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# Sustainability Entrepreneurship: From Consumer Concern Towards Entrepreneurial Commitment

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**Abstract:** Sustainability is a multidimensional concept that goes beyond environmental protection to economic development and social equity. This change drives entrepreneurs introducing new sustainability-derived products and services to help sustain nature and communities. Entrepreneurship is increasingly being cited as a significant conduit for bringing about a transformation to sustainable products and processes. This research uses the term sustainability entrepreneurs for those who introduce innovative sustainability-derived products, processes, and services for gain, where gain includes economic and non-economic gains to individuals, the economy, and society. The research design was a qualitative exploratory study. The study focuses on a sample of sustainability entrepreneurs as the target respondents who take a commitment to sustainability via sustainability entrepreneurship. Interviews were based around open-ended questions prompting the respondents to engage in a storytelling approach to describe their journey from consumer concern to sustainability entrepreneurship. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. A set of themes emerged after analysis, reflecting experience as sustainability entrepreneurs. The themes were: Concern as a consumer for sustainability living; Entrepreneurship is not just for money or identity fulfilment but also for altruism; Values underpinning sustainability entrepreneurship: Fairness, responsibility, altruism, and integrity; and Collaboration not competition. This research contributes to an understanding of sustainability entrepreneurs as those who emerge from consumer concern to introduce innovative sustainability derived products, processes, and services for gain, where gain includes economic and non-economic gain to individuals, the economy, and society.

**Keywords:** sustainability; dark-green consumers; concern; commitment; sustainability entrepreneurship

## 1. Introduction

The concept of sustainability entrepreneurship (SE) has emerged from discussions and observations of theoreticians and practitioners as a meld of entrepreneurship and sustainable development agendas [1–4]. The concept is aligned with concepts of ecopreneurship [5] and social entrepreneurship [6,7]. The difference between traditional entrepreneurship and SE is underpinned by noneconomic gains. Noneconomic gains benefit people and society, whereas economic profit is central to the traditional definition of entrepreneurship, with the environment and society lacking consideration or an afterthought [8]. Green entrepreneurs are moving towards a more ecologically sustainable environment and economy, leading to the biggest opportunity for enterprise and invention in the industrial world [9,10]. SE definitions have developed over time to encompass four defining attributes; 1) Balancing environmental and social concerns; 2) Economic gains; 3) Market failures and disequilibria; and, 4) Transforming sectors towards sustainability [8]. It is timely to understand and discuss the concept of SE, as the new ecological and sustainable economy is developing. We first looked at relationship between sustainability and green

consumers, then the area of green entrepreneurship, before undertaking empirical work, with findings and discussion.

### *1.1. Sustainability and Green Consumers*

Sustainability living [11] is a complex and emergent construct—and involves progress toward creating the outcome of a more sustainable society overall. An individual who is looking to protect themselves and their world through the power of purchasing decisions can be described as the Green Consumer [12,13]. Research has revealed that most of the consumers who claimed to have green values adopted in their everyday life did not demonstrate this in their actual purchases [14].

Green consumers were mainly characterized by values belonging to the domains of self-transcendence and openness to change [15]. Potential greens were identified as one or more consumer segments between green consumers and non-green consumers. This segment was concerned with environmental factors, but importance was attached to other factors such as price, health, and nature as well. Non greens were characterized by the lowest concerns and knowledge among all segments and the lowest attitudes towards green purchases. The consumer segments appear to fragment further to encompass the dark-green and light-green consumer groups, as social mores shift toward wider acceptance of sustainability values, with accompanying legislative changes.

Highly sustainability concerned consumers or dark-green consumers seek sustainability living as a new lifestyle, which leads them to achieve best possible living with ensuing responsible living [16]. Their decision-making towards sustainability is always to push for the best and sustainability remains at the highest priority level. They always value the importance of altruism, community involvement, social responsibility, and long-term contribution. These consumers are the ‘Leaders’ in the field of sustainability, as they contributed to sustainability in every level in purchases and practices as they have a great deal of knowledge and connections into sustainability. As lead consumers, they have strong concerns about personal, community, and planetary health and sustainability issues, which shape their values, worldviews, and decision-making. They join community organisations or, at a personal level, act as ‘market mavens’ and are responsive to addressing others on achieving sustainability; for example, helping to find a best purchase, or new outlet, or spread the word.

