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Living Local: The Impact of Quality-of-Life and Ethnocentrism on Consumer Responsibility for Sustainable Consumption and Local Brands

Pilar Lopez-Belbeze¹  | Josep Rialp-Criado¹  | Maryam Vaziri² 

¹Business Department, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain | ²Business Department, Smart Society Research Group, La Salle – Ramon Llull University, Barcelona, Spain

Correspondence: Pilar Lopez-Belbeze (pilar.lopez@uab.cat)

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ABSTRACT

This study, grounded in consumer culture theory, examines how quality-of-life, consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption, and ethnocentrism influence local brand preference. Moving beyond national wealth metrics, it explores regional disparities in quality-of-life using a representative sample of 2589 Spanish consumers and official quality-of-life indicators. A hierarchical cluster analysis grouped regions by quality-of-life, and structural equation modeling tested the proposed relationships. Results reveal that the effect of consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption on local brand preference varies by regional quality-of-life—factors like safety strengthen local brand preference, while access to broader resources may reduce reliance on local options. Ethnocentrism amplifies local brand preference, particularly in lower-quality-of-life regions where supporting local brands reinforces community identity. These findings underscore the need for localized marketing and policy strategies that not only address consumer preferences at a national level but also consider regional variations in quality-of-life and cultural identity, thereby enabling more effective, context-sensitive interventions.

1 | Introduction

In recent years, the importance of sustainable consumption practices and its role in environmental preservation has gained growing recognition. A key aspect of this discourse involves understanding how regional disparities within a country shape consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption (CRSC) and preferences for local brands. Sustainable consumption is influenced by structural and sociocultural factors, such as access to eco-friendly products, economic capacity, infrastructure for responsible consumption, and environmental awareness, all of which can vary widely within the same country (Haider et al. 2022; Wiesli et al. 2021). Subjective well-being and quality

of life (QOL) also play a role in the adoption of sustainable consumption, suggesting that consumers with better socioeconomic conditions are more inclined to adopt responsible consumption habits (Quoquab and Mohammad 2020).

To understand these dynamics more holistically, this research is anchored in consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson 2005), a framework that moves beyond economic rationality to emphasize the cultural, social, and contextual nature of consumer behavior. CCT conceives consumption not as an individual or utilitarian act but as a culturally embedded practice shaped by identity, values, social norms, and place. This perspective is particularly useful for examining how consumers

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relate to sustainability and local brands, as it captures the influence of broader cultural meanings on individual choices. From a CCT standpoint, CRSC and preferences for local products must be analyzed through regional social dynamics, identity constructions, and culturally grounded understandings of well-being and responsibility.

QoL is a multidimensional construct encompassing economic, social, environmental, and subjective dimensions (Costanza et al. 2007; Veenhoven 2015). It extends beyond income or economic development, incorporating elements such as security, emotional well-being, and social cohesion, which influence consumer perceptions and sustainable decision-making (OECD 2017; Wiesli et al. 2021). Similarly, sustainability is a complex concept that includes not only environmental impact reduction but also consumption habits based on social and community values (Haider et al. 2022). From a consumer perspective, sustainable choices are driven not only by environmental concerns but also by their contribution to local development, alignment with cultural values, and promotion of social cohesion (Shahzad et al. 2024). In this context, consumer ethnocentrism (ETN)—defined as a psychological identity rooted in cultural pride and regional identity—can strengthen this alignment, as ethnocentric consumers perceive sustainable consumption as part of their civic and cultural responsibility (Balabanis et al. 2019; Shahzad et al. 2024; Shankarmahesh 2006).

Although some studies have explored these dynamics at national or international levels (Luchs et al. 2015; Morren and Grinstein 2016), research remains limited regarding how regional differences within a single country shape attitudes and behaviors toward sustainable consumption. This gap is particularly relevant in nations with strong regional contrasts, where infrastructure, income, and access to services vary widely and influence both the willingness to consume sustainable products and the preference for local brands (Puertas and Marti 2023). Most studies to date have focused on developed Western countries (Morren and Grinstein 2016), thereby overlooking internal national diversity. Previous research indicated that economic development, environmental education, and cultural norms are key to fostering sustainable practices (Shahzad et al. 2019). Morren and Grinstein (2016), in their meta-analysis, argue that economic progress alone does not ensure environmental commitment, as social well-being and perceived QoL also shape ecological values. Therefore, sustainable consumption must be understood not only through economic metrics but also via subjective well-being and social cohesion (Wiesli et al. 2021).

Recent studies have emphasized the moderating role of consumer ETN in shaping preferences for local products, particularly in sustainability-related contexts. For instance, Trivedi et al. (2023), in a systematic literature review, highlight that ethnocentric attitudes significantly influence how consumers evaluate brands, especially when local identity and environmental responsibility are part of the brand's positioning. This suggests that ETN not only affects brand preferences but also reinforces the link between consumer responsibility and loyalty to local brands (Shahzad et al. 2024). Thus, incorporating ETN as a moderator in our model provides a novel perspective on how

identity-based factors interact with QoL to shape sustainable consumption.

This relationship becomes particularly relevant when considering that sustainable consumption is closely tied to local brands, which tend to have a lower carbon footprint and support more responsible production models (Bryła 2019; De Albuquerque Landi et al. 2023). Moreover, local brands promote a sense of community and reflect shared values, further strengthening consumer preference (Salnikova et al. 2022; Shahzad et al. 2024; Strizhakova and Coulter 2015). ETN may intensify this relationship, as consumers with strong cultural identity are more inclined to choose regional or national brands as a way to reaffirm that identity (Shahzad et al. 2024).

Therefore, this study aims to examine how regional disparities in QoL impact CRSC and preference for local brands, considering ETN as a key moderating factor. In contrast to prior studies focused on cross-country comparisons, our research focuses on Spain, providing a more nuanced view of the drivers of sustainable consumption across diverse regional contexts. The research draws on a representative sample of 2589 individuals in Spain, using an online questionnaire and data from the Multidimensional Quality-of-Life Indicator (IMCV) (INE 2022) provided by the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE). To capture regional differences, a hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted to group regions according to their QoL. These clusters were subsequently used as grouping variables in a multi-group analysis (MGA) within the structural equation modeling (SEM) framework, allowing us to examine whether the relationships between CRSC, ETN, and local brand preference (LBP) differ across QoL contexts.

By applying a CCT approach to intra-country differences in Spain, this study offers new insights into how QoL and identity-related factors such as ETN shape sustainable consumption and preference for local brands. Furthermore, this study contributes by offering a nuanced understanding of how regional disparities within a single country influence both sustainable consumption behaviors and preference for local brands. By moving beyond cross-national comparisons, our intra-country approach reveals context-specific patterns that can inform the design of more effective, regionally tailored policies, and marketing strategies. Furthermore, by incorporating ETN as a moderating variable, the study adds an original perspective on how identity-related factors intersect with QoL conditions to shape sustainable consumption decisions.

2 | Literature Review, Theoretical Model, and Hypotheses

2.1 | Literature Review

Sustainable consumption has gained increasing relevance in academic and policy discourses due to its implications for environmental preservation and social equity (Haider et al. 2022; Wiesli et al. 2021). It encompasses not only individual choices, as illustrated by Gilal et al. (2020), but also systemic factors such as accessibility to eco-friendly products, income, infrastructure, and environmental awareness

(Quoquab and Mohammad 2020). Within this framework, the notion of CRSC has emerged as a key construct, defined as the individual's ethical and moral obligation to act in ways that promote environmental and societal well-being (Farah and Shahzad 2020; Luchs et al. 2015). Recent literature shows that consumers who internalize a sense of responsibility toward sustainability tend to avoid harmful products and favor brands aligned with ethical values, thereby playing a key role in shaping sustainable consumption decisions (Epstein and Rejc Buhovac 2017; Hosta and Zabkar 2021; Kumar et al. 2021; Shahzad et al. 2024; Yuan et al. 2024). From the perspective of CCT, these behaviors are culturally embedded, reflecting identities, values, and shared meanings rather than purely rational evaluations (Arnould and Thompson 2005). In this sense, CRSC must be interpreted as part of the symbolic and social narratives that shape consumer decision-making.

