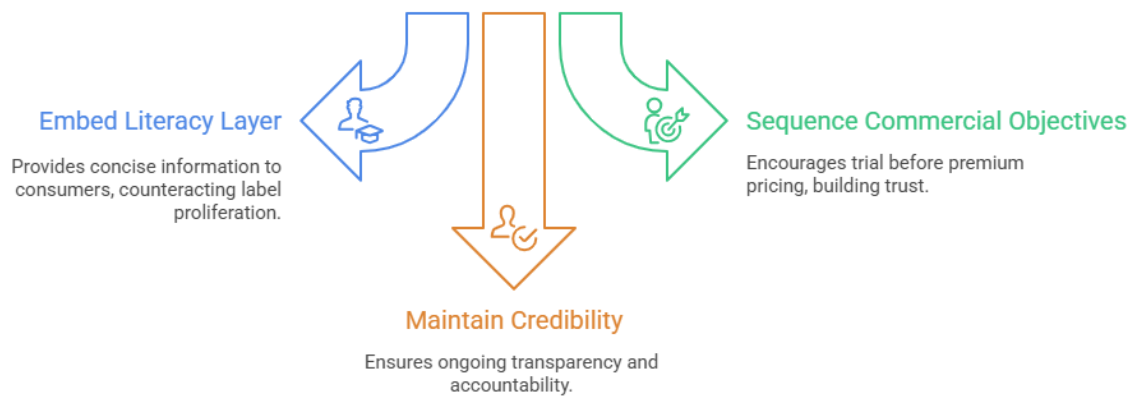


Figure 8 How to enhance the impact of B Corp certification?

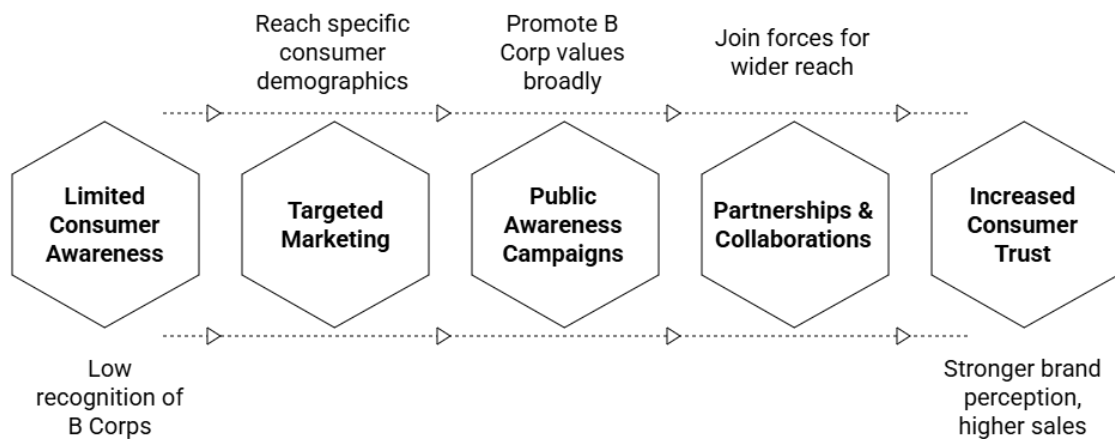


Figure 9 Enhancing B Corp Awareness

5.5 Limitations

This study has three main limitations (Figure 10).

First, the sample included younger and highly educated participants, with some recruited through brand ambassador networks (Chapter 4). This may have increased openness to ethical messaging. Although triangulation reduced single-source bias, the findings cannot be fully generalised to the wider UK tea market.

Second, the neutral literacy primer, though important, may have shifted focus toward ethical features. Studies on label framing show that even factual cues can

influence perception (Brach et al., 2018). The observed effects should therefore be interpreted carefully until different framings are evaluated.

Third, all behavioural measures, willingness to try, switch, or pay more, were self-reported. Such measures often face the intention-behaviour gap seen in ethical consumption research (Carrington et al., 2021). Without behavioural data, findings on actual willingness to pay remain tentative. The scope of future research is given Figure 11.