Dark-green consumers are mindful [17] or conscious consumers who make a conscious purchase decision according to his or her values and preferences, and their sustainability consumption practices then become unconscious (routine) behaviour or established habits. Dark-green consumers find different approaches in any required trade-offs and they offset these trade-offs with highly involved practices [11].

### *1.2. Sustainability Entrepreneurship (SE)*

Ecopreneurship first seems to have entered the literature with Schuyler (1998), who made the following defining statement: “Ecopreneurs are entrepreneurs whose business efforts are not only driven by profit, but also by a concern for the environment.”

Schuyler further stated that ecopreneurship, “also known as environmental entrepreneurship and eco-capitalism, is becoming more widespread as a new market-based approach to identifying opportunities for improving environmental quality and capitalizing upon them in the private sector for profit.” Currently considered an outgrowth of ecopreneurship [5] and social entrepreneurship and sustainability entrepreneurship (SE) involves a balancing act of strategically managing and orienting environmental and social objectives and considerations with achieving specific financial goals towards the business objective [8,18,19]. SE improves the quality of processes while ensuring that their negative environmental and social impact is limited and minimized [20]. Ecopreneurship does not incorporate the development of noneconomic gains for individuals, communities, and societies at large [1]. SE, however, includes social entrepreneurship’s core objectives, creating social impact, solving societal problems, and enhancing social wealth [8]. However, social entrepreneurs are not profit-oriented and aim to use any surplus on specific disadvantaged groups while it is unclear whether sustainability

entrepreneurs operate within a not-for-profit business model [21]. However, in recent discussions, the social entrepreneurs are identified as those who work towards gaining profit while making change by providing community value, to create a sustainable community [1].

Exploring the motivations of entrepreneurs more generally, “entrepreneurs don’t always look at financial rewards as the best thing is being their own bosses” [22]. According to Lee (2012), nonpecuniary motivations are more important than monetary motivations generally for people to start a new business, particularly in the developed-world setting of welfare support and high employment. One nonpecuniary motive is autonomy: People want to be their own boss. The other is ego or identity fulfilment, which is more about people having a vision about a product or a service. In the Schaltegger and Synnestevedt (2002) [23] framework of environment and economic performance, entrepreneurial behaviour is conceptualized mainly at the firm level by positioning ecopreneurship in relation to other forms of environmental management. SE can be distinguished from other forms of corporate environmental development by the extent of environmental commitment and the strong desire for business growth. Motivation for SE according to this framework was market choices available, an external factor, and the priority of environmental contribution, an internal motivational factor.

Like Schaltegger and Synnestevedt (2002), other authors have studied the drivers motivating entrepreneurs to undertake a sustainable venture—while much of the scholarly discussion has since dealt with identifying the direct link between ‘green’ and economic success. Walley and Taylor (2002) [24] suggest a typology established in entrepreneurship theory. Two dimensions are suggested; external and internal influences were observed in entrepreneurial behaviour. First, external factors were conceptualized as ‘soft,’ such as personal networks as opposed to ‘hard’ structural influences (e.g., economic structure of society). Secondly, internal factors of the entrepreneur differ between leading economic objectives with a minimum green orientation on one side, and a sustainability orientation combining economic, ecological, and social/ethical objectives on the other. Green entrepreneurs, in this view, show different levels of commitment to sustainability issues and their motivation can be differentiated along distinct context variables.

Personal values are a certain individual or cultural (social) standard, through which things, events, or actions are measured and approved. In current literature, only a limited research was conducted on values in sustainability entrepreneurship, and the focus was currently given to ecopreneurship values and social entrepreneurship values. Values, drivers for individual’s ideas and behaviours, are essential parts of social integration and accepted as the basic factors of human behaviour. Values display preferences between totality of beliefs and lifestyle of entrepreneurs who employ criteria to evaluate the events, things, and persons as being good or bad, or their behaviours as decent or not. For this reason, values affect the organizational structure and strategies of ventures by forming the entrepreneur’s decisions and behaviors [25].

This paper attempts to offer a better understanding of the broad area of green entrepreneurship [26] making an exploratory, empirical investigation of SE, while also attempting to distinguish it from ecopreneurship. It is focused on SE as distinct from ecopreneurship and social entrepreneurship. It examines SE as a consequence of investigating sustainability-concerned consumers [11], observing that some took an extra step of commitment to sustainability via initiating their own SE, and examines the endeavours and motivations of this group.