Local brands are increasingly perceived as part of ethical consumption practices, due to their lower environmental footprint and stronger community ties (Bryła 2019; De Albuquerque Landi et al. 2023). This preference is not merely utilitarian but reflects deeper values such as trust, authenticity, and alignment with social and environmental goals (Mandler et al. 2021; Salnikova et al. 2022). They also act as signals of sustainable practices and social cohesion (Fernández-Ferrín et al. 2018; Zhou et al. 2010), especially among consumers who prioritize ethical concerns (Yuan et al. 2024). According to signaling theory, local brands can convey more authentic cues of sustainability—such as using local inputs or communicating environmental initiatives—which serve as signals that reduce uncertainty and build brand credibility (Erdem and Swait 1998; Özsumer and Altaras 2008). Within the CCT framework, these signals acquire symbolic value by reinforcing social belonging and cultural identity (Moisander et al. 2010). Additionally, perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE), the belief that one's actions can contribute to sustainability, acts as a mediator between CRSC and behavior; though its influence depends on contextual factors such as institutional trust and perceived agency (Axsen and Kurani 2013; Hanss and Doran 2020; Wamsler and Brink 2018).

Consumer ETN is defined as a belief system in which purchasing domestic products is viewed as morally appropriate and economically beneficial, while buying foreign products is perceived as harmful to the national economy (Shankarmahesh 2006). This construct is closely tied to feelings of national and regional pride, cultural identity, and a perceived civic duty to support one's own economy (Balabanis et al. 2019). ETN has been consistently linked to a preference for local products, especially in contexts where regional or national identity is salient (Bryła 2019; Trivedi et al. 2023). Consumers with ethnocentric tendencies often view local brands as embodiments of cultural heritage and economic protectionism. This emotional connection can reinforce loyalty and willingness to pay for local offerings, even in the presence of superior global alternatives (Cleveland et al. 2009; Kumar et al. 2021). Recent research has also explored how ETN interacts with psychological factors like consumer responsibility, especially in sustainability-related contexts. As shown by Shahzad et al. (2024), perceptions of ethical conduct and CSR initiatives can significantly influence brand decisions. From a CCT perspective, such preferences reflect symbolic boundaries that reinforce in-group loyalty and resistance to globalization

(Arnould and Thompson 2005; Ger 1999). Self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci 2000) adds that consumers are more likely to engage in sustainable behavior when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. These motivations, whether intrinsic (value alignment) or extrinsic (recognition), are filtered through sociocultural lenses, as emphasized by CCT.

QoL, as a multidimensional concept that encompasses both objective conditions (e.g., income, access to services) and subjective perceptions (e.g., life satisfaction, social connectedness), influences consumer values, priorities, and behaviors (Diener et al. 2018; Marans 2015; Wiesli et al. 2021). As proposed in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, individuals pursue socially responsible goals once their basic needs are satisfied (Maslow 1943). Higher QoL is generally associated with a stronger concern for sustainability and a greater willingness to pay for ethical products (Zhao and Wei 2019). In countries where these needs are met, individuals are more likely to pursue prosocial and ethical goals, including sustainable consumption (Jackson and Michaelis 2003; Puertas and Marti 2023; Wiesli et al. 2021). Moreover, QoL reinforces or inhibits the perceived feasibility of sustainable choices. As recent research shows, favorable living conditions foster a stronger connection between responsibility and behavior (Wiesli et al. 2021). Thus, CRSC is not only an individual disposition but also a function of the structural environment in which consumers operate.

The interaction between ETN and CRSC is particularly relevant here. Some studies suggest that both constructs may align, as ethical responsibility and cultural loyalty reinforce the same behavioral outcome: preference for local brands (Nguyen and Pham 2021; Shahzad et al. 2024). However, the effect may vary depending on regional context. In high-QoL areas, ETN tends to be value-driven and proactive; in contrast, in low-QoL settings, it may respond more to protectionist or defensive motivations (Marans 2015).

Despite growing interest in sustainable consumption, most research adopts a cross-national perspective, overlooking internal heterogeneity (Batra et al. 2000; Morren and Grinstein 2016). This study contributes to the literature by integrating CRSC, QoL, and ETN within a unified CCT framework, offering a more nuanced understanding of how these variables jointly shape preference for local brands. By adopting an intra-country lens focused on Spain, this study also addresses that gap by focusing on regional disparities within a country characterized by substantial contrasts in socioeconomic conditions and cultural identities (Boschma 2017; Faggian 2024).

2.2 | Theoretical Background

CCT provides an interpretive lens through which to understand consumption as a socially and culturally embedded practice (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Rather than treating consumption as the outcome of purely rational calculations or linear cause-effect relationships, CCT sees it as a performance of values, identities, and collective belonging. This perspective is especially relevant for exploring preferences for local brands and sustainability, which often involve symbolic choices rooted

in shared meanings and social structures. In this context, CCT offers rich explanatory power for how CRSC is enacted through culturally meaningful brand choices.

What distinguishes CCT is its ability to contextualize behavior within everyday lived experiences and symbolic structures, offering an integrative framework that places consumption decisions within culturally embedded, symbolic, and identity-driven dynamics (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Askegaard and Linnet 2011). This perspective is particularly appropriate for understanding preferences for local brands, which often function as cultural signifiers. Consumers engage in brand choice not only to satisfy functional needs but also to express cultural narratives, ethical commitments, and shared identities. Unlike individually centered perspectives, CCT allows us to understand not only what consumers do, but also how they culturally construct the meaning of their acts. This symbolic meaning-making process is essential when studying CRSC and LBP, especially in culturally diverse regions with distinct sociopolitical identities.

Importantly, CCT recognizes that consumption is not simply the result of individual rational choices but is shaped by broader market systems and institutional forces. Moreover, CCT acknowledges that consumption is shaped not only by individual agency but also by broader market systems and institutional forces. As Moisander et al. (2010) argue, marketing acts as a form of governmentality that structures consumer subjectivity and conducts through subtle techniques of influence and normalization. In this way, CCT does not merely interpret consumption but also helps generate hypotheses rooted in the interplay of values, motivations, cultural contexts, and the socio-market conditions that shape how individuals come to see themselves as consumers. In contrast to theories like SDT or PCE, which emphasize internal motivations or perceived behavioral control, CCT encompasses the broader symbolic and cultural contexts that shape these decisions. This allows for a more comprehensive examination of how collective values, sociopolitical narratives, and place-based attachments influence sustainable behavior.

While CCT anchors the theoretical framework, complementary theories enrich its interpretive strength. Signaling theory helps explain how brands convey authenticity and social values through visible cues. PCE and SDT add insights into the psychological mechanisms—like motivation and agency—that condition how values become behaviors. Maslow's needs hierarchy and QoL theory frame how external conditions enable or limit consumers' capacity for ethical action. Finally, social identity theory and ETN inform how cultural group membership shapes preferences in symbolically meaningful ways. Together, these theories reinforce and extend CCT's focus on symbolic consumption by embedding individual action in broader social, psychological, and structural contexts.

2.3 | Hypotheses

Local brands, by virtue of their transparency, proximity, and community embeddedness, often reflect values that align with consumer responsibility for sustainability (Bryła 2019; De Albuquerque Landi et al. 2023; Epstein and Rejc Buhovac 2017). The authenticity signals these brands send—like sustainable

sourcing or social impact—are interpreted by consumers as indicators of value congruence (Erdem and Swait 1998; Luchs and Miller 2015; Salnikova et al. 2022). CCT helps illuminate how this value alignment is not only cognitive but performative: consumers express their identity and ethical stance by preferring local over global brands (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Mandler et al. 2021).

Furthermore, under CCT, such preferences are shaped by culturally situated understandings of what it means to act responsibly and belong to a community. This symbolic alignment transforms CRSC from an internal disposition into a public act of cultural engagement. It highlights how brands become carriers of meaning, and how consumption becomes a way to participate in socially shared narratives about sustainability, authenticity, and collective well-being (Moisander et al. 2010). Therefore, grounded in the literature that links CRSC to ethical and sustainable consumption behaviors (Farah and Shahzad 2020; Quoquab and Mohammad 2020; Yuan et al. 2024) we suggest the following hypothesis:

H1. *Consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption (CRSC) positively influences the preference for local brands (LBP).*

ETN acts as a cultural amplifier in the link between CRSC and LBP. Consumers with higher ethnocentric tendencies are more likely to interpret CRSC through a lens of national or regional pride, reinforcing their support for local over global brands (Cleveland et al. 2009; Hogg 2016; Trivedi et al. 2023). Social identity theory suggests that consumers express their group affiliation through consumption, and ETN heightens the salience of in-group identity. When CRSC is filtered through this identity frame, local brands become both ethical and identity-signaling choices (Shankarmahesh 2006; Tajfel and Turner 2004).