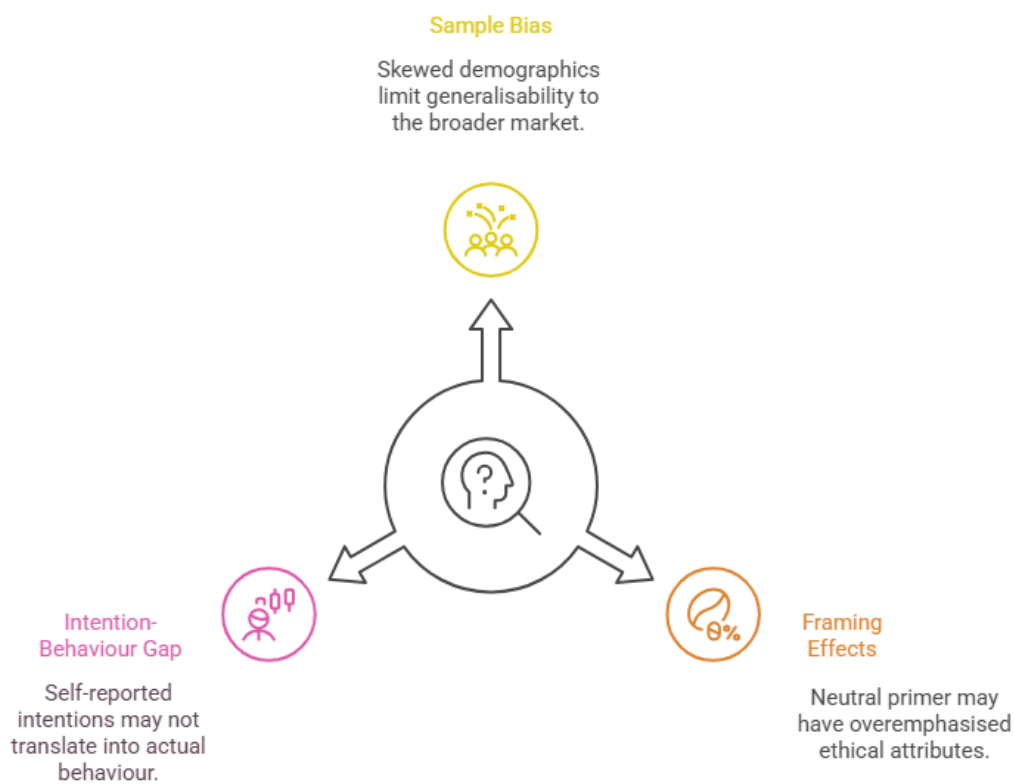


Figure 10 Summary of Study Limitations

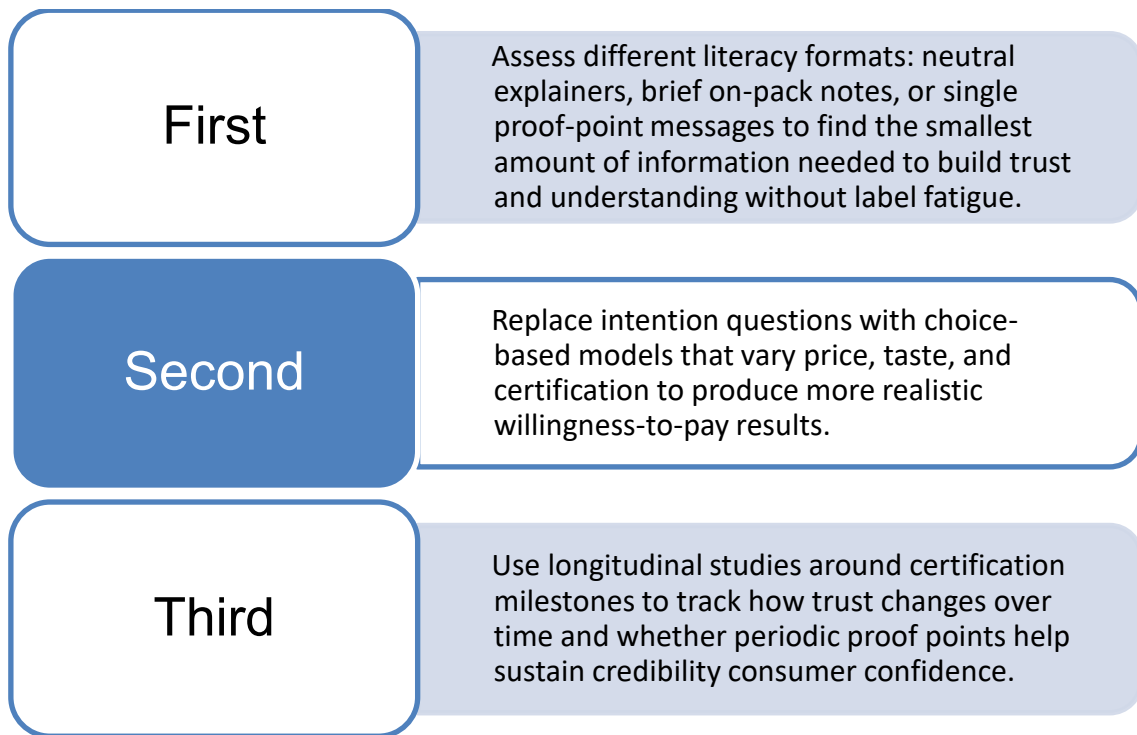


Figure 11 Scope for future research

6 CONCLUSION

This study explored how B Corp certification shapes consumer perceptions and behaviour for a small wellness tea brand. It combined a survey (N = 84) with eleven interviews using the Means–End Chain (MEC) approach. The main finding is that once people understand what B Corp means, it becomes a strong trust and credibility signal, reducing perceived risk and increasing authenticity. This effect mostly influences early decision stages, consideration and first trial, while loyalty and willingness to pay more depend on taste, fit within daily routines, and product value. In short, certification opens the door, but consistent product performance keeps it open (Carrington et al., 2021).

Three main contributions emerge. First, methodologically, the pilot survey revealed low awareness of B Corp, which affected response quality. To fix this, the main survey added conditional branching with a short, neutral explanation, also used in interviews. This simple change improved understanding without bias and reflected how consumers encounter brief explanations near logos (Papaoikonomou et al., 2024). Second, theoretically, findings show that trust is the key link between certification and consumer behaviour, shaped by consumer literacy. The broad scope of B Corp's independent assessment across governance, workers, community, environment and customers, along with its legal accountability, builds perceptions of integrity and authenticity (Hiller, 2013). Third, in practice, for small experience-based brands, B Corp adds value only when three conditions align: clear consumer education, easy first trial, and regular proof points instead of relying on a static logo (Muess, 2024).

This study has limits. The sample skewed toward younger, well-educated participants, and interviews included some brand ambassadors, which may have raised ethical sensitivity. The literacy primer, though useful, might have focused attention on ethical aspects (Nygaard, 2023). Self-reported intentions to try, switch, or pay more may not match real buying behaviour (Carrington et al., 2021). These limits suggest future research should include behavioural data.

Future studies could compare different literacy formats to find the simplest effective explanation, use choice-based experiments to estimate realistic price trade-offs, and track consumers over time to evaluate whether trust effects grow, stabilise, or fade.