## 2. Methodology

The research design was an exploratory qualitative study. Qualitative research is a holistic approach that involves discovery [27]. Qualitative researchers use an emerging approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes [28].

The sample was selected based on those who self-identified as sustainability entrepreneurs in their own sustainability-derived business. The sample was a purposeful sample to distinguish between

ecopreneurship, social entrepreneurship, and SE. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases [29].

The sample of sustainability entrepreneurs was developed over a period of a year by personal referral, perusal of websites, blogs, meet-ups, and chat rooms concerning sustainability. All respondents were residents of a large Australian city at the time of the study and were both concerned with sustainability living personally as consumers, identified as sustainability entrepreneurs and had established their own commercial business. In total, six sustainability entrepreneurs were identified for inclusion in the study. More details of respondents' demographics are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Respondent demographics.

Respondent Code *	Age Group	Education Level	Business Stream
SE1	31–40	Postgraduate university	Organic clothing
SE2	31–40	Postgraduate university	Organic personal care
SE3	31–40	Postgraduate university	Online marketing for organic products
SE4	31–40	Postgraduate university	Organic cleaning items
SE5	31–40	Diploma	Cloth (gift) wrapping
SE6	31–40	Diploma	Organic clothing

Code-SE \* Sustainability Entrepreneur.

The sustainability entrepreneurs were in emerging, nascent, micro businesses (three) as well as in businesses in the small- (two) and medium-(one)sized business category, based on the categories developed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (thereafter OECD) using number of employees OECD (2017) [30]. These businesses had run from one to eight years in the respondents' self-described types of 'general sustainability,' 'ethical,' or 'organic' business. All the sustainability entrepreneurs' formed their ventures as profit-based ventures, not as non-profit or community services. The respondents were personally involved in their businesses at the time of the interview.

Data collection involves an interview guide, which was created before the interviews began and outlined the areas of interest for the study. While the areas of interest remained constant, semi-structured interviews permitted probing and exploration of topics that unexpectedly emerged throughout the interviews. This maximized the amount of information gathered as well as widened the scope of data collected [31]. A key aspect of the semi-structured interview is utilizing semi-structured questions. These questions aim to elicit participants' feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Open-ended questions allow for participants to respond with what comes to their mind, and to articulate their thoughts and feelings in the way they choose. Moreover, asking questions without specified limits gives participants the freedom to answer with what is salient for them. Analysing what words participants use to describe their experiences can create meaningful data that could not otherwise be accessed with direct questions [32].

The depth interviews were conducted by the principal researcher and each respondent completed the discussion with that researcher. Respondents were encouraged to verbalise their reactions and responses. Initial interviews ranged from 60 to 90 min in duration. Follow-up interviews formed part of the design and were conducted to enhance understanding and probe further their emergent and continuing identity.

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for later analysis, using NVIVO software (NVivo 11 for Windows, QSR International P/L, Melbourne, Australia) for qualitative data management. Interviews were based around open-ended questions prompting the respondents to engage in a storytelling approach to describe their journey to SE and establishing and growing a SE-based business. Storytelling is a widely used qualitative technique [32,33], also appropriate for research in marketing [34]. Storytelling was considered an appropriate method given that the context demonstrated

“high levels of involvement, high levels of complexity and a possible shared social dimension” [35]. The individual interviews allowed for an interview technique that delved into social and personal matters [36] and this helped to understand individual behaviour more deeply.

Each transcription was read by all of the researchers and subjected to preliminary analysis. Thematic analysis is defined as ‘a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ [37]. It organises and describes a data set in (rich) detail leading to interpretation of various aspects of the research. An inductive process was adopted in this research with themes driven from the data level. This analysis phase followed certain steps. The researcher started with becoming familiar with the data by reading the depth interview scripts a few times. Then the researcher generated initial codes and searched for grouping of concerns/sub-themes in the first stage of analysis. In the next stage, the researcher reviewed the sub-themes and then defined and named larger themes. Final results enfolded the emergent findings with literature, thereby enhancing internal validity, generalizability, and theoretical level [38]. Interviews were continued until theoretical saturation was achieved [39,40]. Theoretical saturation is described as a process in which the researcher continues to sample relevant cases until no new theoretical insights are being gleaned from the data [41]. Transcriptions were made available to respondents to allow them to check for accuracy [28].