CCT supports this interpretation by emphasizing that consumption is an expression of culturally constructed meaning. In high-QoL regions, where national or regional identity may be celebrated, ETN can reinforce proactive expressions of CRSC through brand choice (Ger 1999). Conversely, in lower-QoL contexts, ETN may reflect protective attachment rooted in economic vulnerability or distrust of external institutions (Marans 2015). In both cases, ETN enhances the cultural salience of local brands and strengthens the motivational link between CRSC and consumer behavior. Therefore:

H2. *Consumer ethnocentrism (ETN) will strengthen the relationship between CRSC and LBP.*

However, all of these effects may not be uniform across all contexts. Higher levels of QoL foster the psychological and structural conditions necessary for ethical consumption. In high-QoL environments, consumers have greater access to education, resources, and institutional trust, which strengthens PCE (Hanss and Doran 2020) and makes CRSC-driven preferences for local brands more feasible and salient (Wamsler and Brink 2018). According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, once basic needs are met, individuals pursue higher-order goals such as self-actualization, which may be expressed through sustainable and community-supportive consumption (Jackson and Michaelis 2003; Wiesli et al. 2021; Zhao and Wei 2019).

From a CCT perspective, these conditions of QoL foster an environment in which symbolic consumption becomes a viable mode of identity expression and value alignment. Consumers in such contexts are better positioned to act on their values through choices that reflect not only personal ethics but also community solidarity and cultural pride. Thus, QoL serves as a structural enabler of the CRSC–LBP link, supporting the enactment of sustainability in everyday consumption. Drawing from this theoretical foundation, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3a. *Quality-of-Life moderates the positive relationship between CRSC and LBP.*

Likewise, ETN can reflect different identity dynamics depending on the socioeconomic context. While QoL directly moderates the relationship between CRSC and LBP—H3a, we also posit that the moderating effect of ETN on this relationship is itself conditioned by QoL. Specifically, in higher QoL contexts, ETN may act as an amplifier of symbolic meaning, intensifying the perceived ethical and cultural value of local brand attachment among responsible consumers.

Consumers with strong ethnocentric tendencies often rely on in-group affiliation and symbolic boundaries to guide their sustainable consumption choices (Shankarmahesh 2006; Tajfel and Turner 2004). However, the nature and strength of this ethnocentric influence are shaped by the socioeconomic context, particularly by the surrounding level of QoL. In high-QoL environments, ETN is more likely to be aspirational—rooted in cultural pride and identity affirmation—and thereby aligns with the symbolic consumption patterns emphasized by CCT (Balabanis et al. 2019; Ger 1999). In such settings, local brands become emblematic of both ethical responsibility and cultural allegiance, reinforcing the effect of CRSC on LBP.

Conversely, in lower-QoL contexts, ethnocentric behavior may be driven less by symbolic identity expression and more by defensive motives such as economic insecurity, institutional distrust, or perceived external threats (Kumar et al. 2021; Marans 2015). In these cases, ETN functions as a protective mechanism rather than a form of cultural affirmation, potentially weakening its alignment with sustainability values and diminishing its reinforcing effect on CRSC-driven brand preference.

This dual character of ETN suggests that its moderating effect on the CRSC–LBP relationship is itself contingent on QoL. Specifically, we expect that in regions with higher QoL, ETN will amplify the symbolic and cultural relevance of sustainability and strengthen the CRSC–LBP link. In contrast, in lower-QoL contexts, this moderating effect may be less pronounced or even redirected. CCT provides a useful interpretive lens for these dynamics by situating consumption within broader socio-cultural structures: in stable, affluent regions, LBP may function as a performative expression of pride and belonging; in more vulnerable contexts, the same preference may emerge as an act of resilience or resistance.

Thus, QoL not only shapes the broader conditions for sustainable consumption but also moderates the role of ETN in reinforcing (or reshaping) the symbolic and motivational force of

CRSC in consumer behavior. Based on this reasoning, we posit the following hypothesis:

H3b. *The moderation effect of ethnocentrism (ETN) in the relationship between CRSC and LBP is conditioned by Quality of Life (QoL).*

Building on the preceding hypotheses, our conceptual model posits that CRSC has a direct and positive influence on LBP, and that this relationship is moderated by consumer ETN. Furthermore, we conceptualize QoL as a contextual factor that shapes the strength of these relationships by capturing underlying regional disparities in social, economic, and cultural conditions (Figure 1). Rather than modeling QoL as a statistical moderator, we treat it as a grouping variable derived from a hierarchical cluster analysis based on nine IMCV database provided by the National Statistics Institute (INE 2022). The resulting clusters represent distinct regional contexts across Spain.

The proposed model examines the direct effect of CRSC on LBP ($H1 = CRSC \rightarrow LBP$), as well as the moderating role of ETN on this relationship ($H2 = ETN \text{ moderates } CRSC \rightarrow LBP$). To explore contextual influences, QoL is incorporated as a grouping variable based on regional clusters derived from QoL indicators. These clusters serve as the basis for a MGA, which allows for testing whether the strength of the $CRSC \rightarrow LBP$ relationship and the $CRSC \times ETN$ interaction differ across varying QoL contexts (H3a, H3b). This approach captures conditional moderation effects without modeling a formal three-way interaction.

3 | Research Method

3.1 | Data and Sample

Spain, comprising 17 autonomous communities, exhibits a rich regional, cultural, and economic diversity. In 2023, the national average GDP per capita was 28,162 euros, below the EU average of 35,440 euros. Seven regions exceeded the national average, with two surpassing the EU average. This economic variability, along with diverse QoL levels, provides an ideal backdrop for this study's objectives.

QoL data were sourced from the 2022 IMCV database provided by the National Statistics Institute (INE 2022). The INE

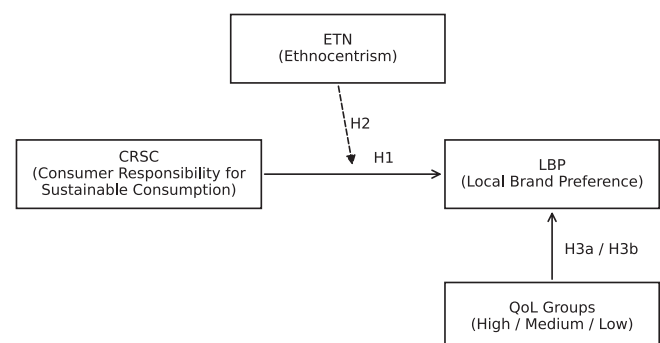


FIGURE 1 | General model and hypotheses. Source: Own elaboration.

compiles 57 items, subsequently consolidated into nine dimensions covering Spain's 17 autonomous communities. Our database includes the nine QoL indicators: Material living conditions (income, poverty, economic security), Job (quantity and quality), Health (outcomes, access, determinants), Education (skills, continuous learning), Leisure and social relationships (event attendance, social frequency), Physical security (objective indicators, perceived safety), Governance and rights (trust in institutions, participation), Environment (pollution, access to green spaces), and Life experience (life satisfaction, emotions, sense of purpose). All of these indicators offer a detailed view of overall QoL (general descriptive information about IMCV and its evolution as well as results by autonomous communities can be found on this link: https://www.ine.es/en/prensa/experimental_ind_multi_calidad_vida_2022_en.pdf).

To ensure our study accurately represented the entire Spanish population aged 18–85 years (totaling 38,624,561 individuals as of January 1, 2023), we conducted the survey using a representative sample from this age group. The data were collected through an external panel provider, Netquest, which ensured a demographically balanced sample according to quotas for gender and age, based on official population statistics from the INE. Participants were residents of the 17 autonomous communities of Spain, and quotas were also applied at the regional level to ensure geographic representation. Data collection took place between January 2 and January 12, 2023. Before beginning the survey, all respondents provided informed consent. Attention check questions were included to ensure data quality, and cases failing these checks were removed from the final sample.

Prior to the main data collection, the survey was pretested with a sample of 25 participants representing a range of regions, ages, and educational backgrounds. Participants were asked to provide feedback on item clarity, language consistency, and survey length. Minor revisions were made to improve item comprehension and flow, particularly for the constructs measuring perceived effectiveness and local brand image. The pretest confirmed the face validity of the instrument and its suitability for the broader sample.

From an initial pool of 5394 invited participants, 2589 individuals successfully completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 47.99%. The final sample was deemed statistically representative, with a 95% confidence level, a 1.9% margin of error, and an assumed proportion rate of 50%.