Overall, this thesis shows that B Corp certification can strengthen ethical credibility and consumer trust for small wellness tea brands, but only when consumers understand what it means. Certification can help people notice and try the brand, but loyalty depends on what follows: when the tea delivers consistent taste, easy access, and clear value. Also, when the brand communicates its impact honestly and regularly. The certification moves beyond a logo to become a real, ongoing tool for building and sustaining consumer trust.

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Appendices

Appendix A Ethical approval letter



10 September 2025

Dear Ms Seraj ,

Reference: CURES/26489/2025

Project ID: 29917

Title: Do Consumers Really Care? Investigating the Role of B Corp Certification in Shaping Brand Perception for Small Tea Brands.

Thank you for your application to the Cranfield University Research Ethics System (CURES).

We are pleased to inform you your CURES application, reference CURES/26489/2025 has been reviewed. You may now proceed with the research activities you have sought approval for.

If you have any queries, please contact CURES Support.

We wish you every success with your project.

Regards,

CURES Team

Appendix B Informed Consent Form



Consent Form

Title Of Study: Do Consumers Really Care? Investigating the Role of B Corp Certification in Shaping Brand Perception for Small Tea Brands.

General Aim of the Project:

This research is being conducted as part of my Master's thesis. It aims to critically examine whether and how B Corp certification influences consumer perceptions of ethics, trust, and shapes purchasing behaviour towards a small tea brand.

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick each box as appropriate):

1.	I have read and understood the information provided about the research.
2.	I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss any concerns with the researcher.
3.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without providing a reason and without penalty.
4.	I understand how my data will be treated, including anonymisation and secure storage, and that confidentiality has been clearly explained.
5.	I understand that, if applicable, the interview will be audio-recorded for transcription and analysis.
6.	I permit the interview to be audio-recorded.
7.	I understand how the data collected may be used for academic research, publication, and presentation purposes.
8.	I prefer for my name to remain anonymous in any reports or publications.
9.	I agree to write my name on this informed consent form.