### 3. Results

Respondents identified their role as entrepreneur in terms of their duties, responsibilities, and involvement levels. Overall, respondents focused on sustainability at personal, product, practice, and outcomes levels in a continuous cycle. A set of themes emerged after analysis, reflecting experience as sustainability entrepreneurs.

#### 3.1. Theme 1: Concern as a Consumer for Sustainability Living

In sustainability living [11], consumer purchases and all consumption types are not equally important, as some have a greater overall impact on sustainability. Changes in purchasing behaviour of an individual can contribute progress towards sustainability, but the progress also depends on support from stronger changes happening within the consumer lifestyle across society [42]. Approach towards sustainability living and sustainable lifestyles will be a continuing process, but must be seen in the context of a holistic move towards new lifestyles, incorporating related purchases and habitual elements that cross conventional behavioural boundaries [43]. When it comes to promoting and deterring sustainability, the role that consumers play is vital. Dark-green consumers increasingly are committed to sustainability living. However, they report it as difficult and time-consuming. Companies and products are not reliable. Products are not widely available and there are barriers to integrating sustainability into their everyday life. Some dark-green consumers are willing to take a further step to overcome some of these issues. Being aware that fellow consumers find issues in being more deeply involved in sustainability living, these dark-green consumers revealed that they contribute to sustainability living by educating others on sustainability. Most dark-green consumers engage in community-based social group sessions and share their knowledge amongst others. They find communities of practice [44] is one of the best way to educate others towards sustainability contribution. Some dark-green consumers take an extra step to create business ventures based on sustainability products and services to lessen the disappointments in the current market. Sustainability entrepreneurs follow sustainability practices in their enterprise/venture as well as in their everyday lives. All respondents interviewed in this category continued to be highly involved in sustainability, in their personal and public lives and commercial lives. Sustainability entrepreneurs were asked how would they perceive sustainability living.

*“ ... Its wonderful way of life ... it's the way forward ... I think what we are seeing inclusively understanding importance of older traditions ... and going back to growing your own fruits, vegetables ... not using chemicals ... using nets ... ..picking by hand ... all that sort of things ... I think that's sort of way forward ... ”*



(SE2)

*“ ... Well, I think it’s really important because if we don’t consider our footprint on earth and what we do ... we’re blessed to be here ... We’re blessed to have this place. We share it with other creatures and plants and things ... I think it’s in our interest to look after that and manage that. But that sustainability as I just mentioned goes back to sustainable living for yourself ... So, you’ve got to make sure you live in a healthy way, the planet too is in a health way ... ”*

(SE1)

*“ ... I think it would be great to live in the type of environment where you grow your own food and you have that community feeling and working together, you know everything is natural and healthy for you ... at some point, spend your whole life in that environment, I think it would be great. I would love it ... ”*

(SE5)

*“ ... I just wanted to be more responsible for the choices I was making and how I run my business rather than just consuming and not caring about where it’s made and how it’s made and how it’s affecting the workers ... By choosing organic it means that this is like a social compliance factor involved in a chain of custody ... the environmental sort of things ... ”*

(SE4)

Typically, sustainability entrepreneurs are on a personal mission to make the world a better place for people around them. Respondents were connected by their perception towards sustainability living in their everyday life and imagination to see the sustainability future. Quality of life is one of their main concerns. Sustainability entrepreneurs are highly contributive to the concept of sustainability citizens/citizenship [45–47]. Sustainability citizenship is defined as pro-sustainability behaviour, in public and in private, driven by a belief in fairness of the distribution of environmental goods, in participation, and in the co-creation of sustainability policy [47].

### 3.2. Theme 2: Entrepreneurship in not Just for Money or Identity Fulfilment but For Altruism

The motivation of the sustainability entrepreneurs was identified as resulting from self-sustained initiatives [48], aiming to facilitate more people, their customers, to be involved in a sustainability lifestyle. Respondents revealed a focus on how much time they had wasted in their own life to find a product which was produced, marketed in a sustainability-derived manner. Taking their life experiences into account, sustainability entrepreneurs’ main motivation was to start a venture which facilitates or creates opportunities for sustainability-concerned consumers to express that identity, as well as to attract other consumers by offering sustainability choices which are convenient and easily available in the market. Their intention is ‘want to change the world’ [49] in its future context.