Participants provided sociodemographic details, including gender, age, income, education level, household composition, and purchasing habits. The dataset contained no missing values. As summarized in Table 1, men accounted for 51.83% of the respondents, with an average age of 49.75 years. The most prevalent subgroups included individuals aged 35–54 years (37.51%), those earning a middle-to-high income (58.21% reporting monthly earnings above €2001), participants with secondary or upper secondary education (87.64%), and individuals living with family members or others (48.09%).

TABLE 1 | Descriptive statistics.

Variables	Categories	Freq.	%
Age	< 35 years	591	22.83
	35–54 years	971	37.51
	55–74 years	740	28.58
	> 74 years	287	11.09
Gender	Male	1342	51.83
	Female	1247	48.16
Living situation	Living alone	383	14.79
	Living with other	1245	48.09
	Living with family	961	37.12
Income	< 1000 €	332	12.82
	1000–2000 €	750	28.97
	2001–3000 €	732	28.27
	> 3000 €	775	29.94
Education	Lower	320	12.36
	Secondary	894	34.53
	Tertiary	995	38.43
	Master & Ph.D.	380	14.68

3.2 | Measures and Instrumentation

The model shown in Figure 1 includes the constructs of CRSC, LBP, and ETN, measured by 12 items. These items, used as reflective indicators for the first-order constructs, were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Table 2 summarizes these constructs.

3.3 | Analytical Strategy

In the first step, we conducted a cluster analysis to identify regions that are homogeneous across the nine dimensions of QoL derived from the IMCV database provided by the National Statistics Institute (INE 2022). A hierarchical cluster analysis was performed to group the autonomous communities in Spain based on their similarities in these dimensions. We used Ward's method, which minimizes variance within each cluster, combined with Euclidean distance as the similarity metric. To determine the optimal number of clusters, we examined the agglomeration coefficient, analyzed the dendrogram, and performed ANOVA analysis, ensuring that the resulting segmentation was both meaningful and statistically appropriate. This clustering approach allowed us to identify distinct regional groupings within Spain, facilitating a more detailed analysis of the studied factors.

Next, we employed SEM, specifically partial least squares (PLS), to assess both the measurement and structural models. PLS-SEM was chosen for this study due to several

TABLE 2 | Measurement scales.

Construct	Item	Items	References
Consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption	I feel obligated to try to implement sustainable practices where appropriate.	CRSC1	Luchs and Miller (2015)
	It is up to me to bring about improvements in sustainability.	CRSC2	
	I feel a personal sense of responsibility to be more sustainable in my product choices.	CRSC3	
Local brand preference	It makes sense to always choose a local brand, even if global brands have slightly better services.	LBP1	Liu et al. (2014); Yoo et al. (2000)
	Even if another global brand has a better portfolio of products than the local brand, I strongly prefer the local brand.	LBP2	
	Although a global brand offers more convenient product, I still prefer to choose the local brand.	LBP3	
	The local brand would easily be my first choice	LBP4	
	I have a very strong preference for local brands.	LBP5	
Ethnocentrism	Purchasing foreign-made products is unpatriotic.	ETN1	Batra et al. (2000); Zhou et al. (2010)
	A real Spaniard should always buy domestic products.	ETN2	
	Spaniard should not purchase imported goods, because we need to support our own economy.	ETN3	
	Spaniards should try not to buy foreign brands whenever possible.	ETN4	

methodological and practical reasons. Recent bibliometric analyses confirm the growing adoption of PLS-SEM across disciplines due to its ability to estimate complex models, handle small sample sizes, and focus on predictive accuracy rather than model fit (Angelelli et al. 2025). Specifically, research has shown that PLS-SEM facilitates knowledge transfer across domains and is increasingly used to analyze sustainability-related topics, consumer behavior, and business performance (Angelelli et al. 2025). Furthermore, the increasing integration of PLS-SEM in diverse fields supports its suitability for this study. Recent methodological developments, such as new model evaluation metrics and enhanced techniques for handling heterogeneous data structures, strengthen PLS-SEM's relevance in modern research applications (Hair et al. 2024; Sarstedt et al. 2016).

Likewise, PLS-SEM offers higher statistical power, making it an optimal choice for exploratory research design (Aksoy and Bayram Arlı 2020; Lew and Sinkovics 2013; Sarstedt et al. 2016). Given our focus on exploring and extending theoretical relationships, PLS-SEM provides greater flexibility in testing complex models while ensuring robust predictive accuracy. On the

other hand, unlike CB-SEM, which relies on strict assumptions of data normality and large sample sizes, PLS-SEM is particularly suited for non-normally distributed data. In our study, three out of five LBP indicators did not meet normality assumptions, as revealed by a normality test (Fitrianto and Chin 2016). This methodological advantage allows us to obtain robust estimates without imposing restrictive distributional assumptions. Finally, our study adopts a causal-predictive approach, which aligns with PLS-SEM's emphasis on prediction rather than strict confirmatory analysis (Hair et al. 2024). Given these factors, PLS-SEM represents the appropriate analytical approach for our research objectives.

A MGA was also performed to assess whether the relationships between CRSC, ETN, and LBP varied significantly across Spanish regional clusters. MGA was conducted in SmartPLS 4 using the bootstrapped MGA procedure. This method compares path coefficients across groups by computing bootstrap confidence intervals and identifying statistically significant differences between them. Following Hair et al. (2019), we used 5000 bootstrap resamples and considered group differences to be significant when the *p*-values were below 0.05 and

Map of Spanish regions grouped by hierarchical cluster analysis

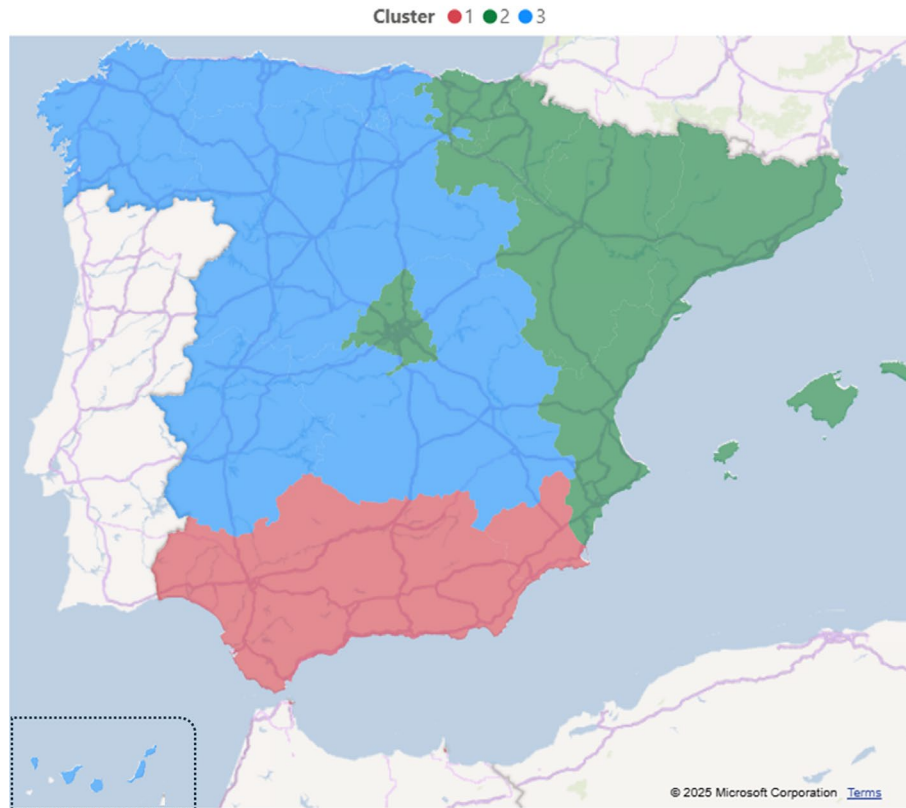


FIGURE 2 | Regional clusters based on quality-of-life indicators across Spain.

the confidence intervals did not include zero. This approach is appropriate when testing moderation effects across categorical groups such as the QoL-based clusters defined through hierarchical analysis.