Participant:

Name of Participant: _____

Researcher:

Name of Researcher: ___Darakshan Seraj_____

Contact Information:

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact:

Student: Darakshan Seraj; (darakshan.seraj@cranfield.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Namita Shete; (N.S.Shete@cranfield.ac.uk)

Appendix C Survey Questionnaires

Survey Questionnaires

Thank you for considering taking part in this survey, which forms part of a Master's thesis project at Cranfield University. The study aims to understand how B Corp certification influences consumer perceptions of ethics, trust and purchasing behaviour towards small tea brands, with Mothe Cuppa Tea Ltd serving as a case study. Your participation is entirely voluntary and the survey will take about 5–7 minutes to complete. All responses will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, no personal identifying information will be collected and the data will be used only for academic purposes. As this is an important part of the research, we kindly ask that all questions are answered before submission. By continuing with the survey, you confirm that you have read this information and are happy to take part. We are very grateful for your time and valuable input.

- ☐ I Agree

Q. How often do you purchase herbal or wellness tea?

- ☐ Several times per week
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Every few months
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Q. Which age group do you belong to?

- ☐ 18-24 years
- ☐ 25-34 years
- ☐ 35-44 years
- ☐ 45-54 years
- ☐ 55-64 years
- ☐ 65+ years

Q. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary/third gender
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Q. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High school or equivalent
- College/Undergraduate degree
- Postgraduate degree
- Others (Please Specify)

Q. Please indicate your familiarity with the following certifications:

	Not Familiar	Heard of but not sure	Somewhat Familiar	Very Familiar
Organic Certification				
Fair Trade Certification				
B Corp Certification				
Rainforest Alliance Certification				

(If anyone selects *Not Familiar* or *Heard of but not sure* for B Corp Certification, they will see a short description of B Corp.)

B Corp Certification:

-It is a designation for businesses that meet high standards of social and environmental impact.

- Awarded by the non-profit B Lab.

- To balance profit with purpose.



Q. Have you seen this logo before?



- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q. What do you think when you see this symbol?

A.

Q. When I see a B Corp certification on a product from a small, independent brand, I perceive that company as:

	1	2	3	4	5
Ethically responsible					
Environmentally sustainable					
Socially conscious					
Trustworthy					
Transparent in business practices					

Q. Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

	1	2	3	4	5
I am more likely to trust a small brand if it is B Corp certified					
For a wellness product like tea, ethical certification is important to me					
B Corp certification makes a small brand seem more legitimate					

Please read the following scenario:

Imagine you are shopping for wellness tea and come across a brand called Mother Cuppa Tea. It is a small, independent UK brand. Their packaging and website highlight that they are a certified B Corporation.

Q. Based on this scenario, how does the B Corp certification influence your likelihood to try Mother Cuppa Tea for the first time?

- ☐ Dislike a great deal
- ☐ Dislike somewhat
- ☐ Neither like nor dislike
- ☐ Like somewhat
- ☐ Like a great deal

Q. If you already had a favourite tea brand that was not B Corp certified, how likely would you be to switch to Mother Cuppa Tea?

- ☐ Extremely unlikely

- Somewhat unlikely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat likely
- Extremely likely

Q. How important are ethical certifications in general when choosing between similar wellness tea products?

- Not at all important
- Slightly important
- Moderately important
- Very important
- Extremely important

Q. When purchasing tea, which of these certifications is most important to you? (Please drag and drop the options below to rank them in order of importance, with 1 being the most important)

1. Organic
2. Fair Trade
3. B Corp
4. Rainforest Alliance

Q. Would you be willing to pay more for a product from a small B Corp-certified tea brand (like Mother Cuppa) compared to a similar non-certified product from a large corporation?

- Yes, significantly more (15-20% premium)
- Yes, moderately more (5-10% premium)
- Yes, slightly more (1-5% premium)
- No, I would not pay more
- I would expect to pay less

Q. Is there anything else you would like to share about how B Corp certification influences your trust in, or willingness to buy from, a small or independent brand?

Appendix D Interview Question

Means-End Chain theory Interview Protocol

PART 1: INTRODUCTION & CONSENT

"The goal of our conversation is to understand your thought process when choosing herbal teas, especially when you see different types of certifications. There are no right or wrong answers. I'm just interested in your honest perspective. The interview will take about 15-20 minutes."

"Before we begin, I want to assure you of a few important points:

- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- You can stop the interview at any time without any penalty.
- Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymized.
- The interview will be transcribed and will be deleted afterward."