*“...I think most of the existing brands mainly focus very much on the whole natural content and their organic certification ... It’s obvious if you are aware and you know consumer interest in those types of products is growing. However I don’t think anyone else is actually trying to do what we’re doing as it’s linked to the wider world out there and trying to show people how it’s actually having an impact, on much more than you know about your consumption to have this, and hopefully you know people’s individual health ... ”*

(SE2)

*“...my business partner just renovated her house and she was finding it very difficult to get information about products which are sustainability derived... But how do you know if the product’s got something that is not good for you? I believe consumers should have informed choices and they should be able to make a choice and know what’s in this- ingredients...whatever it is. We looked to the idea*

*of doing—we went through having a shop and decided that we didn't want to do 24 × 7. We still do it with online ... We then looked at doing our own product line and in the both cases we didn't want to carry all the product and have that liability of the product, and so we came up with sort of aggregated multi-window ... "*

(SE4)

The other motivating factor is altruism. These respondents' decision-making is based on altruism and this has led them to start up their sustainability-related business.

*"...I couldn't lose my conscience, couldn't walk away and do nothing. I will never forget the tears of the conversations I had with the people. And children who have died, people are dying and the earth is dying, and to see it ... I couldn't walk away anymore. It was about how I blend it. What can I do to help...? It's actually relating it back to providing new market opportunities for the growers and obviously helping the whole sort of community and environment be healthier in terms of not using pesticides on crops and those sort of things ... "*

(SE1)

*" ... I've started a business because I want to provide an environment where -a place that people can go to, when they get confused with all the information out there ... I want that to be a community and to be collaborative from businesses. I want businesses and consumers to find each other ... "*

(SE4)

According to Schlange (2006) [48], sustainability entrepreneurship motivation is identified as generating and enhancing economic activity which, in turn, increases welfare for the economy and the society as a whole. Sustainable entrepreneurs are social activists who promote and conduct activities which generate social and economic value, and their motivation to start sustainability entrepreneurship ventures was heavily based on internal factors; they also responded to facilitate more customers to be involved in the sustainability lifestyle and to increase welfare for the economy and the society as a whole but were driven by their personal altruism. At the system level, they identified that they could intervene to short-circuit the search to sustainability-derived products where the existing system makes it hard to tend these products.

With this analysis, apart from financial and identity fulfilment, sustainability entrepreneurs' business perspective is to accommodate others to be involved in sustainability living. They facilitate this by operating, manufacturing, and distributing their product or services in a sustainability-derived way, so that general consumers can have more opportunities to purchase products developed in a sustainability-derived marketplace.

### *3.3. Theme 3: Values Underpinning Sustainability Entrepreneurship: Fairness, Responsibility, Altruism, and Integrity*

Personal values are a certain individual or cultural (social) standard, through which things, events, or actions are measured and approved [25]. In current literature, only a little research was conducted on values in sustainability entrepreneurship and focus was currently given to ecopreneurship values and social entrepreneurship values. Values, criteria of individuals' ideas and behaviours, are essential parts of social integration and accepted as the basic factors of human behaviour. Values display preferences between totality of beliefs and lifestyle of entrepreneurs who employ criteria to evaluate the events, things, and persons as being good or bad, or their behaviours as decent or not. For this reason, values affect the organizational structure and strategies of ventures by forming the entrepreneur's decisions and behaviours [25]. Value leads to a person's actions and behaviours. Respondents were asked what values led them to undertake a sustainability living entrepreneur venture.