4 | Results

4.1 | Cluster Analysis

After testing various cluster solutions, ANOVA results supported a three-cluster solution for its clear group characterization. To visualize the distribution of the QoL clusters across the country, Figure 2 shows a map of Spanish regions colored according to their cluster membership. The dendrogram resulting from the hierarchical clustering procedure is presented in Figure A1.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) results (Table 3) reveal distinct patterns among the three clusters based on their QoL indicators. Cluster 1, comprising five regions, faces the greatest socioeconomic challenges, with the lowest scores in four key dimensions: Material living conditions, Job, Education, and Environment. In contrast, Cluster 2, the largest group with eight regions, emerges as the most developed and urbanized, achieving the highest values in Job, Health, and Leisure and social relationships, reflecting stronger economic and social conditions. Meanwhile, Cluster 3, which includes regions from central and northeastern Spain, stands out primarily for its high Physical security; though it also exhibits the lowest level of subjective well-being, as measured by Life experience.

These findings highlight the diverse socioeconomic and environmental realities across Spain's autonomous communities. Accordingly, we propose naming Cluster 1 as “Regions with Socioeconomic Challenges,” Cluster 2 as “Developed and Urbanized Communities,” and Cluster 3 as “Secure and Environmentally Rich Rural Regions.” These labels provide a clearer understanding of each cluster's defining characteristics and regional composition.

4.2 | Measurement Model Assessment

A PLS model is generally analyzed in two stages: first, analyze the reliability and validity of the measurement model (the outer model); and second, analyze the structural (inner) model (Hair et al. 2019).

First, procedural remedies for controlling the common method biases were followed (Podsakoff et al. 2003). To strengthen validity, the questionnaire used clear and concise questions, and respondents' anonymity was ensured. The Harmon one-factor test showed that common method bias was not a concern; three factors with eigenvalues above 1 accounted for 73.39% of the variance, with the first factor capturing 40.98% (Podsakoff et al. 2003).

We analyzed the validity and reliability of the scales in our model, controlling for relationships across different autonomous community groups and testing the measurement instruments' reliability and validity for these subgroups. Scale development

TABLE 3 | Cooperative clusters with quality-of-life indicators.

QoL indicator	(A) Cluster 1: Regions with Socioeconomic Challenges	(B) Cluster 2: Developed and Urbanized Communities	(C) Cluster 3: Secure and Environmentally Rich Rural Regions
	Andalusia, Canary Islands, Murcia, Ceuta, Melilla	Aragon, La-Rioja, Navarre, Basque-Country, Balearic-Islands, Valencian-Community, Catalonia, Community-of-Madrid	Asturias, Cantabria, Galicia, Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla-León, Extremadura
1. Material	94.85	102.95 A	101.43 A
2. Job	97.19	103.21 A, C	99.99 A
3. Health	101.08	103.59 A, C	101.06
4. Education	105.57	111.61 A	109.73 a
5. Leisure	95.490	98.573 A, c	96.815
6. Security	97.01	101.14	106.22 A, B
7. Rights	97.84	100.22	97.06
8. Environment	95.34	104.1 A	104.82 A
9. Life experience	104.03 C	104.79 C	99.43

Note: Values above represent means, with bold values highlighting the highest or lowest for each indicator. A, B, and C correspond to Clusters 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Letters below the means indicate significant differences between clusters: capital letters (A, B, C) denote statistically significant differences at $p=0.05$, while lowercase letters (a, b, c) indicate marginal significance at $p=0.1$. For example, in the Material living conditions dimension, Cluster 2 has a mean value of 102.95, with the letter A below it. This indicates a statistically significant difference ($p=0.05$) between Clusters 1 and 2 in this dimension.

was based on a review of seminal literature, ensuring content validity (Hair et al. 2019).

To assess the reliability of first-order reflective constructs, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using Stata, which confirmed one-dimensionality for all constructs by revealing a single dimension per construct. Item-total correlations exceeded the 0.3 threshold recommended by Nurosis (1993) indicating satisfactory reliability. Table 4 reports the outer loadings for reflective indicators, confirming convergent validity through analysis of factor loadings and their significance. The item loadings in our models exceeded 0.6 (Bagozzi and Yi 1988), with average loadings above 0.7 (Hair et al. 2012). A re-sampling procedure (5000 subsamples) confirmed all loadings as significant ($p<0.001$), supporting convergent validity across all reflective constructs for the four models.

The composite reliability (CR) for each construct met the 0.60 threshold (Bagozzi and Yi 1988), and the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded 0.50 for all constructs (Fornell and

Larcker 1981), indicating acceptable reliability for the first-order constructs (see Table 5).

Finally, the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio, as well as the comparison of the bivariate correlations and square roots of the AVEs showed an adequate discriminant validity of all the constructs for every model, since all the diagonal values exceeded the inter-construct correlations (see Table 6).

Based on all the criteria, it was concluded that the measures in the study provided sufficient evidence of reliability and validity.

4.3 | Structural Model Results

After evaluating the psychometric properties of the measurement instrument, we proceeded to estimate the structural model using PLS and the same criteria for determining the significance of the parameters (bootstrapping of 5000 subsamples). First, the general model was run (Table 7).¹

TABLE 4 | Convergent validity.

Construct	Item	Outer loadings			
		General	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
CRSC	CRSC1	0.856	0.853	0.849	0.874
	CRSC2	0.824	0.838	0.822	0.820
	CRSC4	0.878	0.907	0.871	0.861
ETN	ETN1	0.857	0.872	0.852	0.846
	ETN2	0.882	0.888	0.882	0.872
	ETN3	0.871	0.874	0.867	0.878
	ETN4	0.874	0.876	0.872	0.875
LBP	LBP1	0.843	0.814	0.855	0.842
	LBP2	0.859	0.838	0.864	0.866
	LBP3	0.862	0.852	0.862	0.870
	LBP4	0.811	0.802	0.817	0.802
	LBP5	0.836	0.835	0.836	0.841

TABLE 5 | Reliability assessment.

	CRSC				ETN				LBP			
	Global	C1	C2	C3	Global	C1	C2	C3	Global	C1	C2	C3
Cronbach's alpha	0.813	0.834	0.805	0.811	0.894	0.901	0.892	0.892	0.898	0.886	0.901	0.899
Composite reliability (rho_a)	0.817	0.845	0.810	0.813	0.899	0.907	0.895	0.903	0.898	0.887	0.902	0.901
Composite reliability (rho_c)	0.889	0.900	0.884	0.888	0.926	0.931	0.925	0.924	0.924	0.916	0.927	0.925
Average variance extracted (AVE)	0.728	0.751	0.718	0.726	0.759	0.770	0.754	0.753	0.710	0.686	0.717	0.713

TABLE 6 | Discriminant validity.

HTMT	General		Cluster 1		Cluster 2		Cluster 3	
	CRSC	ETN	CRSC	ETN	CRSC	ETN	CRSC	ETN
ETN	0.088		0.058		0.097		0.134	
LBP	0.415	0.443	0.379	0.389	0.402	0.474	0.502	0.409

Fornell–Larcker criterion												
	General			Cluster 1			Cluster 2			Cluster 3		
	CRSC	ETN	LBP	CRSC	ETN	LBP	CRSC	ETN	LBP	CRSC	ETN	LBP
CRSC	0.853			0.866			0.848			0.852		
ETN	0.074	0.871		0.022	0.878		0.084	0.868		0.115	0.868	
LBP	0.356	0.400	0.842	0.329	0.350	0.828	0.344	0.428	0.847	0.428	0.374	0.844

To assess the structural model's predictive ability, we used Falk and Miller (1992) approach, requiring the R^2 value of the dependent construct to exceed 0.1. Table 7 shows that the R^2 value for the dependent variable LBP is 0.267, surpassing the critical level. The coefficient of CRSC on LBP is positive and significant (0.329, $p = 0.000$), supporting hypothesis H1. ETN also has a significant positive effect on LBP (0.374, $p = 0.000$). However, ETN does not moderate the CRSC effect on LBP (0.010, $p = 0.577$), thus H2 is not supported.

4.4 | Moderation Results of QoL

The model was tested for each subgroup to examine QoL's moderating effect and analyze group-specific relationships. Before assessing moderation through MGA, measurement invariance was confirmed using the MICOM procedure (Hair et al. 2012), which included configurational, compositional, and scalar invariance checks (Henseler et al. 2016). Table 8 presents compositional invariance (step 2 in MICOM). Partial invariance was indicated due to the inequality of composite means and variances between Regions with Socioeconomic Challenges and Developed and Urbanized Communities—Clusters 1 and 2—and Developed and Urbanized Communities and Secure and Environmentally Rich Rural Regions—Clusters 2 and 3. Since partial invariance is

sufficient to proceed with MGA (Byrne and Stewart 2006; Hair et al. 2012), we continued to evaluate the moderator effect of clusters on the proposed relationships (Henseler et al. 2016).