PART 2: WARM-UP – GENERAL TEA CONSUMPTION HABITS

(To understand the participant's general behaviour and preferences.)

Questions:

1. "To start, could you tell me about the herbal or wellness teas you enjoy? Are there any specific brands you typically buy?"

(If they focus only on taste/price/convenience)

- a. Some people also look for things like organic or ethical sourcing. Is that something you think about when you buy tea?
- b. "Apart from taste and price, are there any wider issues that matter to you in choosing a brand like the environment, how workers are treated, or the company's values?"

2. "What are the most important factors you consider when choosing a new herbal tea? What really matters to you?"

[Probe further based on their answer: e.g., taste, ingredients, brand reputation, price, ethical claims, packaging.]

PART 3: LADDERING PRACTICE – ON A GENERAL ATTRIBUTE

(To introduce the laddering technique using an attribute the participant has already mentioned.)

Laddering Probes:

- a. "Could you tell me why [ATTRIBUTE] is important to you when choosing a tea?"
[Attribute -> Consequence]
- b. "And what does that [CONSEQUENCE] do for you? How does it make you feel?"
[Consequence -> Value]
- c. "What is the ultimate value or benefit you get from that feeling?"
[Value -> Terminal Value]

PART 4: CORE SECTION – B CORP & THE MOTHER CUPPA TEA SCENARIO

(To apply laddering specifically to the B Corp attribute within the context of the case study.)

Introduction and Awareness Check

"Now, I'd like to shift to a more specific topic. My research focuses on a particular small UK brand called Mother Cuppa Tea and a certification called B Corp."

[Show the participant a clear image of the B Corp logo]



"Have you ever seen this logo before? What, if anything, does it mean to you?"

Branching Paths

BRANCH A: IF THE PARTICIPANT IS FAMILIAR WITH B CORP

"Great. Now, imagine you are shopping online or in a store and you see Mother Cuppa Tea for the first time. It's a small, independent brand. Their packaging highlights that they are a certified B Corporation."

Core Laddering Questions:

1. Perception: "How does seeing the B Corp logo influence your perception of Mother Cuppa Tea's ethical credibility and trustworthiness as a small brand? Why?"
2. Comparison: "Thinking specifically about Mother Cuppa Tea as a small, independent brand, does the B Corp certification change how you view them compared to a large corporation with the same certification? Why?"
3. Trial: "If your usual tea brand was not B Corp certified, how would this influence your willingness to try Mother Cuppa Tea for the first time? What is the underlying reason for that?"
4. Switching: "Would this certification make you more likely to switch your loyalty to Mother Cuppa Tea if you liked the product? Why or why not?"
5. Price: "If Mother Cuppa Tea's B Corp certified product was priced higher than a similar, non-certified tea from a large company, what would you think? What percentage price increase would you consider reasonable, and what specifically justifies that premium for you?"

BRANCH B: IF THE PARTICIPANT IS UNFAMILIAR WITH B CORP

"That's perfectly fine, and very helpful for my research. Let me give you a brief description."

B Corp Description:

"B Corp Certification is awarded by a non-profit organization called B Lab. A company is rigorously assessed on its social and environmental performance, its transparency, and its legal accountability. It's a sign that the company balances profit with a positive impact on its workers, community, and the environment."



"Now, imagine you are shopping and see Mother Cuppa Tea for the first time. It's a small, independent brand, and their packaging highlights this B Corp certification."

Modified Core Laddering Questions:

1. Perception: "Now that you know what it represents, what is your reaction? How does this information shape your perception of Mother Cuppa Tea's ethical credibility and trustworthiness?"
2. Comparison: "As a small brand, does knowing about B Corp certification make Mother Cuppa Tea seem different from large corporations in your eyes? Why?"
3. Trial: "How would this knowledge influence your willingness to try Mother Cuppa Tea compared to your current brands? Why?"
4. Switching: "Knowing what the certification involves, would you be more likely to choose Mother Cuppa Tea over a non-certified option? What is the main reason for that?"
5. Price: "If this certification meant the tea cost a bit more, how would you feel? What would make a price increase acceptable to you?"

"If two teas tasted the same and cost the same, but one had this certification, how would you decide?"

PART 5: CONCLUSION & SYNTHESIS

(To summarize and capture final insights.)

1. "Based on everything we've discussed; how would you summarize the overall influence of a B Corp certification on your perception of and willingness to buy from a small brand like Mother Cuppa Tea?"
2. "If you had to rank the importance of B Corp certification against other factors like taste, price, and brand reputation, where would it fit and why?"