*“ ... The earth is dying! People are dying! ... it's about understanding we have a sacred connection with each other and the land. The earth in its entirety—animals, humans and plants we are all connected and we have to help each other and if we don't it's over...that's my concern on values ... ”*

(SE1)

*“ ... I just wanted to be more responsible for the choices I was making and how I run my business rather than just consuming and not caring about where it's made and how it's made and how it's affecting the workers ... . By choosing organic it means that this is like a social compliance factor involved in a chain of custody ... . the environmental sort of things ... ”*

(SE4)

*“ ... I guess as things of fairness ... . We are interested in running our business in very ethical and equitable ways. I would not feel morally right with getting these made at 25 cents ... I guess it is a sense of integrity as well ... ”*

(SE5)

According to Hemingway (2005) [6], corporate social responsibility, also known as sustainable responsible business, demonstrates that business is not solely driven by economics and that responsibility may also be championed as a result of a personal morality, inspired by employees' own socially oriented personal values. While businesses may be amenable to expression of values and personal morality, the findings from this analysis show that, while the sustainability entrepreneurs share the regular entrepreneurs' drive to be in control, they also possess a dominant sense of responsibility [6], along with fairness and altruism. These respondents mainly discussed how to serve community and welfare of others, based on their dominant values. They expected to be responsible for their actions and deliver fairness to everyone with their altruistic values and sense of fairness. Yet, it should be noted that in smaller organizations the personality, beliefs, values and behavior of the lead entrepreneur is the driving force of a very powerful influence on the past, present and future of the organization [50].

#### 3.4. Theme 4: Collaboration not Competition

The sustainability entrepreneurs stated that there is no competitive mindset and they are following a 'soft' approach in the market by collaboration rather competition. Collaboration is working with each other to do a task and to achieve shared goals. Traditional entrepreneurial thought revolves around the idea of competition, capitalism, and self-exaltation [51,52]. Success is determined by money in the bank, power, influence, and material possession. The analysis revealed that sustainability entrepreneurs are unlike traditional entrepreneurs, and they are willing to embrace new ways of working together. They seek opportunity of learning from others, community involvement, and collective approach in collaboration. These findings focusing on 'sustainability entrepreneurship' and sustainability entrepreneurs' moral behaviour share that collaboration is the inherent approach in sustainability entrepreneurship, rather than an aggressive competitive approach to other entrants and subsets of the market.

Sustainability entrepreneurs accepted that they have competition based on direct competition as well as indirect competition. Direct competition is from the sustainability-related same-industry competitors and indirect is other unsustainability businesses in the same industry. Sustainability entrepreneurship is a new aspect of sustainable development, the proportion of Australian businesses undertaking some form of sustainability-related innovative activity reached a plateau in 2007; since then, it has held steady at around 40%. However, relatively few of these businesses grow into mid-sized global firms with broad innovation capabilities and strong international connections [53]. Sustainability entrepreneur respondents revealed that they perceive they have few direct competitors but a large number of indirect competitors.



*“ ... there is so much shelf space in a shop, but you can't have every shop, kind of have your product otherwise it would be boring and I like it that other people get their product into a shop and every product has its span ... ”*

(SE4)

*“ ... There are people doing just one line of product... So it's not a broad range. So from that angle we are unique. So there is no store that offers everything in organic or sustainable ... there are plenty of unsustainable products available ... The big department stores offer everything we offer. We offer the same but its certified organic cotton. So it's a life style choice ... do you want to live sustainably, and then the answer is organic cotton. It's a choice. I think that mindset is a very individual thing. We don't force it upon people. We have the soft approach ... ”*

(SE3)

*“ ... there is always competition. The way I see it is that we go with them, like with the Fairtrade and sustainable and all those sorts of people who work with them to make other people become more aware that they can move into this market and grow it so it becomes attractive to more people to move in ... ”*

(SE6)

*“ ... Well probably all the other natural and organic skincare brands out there in the market are direct competitors ... . This has been a huge plus as a desire of so many other brands in the industry ... because everyone is becoming aware of the need for these types of products ... I don't necessarily look at those as direct competition, although that is probably a fair calling, as much as, ideally, we would want everyone to be using natural skincare products because that will be so much better for the customer themselves but also for the environment“*

(SE2)

*“ ... Looking at niche markets different products like Kapok ... Kapok is similar to cotton and feels like cotton. The trees are not cut down so it has grown sustainably. The buds are picked and it grows again. It is just like cotton. Again all certified, so it is nontoxic. I think it is a collective movement and we have to work together. If someone has a brilliant idea, we have to work together to make it happen. it may be myself or a company it has to be a collaborative partnership to make it happen ... ”*

(SE1)

*“ ... I am in a growing stage and the market is growing too, but I don't believe in being aggressive and a lot of entrepreneurs that I know they might be assertive but they are also more into abundance rather than limits. And I think people who are really aggressive see that there is limited resources whereas people who are into abundance say that there is a lot to go around and you've just got to grow it and work together ... .so I am a big believer in collaboration, not aggression ... .”*

(SE2)

Sustainability entrepreneurs focus on collaboration, not on competitiveness, to achieve sustainability. Their self-connection is to the long journey they have been on, in opportunity-seeking and development in their entrepreneurship, and want to share this with their customers to add social value. Further, they contribute their knowledge, time, capability, and experience to develop their venture and they agreed that their business has become part of their life. It appears to go beyond the ability to act autonomously and to reflect a passion for the business; a strong emotional connection.