As previously anticipated, MGA was conducted in SmartPLS 4 using the bootstrapped MGA procedure. This method compares path coefficients across groups by computing bootstrap confidence intervals and identifying statistically significant differences between them. Following Hair et al. (2024) and Keil et al. (2000), we used 5000 bootstrap resamples and considered group differences to be significant when the p -values were below 0.05 and the confidence intervals did not include zero. This approach is appropriate when testing moderation effects across categorical groups such as QoL-based clusters defined through hierarchical analysis. Table 9 reports the results.

The results indicate that the direct effect of CRSC on LBP is positive and significant in all three clusters (0.327, 0.308, and 0.393, respectively). However, statistically significant differences exist between Cluster 2 and Cluster 3 (diff. = -0.085 ; $p = 0.084$, indicating a significant difference at the 90% confidence level).

Similarly, the effect of ETN on LBP is significant across all clusters but differs significantly between Cluster 2 and Cluster 3

TABLE 7 | Estimation of the general model.

Paths	Coefficient	Standard deviation	t statistics	p
CRSC $\rightarrow$ LBP	0.329	0.019	17.443	< 0.001
ETN $\rightarrow$ LBP	0.374	0.018	21.142	< 0.001
ETN $\times$ CRSC $\rightarrow$ LBP	0.010	0.018	0.558	0.577
		R^2	R^2 adjusted	
LBP		0.267	0.266	

Note: Values in bold indicate statistically significant path coefficients ($p < 0.001$).

TABLE 8 | Results of the invariance measurement testing.

Original correlation		Correlation permutation mean	5.0%	Permutation p -value
Cluster 1 vs. Cluster 2				
CRSC	1.000	0.999	0.997	0.720
ETN	1.000	1.000	0.999	0.498
LBP	1.000	1.000	0.999	0.258
Cluster 1 vs. Cluster 3				
CRSC	0.999	0.999	0.997	0.611
ETN	1.000	1.000	0.999	0.348
LBP	1.000	1.000	0.999	0.329
Cluster 2 vs. Cluster 3				
CRSC	0.999	0.999	0.997	0.331
ETN	1.000	1.000	0.999	0.375
LBP	1.000	1.000	0.999	0.799

TABLE 9 | Multigroup comparison test results.

	Coeff. Cluster 1 (C1)	Coeff. Cluster 2 (C2)	Coeff. Cluster 3 (C3)	Diff. (C1 – C2)	<i>p</i> (C1 – C2)	Diff. (C1 – C3)	<i>p</i> (C1 – C3)	Diff. (C2 – C3)	<i>p</i> (C2 – C3)
CRSC → LBP	0.327***	0.308**	0.393***	0.019	0.678	−0.066	0.264	−0.085	0.084
ETN → LBP	0.330***	0.405**	0.327***	−0.074	0.107	0.003	0.952	0.078	0.095
ETN × CRSC → LBP	0.069*	−0.018	0.015	0.088	0.056	0.055	0.339	−0.033	0.496

Note: **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < 0.001. Values in bold indicate statistically significant path coefficients (*p* < 0.001).

(diff. = 0.078; *p* = 0.095, indicating significance difference at the 90% confidence level).

Finally, the interaction term ETN × CRSC → LBP is significant only for Regions with Socioeconomic Challenges—Cluster 1, with a difference between these regions and Developed and Urbanized Communities—Cluster 2 (diff. = 0.088, *p* = 0.056, indicating significance difference at the 90% confidence level).

These findings provide evidence that the impact of CRSC and ETN on LBP varies depending on QoL conditions across clusters.

5 | Discussion of Results

The results reveal that CRSC significantly influences LBP across all clusters. However, its effect varies by QoL conditions, particularly between Developed and Urbanized Communities—Cluster 2 (high QoL: job access, health, leisure) and Secure and Environmentally Rich Rural Regions—Cluster 3 (high QoL: safety). In the latter, where safety is a defining QoL factor, CRSC has a stronger impact on LBP. This suggests that in areas where security is prioritized, consumers place greater value on responsible consumption as a means of reinforcing social stability and local economic resilience.

Conversely, in Developed and Urbanized Communities—Cluster 2, where QoL is high in job opportunities, health, and leisure, the CRSC → LBP link is weaker than expected. This aligns with studies indicating that in developed regions with superior infrastructure, consumers have access to a broader range of brands, reducing their reliance on local options (Erdem et al. 2006; Morren and Grinstein 2016). In these areas, global brands may be more appreciated, while local brands lack the recognition and prestige of larger, well-established competitors. Furthermore, consumers in Developed and Urbanized Communities—Cluster 2—may prioritize sustainability practices over brand origin, meaning that they are more likely to support both local and global brands that demonstrate responsible practices (Diekmann and Franzen 2019; Morren and Grinstein 2016).

Regarding ETN and LBP, the results show a significant difference between Developed and Urbanized Communities—Cluster 2—and Secure and Environmentally Rich Rural Regions—Cluster 3—reinforcing the idea that strong QoL conditions (job access, health, leisure) intensify ethnocentric preferences for local brands. ETN fosters a stronger emotional connection

TABLE 10 | Summary of hypotheses.

	Conclusion
Hypotheses (general model)	
H1: CRSC → LBP	Supported
H2: ETN × CRSC → LBP	Not supported
QoL Hypotheses	
H3a: CRSC → LBP	Supported (sig. diff. C2 vs. C3)
H3b: ETN × CRSC → LBP	Not Supported

with local products, which can be particularly pronounced in high-QoL regions where consumers seek to support their local economy and cultural identity (Cleveland et al. 2009; Sharma et al. 1995).

The results also indicate that ETN moderates the CRSC → LBP link only in Regions with Socioeconomic Challenges—Cluster 1 (low QoL), where the interaction term is significantly different from Developed and Urbanized Communities—Cluster 2 (*p* = 0.056, 90% confidence level). This suggests that in areas with lower QoL conditions (poor material living conditions, employment, education, and environment), ethnocentric sentiment amplifies the effect of CRSC on LBP. Consumers in these regions may perceive local brands as a symbol of community identity and economic support, reinforcing their preference for locally produced goods (Ben-Othmen and Kavouras 2024; Zhou et al. 2010). The perception that supporting local brands contributes to regional development and job creation strengthens their commitment to sustainable consumption in this context (Zhou et al. 2010).

Thus, while H3a is supported (significant differences in the effect of CRSC on LBP between Clusters 2 and 3), H3b is not supported, as the moderating effect of ETN on CRSC → LBP is only significant for Regions with Socioeconomic Challenges—Cluster 1. Table 10 summarizes all these results.

As pointed out in Table 10, while the direct effects of CRSC and ETN on LBP were supported, the moderating role of ETN (H2) and the conditional moderation of this effect by regional QoL (H3b) were not. These nonsignificant results may be better understood when considered through the lens of CCT (Arnould and Thompson 2005), which emphasizes the contextual, symbolic, and culturally embedded nature of consumer behavior.

From this perspective, the failure to support H2 may reflect the complex and sometimes nonadditive interplay between moral responsibility and identity-based motivations. Although both CRSC and ETN independently influence LBP, they may operate in parallel rather than synergistic ways. That is, for some consumers, the preference for local brands may be driven primarily by ethical responsibility (CRSC), while for others, it is more strongly shaped by cultural or national identity (ETN). These mechanisms may not always reinforce each other, especially in regions where consumers distinguish between ethical behavior and national loyalty, leading to a nonsignificant interaction effect.

Additionally, SDT (Ryan and Deci 2000) suggests that the effectiveness of motivational drivers depends on the degree to which individuals perceive their actions as self-endorsed and contextually enabled. In higher QoL regions, where autonomy and well-being are generally higher, consumers may feel equally empowered to act on either their ethical beliefs or their identity-driven preferences without these necessarily reinforcing each other. This could explain the lack of support for H3b, as higher QoL might facilitate the independent expression of CRSC and ETN, rather than an interaction between them.

Moreover, social identity theory (Hogg 2016) helps us understand that ETN, while a stable trait, may be situationally activated only in contexts where identity is threatened or salient. In high QoL regions, where individuals may feel secure and less economically vulnerable, the motivational salience of ETN may be reduced, weakening its moderating power on the CRSC–LBP relationship. In contrast, in lower QoL regions, identity-based consumption may become more prominent to express belonging or resist perceived external threats—explaining why moderation was only significant in Cluster 1.

While our findings offer important insights into the role of consumer responsibility, ETN, and regional QoL in shaping LBP, we have to acknowledge that other explanatory factors may also be at play. For instance, individual differences in environmental concern, political ideology, or regional exposure to sustainability campaigns may influence both CRSC and LBP, independently of ETN or QoL. Moreover, local brand availability, perceived price–quality ratio, and media influence could act as intervening variables that moderate or mediate these relationships. Given the cross-sectional nature of our study, we cannot infer causality; the interactions observed may be context-dependent. In this sense, longitudinal or experimental designs could help disentangle these effects and test additional mechanisms behind the observed patterns.

6 | Conclusions

The results of this research highlight the relevance of QoL and ETN in CRSC and preference for local brands. The findings reveal that CRSC leads consumers to prefer local brands; this relationship is reinforced by their ethnocentric sentiment. The results also show that local consumer QoL conditions affect these relationships. Specifically, this study contributes to the literature in three important ways.

This study addresses a relevant gap in the literature by offering a theoretically integrated and contextually nuanced model of sustainable consumption that foregrounds regional heterogeneity within a single country. While most prior research has adopted cross-national perspectives, typically comparing developed versus developing countries (e.g., Diekmann and Franzen 2019; Morren and Grinstein 2016), this study focuses on intra-country disparities in QoL—a level of analysis largely overlooked in sustainable consumption research. By using a hierarchical cluster analysis based on multidimensional QoL indicators, the research identifies within-country heterogeneity in consumer responses to sustainability and local branding. In doing so, we show that national-level generalizations may mask significant regional variations in values, infrastructure, and cultural identity, which have a direct influence on consumer behavior. Recognizing this subnational heterogeneity is essential for developing effective, locally tailored strategies (Boschma 2017) and understanding local conditions have a certain impact on consumer sustainable behavior (Faggian 2024; Siemieniako et al. 2011; Zhou et al. 2010).

Second, this research contributes by positioning CCT as the central interpretive lens, not just as a background reference but as a framework that organizes how values, identities, and structural inequalities shape consumption practices. We extend CCT by embedding it within a multi-theory architecture that integrates SDT, social identity theory, and signaling theory, thereby explaining how ethical motivations, group belonging, and symbolic brand meanings jointly shape LBPs. This integration responds to the call for more context-sensitive applications of CCT and reinforces the view of consumption as culturally performed and structurally conditioned behavior. The paper offers a coherent sociocultural interpretation of sustainable consumer behavior. This approach helps to explain not only the cognitive but also the symbolic and performative dimensions of choosing local brands in response to sustainability concerns.

Third, the research provides empirical evidence of contextualized conditional moderation. It shows that QoL not only moderates the direct relationship between CRSC and LBP, but also conditions the strength of ETN's moderating role. This is particularly evident in low QoL areas, where ETN strengthens the impact of CRSC on LBP (Fernández-Ferrín et al. 2018). In these regions, consumers choose local brands not solely for quality or price but as an expression of economic support, community solidarity, and local identity, fostering regional economic development (Cleveland et al. 2009).

QoL significantly influences consumers' sustainable behavior, encompassing both objective factors like access to services and subjective factors such as personal satisfaction and social relationships. These dimensions impact consumers' readiness to adopt sustainable consumption practices. Research shows that CRSC and LBP vary by regional QoL. In regions with high QoL linked to personal safety, consumers show a strong preference for local brands. However, in areas with broader access to jobs, health, and leisure, this preference weakens due to more brand options. This suggests that safety enhances LBP, while greater resource access may reduce it. This supports previous research in developed regions, where greater access to technology and

resources encourages environmentally responsible behavior and a preference for sustainable products, whether local or global (Morren and Grinstein 2016).

7 | Implications

7.1 | Theoretical Implications

This study is grounded in CCT (Arnould and Thompson 2005), which serves as the overarching framework guiding our analysis. CCT conceptualizes consumption as a culturally embedded, socially situated practice that reflects individuals' identities, values, and lived realities. Rather than treating consumption as a purely rational or isolated act, CCT emphasizes how consumer behavior is shaped by broader social structures, regional dynamics, and symbolic meanings. By adopting this perspective, our study contributes to the literature by showing that sustainable consumption and preference for local brands are not merely ethical or utilitarian choices, but culturally meaningful actions rooted in regional contexts and collective identities.

Within this framework, QoL emerges as a key contextual factor influencing how consumers engage with sustainability. Our findings suggest that QoL facilitates consumers' autonomous motivation to adopt sustainable behaviors, reinforcing principles from both SDT (Ryan and Deci 2000) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1943). In regions where basic needs are met, individuals are more likely to pursue higher-order goals such as environmental consciousness and social responsibility. This is consistent with Gilal et al. (2020), who emphasize that intrinsic and identified motivations are critical drivers of sustainable consumer behavior. These motivations are more likely to flourish in contexts where autonomy and well-being are supported, reinforcing the relevance of SDT in the sustainability domain.

Our findings can be interpreted through the lens of signaling theory (Erdem and Swait 1998), as local brands that visibly engage in sustainable practices appear more likely to be favored by ethically driven and culturally rooted consumers. These individuals interpret such efforts as signals of shared values and trustworthiness—attributes that resonate with their personal convictions and cultural identities.

Moreover, our findings can also be interpreted through PCE theory (Hanss and Doran 2020), which posits that consumers who believe their actions have a tangible impact are more inclined to adopt sustainable behaviors. We find that this perceived agency is shaped not only by individual disposition but also by regional context. In high-QoL areas, consumers express greater confidence in their ability to make a difference, which reinforces sustainable consumption behaviors and preferences for brands aligned with their values.

Still within the CCT framework, this study highlights that sustainable consumption and preference for local brands are strongly influenced by regional cultural and social contexts. By examining how QoL interacts with ETN, the study enriches the sustainability literature, demonstrating that consumer choices are shaped not only by ethical considerations but also by social

identity, cultural attachment, and regional socioeconomic conditions (Morren and Grinstein 2016; Sharma et al. 1995). This underscores the inseparability of consumption practices from their cultural and contextual foundations and emphasizes the need for more regionally nuanced analyses.

In particular, the study reveals that ETN, as an expression of regional or national identity, significantly drives preference for local over global brands. In high-ETN regions, consumers are more likely to choose local brands to affirm cultural pride and identity, beyond purely economic considerations (Shankarmahesh 2006). These findings resonate with ideas from social identity theory (Hogg 2016), illustrating how social identity may influence sustainable consumption. Supporting local brands can foster social cohesion and group belonging, especially in lower-QoL regions where consumers may feel a stronger sense of responsibility to support their community.

Likewise, our results reinforce PCE theory (Hanss and Doran 2020), showing that consumers who feel a strong sense of responsibility for sustainable consumption (CRSC) are more likely to prefer local brands that engage in sustainable practices. In high-QoL regions, consumers feel that their choices can have a meaningful impact, highlighting that perceived effectiveness is shaped by both personal values and contextual conditions such as QoL, which can either enable or hinder sustainable behaviors.

By integrating these complementary perspectives—SDT, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, PCE, social identity theory, and signaling theory—within the broader CCT framework, we demonstrate that sustainable consumption and LBP are multi-dimensional phenomena. They are shaped by the interplay of individual motivations, perceived agency, social identity, and the sociocultural environment.

In sum, this study draws on CCT to contextualize sustainable consumption within the lived realities of consumers across different regional contexts. It emphasizes the importance of understanding how cultural values, collective identities, and structural disparities—such as variations in QoL—interact to shape sustainability-related behaviors. These insights point to the need for a more nuanced and culturally sensitive approach to promoting sustainable consumption, particularly in countries characterized by significant regional diversity.

7.2 | Managerial Implications

This study shows that local brands are key for sustainability, especially in regions with strong ETN. By aligning with local values, these brands support the economy and sustainable practices, gaining a competitive edge where ETN and sustainability are priorities. In low QoL regions, local brands play a key role in economic support and cultural identity. Regional leaders can enhance competitiveness by helping local businesses adopt sustainable practices, capitalizing on ethnocentric sentiment, particularly in rural or less developed areas reliant on local economies. The strategies to promote local products provide a practical framework for strengthening the connection between consumers and local brands (Guillaumie et al. 2024). These initiatives not only reduce emissions associated with

transportation, supporting SDG 13, but also foster resilient and sustainable regional economies, aligning with SDG 12.