We present a typology drawn from the thematic analysis of Sustainability Entrepreneurship responses contrasted with Ecopreneurship, the other commonly occurring term in green entrepreneurship, at the intersection between entrepreneurship and sustainability. Table 2 highlights that, while there are a number of commonalities, Sustainability Entrepreneurship draws more on

a set of green passions/values aimed at sharing and enabling a green lifestyle, while also operating the business using a co-opetition or sharing framework.

**Table 2.** Contrasting Sustainability Entrepreneurship and Ecopreneurship.

Motives/Modes of Action	Sustainability Entrepreneurship	Ecopreneurship
Personal autonomy	X	X
Strong green personal values	X	
Dark-green lifestyle	X	
Green activism/sharing green lifestyle	X	
Sees green business opportunity	X	X
Merge business and environmental issues	X	X
Co-opetition	X	
Triple bottom line concerns	X	X

#### 4. Discussion

This research at the intersection of sustainability and entrepreneurship research [54] seeks to clarify entrepreneurial motivation and action that takes place within a context of need for a sustainable planet, biosphere, and human communities. Sustainability entrepreneurship in our research, by the view of the self-identified sustainability entrepreneurs, is definitely concerned with building a commercial business as a prime mode of action. While they pursue a broader social benefit, they do so within an organization that is set up as a commercial business, seeks to make a profit, and retains the profit it generates. We use this as the basis of clearly distinguishing sustainability entrepreneurship from social entrepreneurship, which has its primary focus on the social mission [55] with economic/financial concerns subjugated to that social mission.

Our conceptual typology, empirically derived from the thematic analysis (Table 2) of interviews with sustainability entrepreneurs, and enfolding concepts of previous literature, differentiates sustainability entrepreneurship from ecopreneurship. SE is driven by deep green values and extends personal activism to the founding of an organization to enhance the effectiveness of the environmental concern and activism. Previous research has termed this distinction as one between ecopreneurs and authentic ecopreneurs, but here we clearly define the term sustainability entrepreneurship as the more appropriate term and enfold any classification termed authentic ecopreneurship or green, green ecopreneurship [26].

Sustainability entrepreneurship was both for personal autonomy and a self-sustaining business initiative [48], but also aiming as a consumer themselves to facilitate more consumers to be involved in a sustainability lifestyle. While they did have value expressive motives and a vision for the business-like regular entrepreneurs [22], this group's main focus was to attract other consumers to sustainability living by providing authentic businesses, serving the environment, community, and prioritising the welfare of others as part of their values. They tended then to retain their identity as a committed consumer, and draw on lived experience embedded in consumer networks, rather than simply having a market orientation [56]. These sustainability entrepreneurs focused on collaboration not on competition, to achieve business viability, akin to co-opetition described by Kirchner and Ford (2017) [57]. They contribute their knowledge, time, capability, and experience to develop their venture and they agreed their business has become part of their life. In this context, SE can be considered an outgrowth of a form of consumer activism [58], rather than simply of ecopreneurship [5] and social entrepreneurship [6].

Future research could be conducted to compare and contrast SE-based business and 'green' businesses conducted by ecopreneurs to understand more deeply how the relationship to the consumer and environment outcomes vary across the two types. Further, more needs to be understood about how

sustainability entrepreneurs develop their morality-based decision-making as their businesses grow and become more complex, and whether their management differs in ways other than in approach to competition.

## 5. Conclusions

We have identified sustainability entrepreneurship as being strongly motivated by concern as consumers and their personal values. They are on a personal mission to make the world a better place for people around them by facilitating green consumer consumption and sustainability living. This has led them to take on personal risks and rewards by establishing and running an SE-based business with responsibility for the environment/sustainability.

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