The study demonstrates that within-country QoL disparities impact sustainable consumption and LBP. Public policies should address these regional differences: in low QoL areas with strong ETN, policies could support local brands in adopting sustainable practices, while in high QoL areas, incentives might focus on enhancing local brands' competitiveness against global ones. Brands that promote sustainability and community support are better positioned to attract consumers in these varied contexts (Bryła 2019).

Subnational innovation strategies for sustainable development should consider QoL and ETN. In high QoL regions, policies could support local brands in developing sustainable offerings; while in lower QoL areas, they might focus on strengthening economic infrastructure to boost community impact. This aligns with the ongoing "twin transition" challenge (green and digital) faced globally (Faggian 2024).

Beyond guiding firms and policymakers, this study also highlights the societal and consumer-level implications of supporting local brands through sustainability narratives. Consumers in lower QoL regions, often positioned as passive participants in market structures, are shown here as empowered actors who use brand choice as a form of urban engagement and cultural affirmation (Cleveland et al. 2009; Fernández-Ferrín et al. 2018). By preferring local brands that align with sustainability, they contribute not only to environmental outcomes but also to regional identity and economic recovery. These dynamic positions view consumers as key partners in place-based sustainable development strategies, especially in contexts where trust in institutions is low and community links are strong (Bryła 2019; Zhou et al. 2010). At the societal level, recognizing these patterns can inform more inclusive policies that engage citizens as collaborators in sustainability transitions. For marketers, this suggests the need to shift from product-level eco-labeling to communicating how local brand consumption directly benefits local livelihoods and strengthens regional cohesion, an approach increasingly aligned with Sustainable Development Goals 8, 11, and 13 (Faggian 2024; Guillaumie et al. 2024). This expanded view of consumers as sociocultural agents boosts both the ethical and strategic dimensions of sustainable brand management.

8 | Limitation and Future Research Lines

Although the study focuses on regional variations within Spain, its findings may not be directly transferable to other countries with different cultural, political, and economic contexts. Factors influencing QOL, ETN, and sustainable behavior vary widely across nations, which may limit the global applicability of the results. Future research could replicate this approach in other cultural settings to assess the generalizability of the findings.

Although our sample was designed to be statistically representative of the Spanish population based on age, gender, and geographic distribution, some limitations should be noted. First, as data collection was conducted through an online panel,

individuals with limited internet access—such as those from lower-income households or rural areas—may be underrepresented. While online surveys offer advantages in terms of reach and efficiency, they can introduce response biases related to digital literacy and accessibility. Additionally, factors beyond demographic quotas, such as socioeconomic status or cultural attitudes toward survey participation, could influence the sample composition. Future research should consider complementary data collection methods, such as mixed-mode surveys or targeted outreach, to enhance inclusivity and minimize potential biases.

Another limitation concerns the use of secondary QoL data from national sources such as the INE. While these indicators offer robust regional comparisons, they may not fully capture individuals' subjective perceptions of well-being, potentially affecting the interpretation of their impact on consumer behavior. Additionally, survey responses related to ETN and sustainable consumption inherently involve self-reporting bias and subjectivity, which should be acknowledged when interpreting the results.

The study also does not account for differences across product sectors, which may influence preferences for local versus global brands. Consumer behavior can vary significantly depending on the type of product—for instance, food, fashion, or technology—each of which may evoke different sustainability and identity-related concerns (Xiao et al. 2020). Future research could explore how ETN and sustainability motivations shape brand preferences in specific sectors, providing more industry-specific insights.

Furthermore, despite the significance of the relationships observed in our structural model, the relatively modest R^2 values indicate that additional variables likely contribute to explaining both CRSC and LBP. This limitation reflects the inherent complexity of consumer behavior, particularly within the framework of CCT, which emphasizes the importance of symbolic meanings, social identities, and contextual dynamics—elements that may not be fully captured by the constructs used in this study. Future studies could improve explanatory power by incorporating additional variables such as place attachment, perceived brand authenticity, or consumer skepticism toward sustainability claims. These factors could offer richer insights into how consumers evaluate and select local brands. Moreover, integrating variables such as media exposure, regional narratives, or political and cultural worldviews may help to better understand how ETN and sustainability concerns interact in diverse social contexts. Lastly, we recommend the use of longitudinal or mixed-method research designs to examine how consumer motivations and perceptions evolve over time and across changing regional conditions. These extensions would contribute to a more comprehensive, context-sensitive understanding of sustainable consumption patterns.

This study also recognizes the limitation of using subjective self-reported measures to assess consumer preferences and behaviors. Although widely applied in consumer behavior and sustainability research (Farah and Shahzad 2020; Luchs and Miller 2015), such measures may not fully capture real-world decision-making. Future research could apply methods like

choice experiments or conjoint analysis to assess consumer preferences more precisely and enhance the external validity and practical relevance of the findings.

Endnotes

¹ A structural model diagram with the estimated coefficients and *p*-value is presented in Figure A2.

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Appendix A

See Figures A1 and A2.

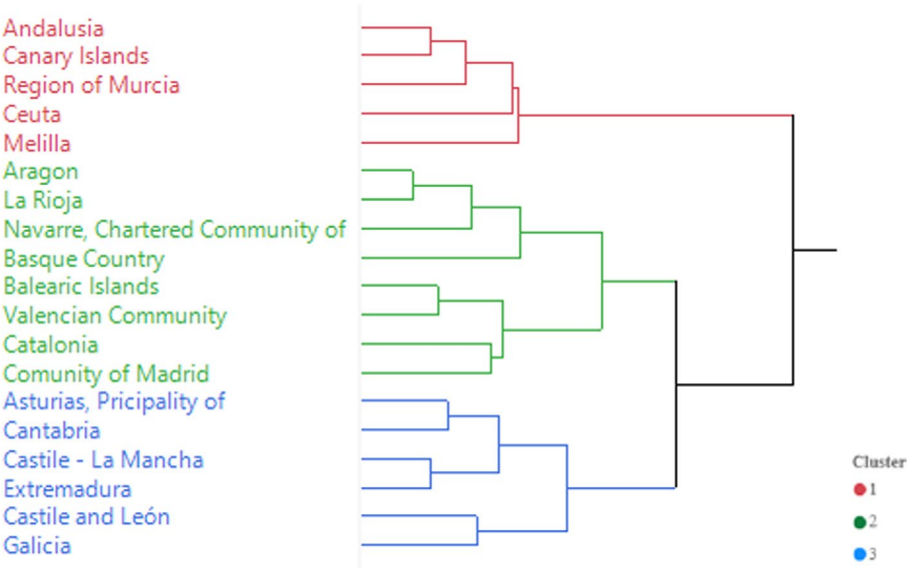


FIGURE A1 | Dendrogram from the hierarchical clustering of quality-of-life indicators.

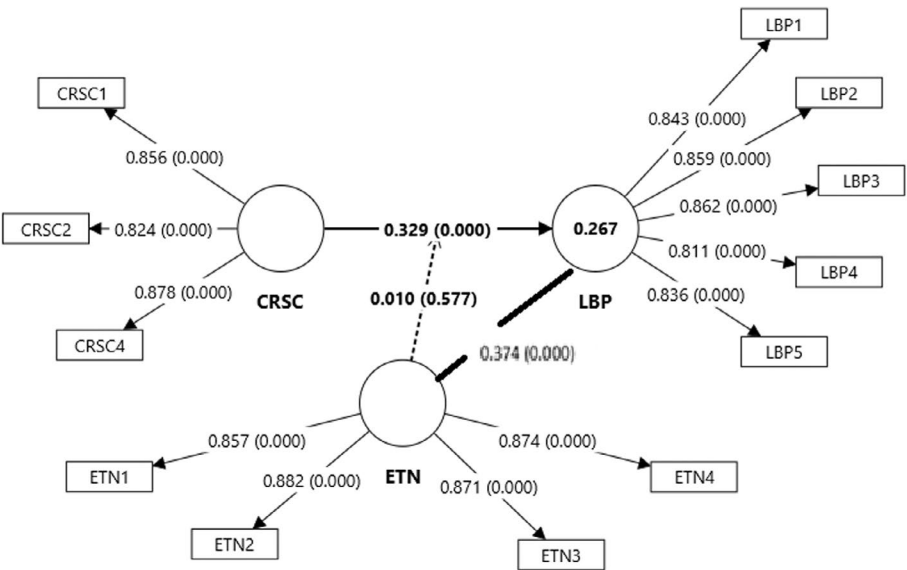


FIGURE A2 | Structural model diagram with estimated coefficients and *p*-values.