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The Power of Real Experience: Self-Driven Contributions for Sustainable Environment

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ABSTRACT

Habit formation is essential for environmental preservation and sustainability as it promotes consistent, long-term engagement in pro-environmental behaviors. Habitual pro-environmental behaviors contribute to the establishment of social norms, encouraging communities to adopt sustainable lifestyles collectively. As more people integrate environmentally conscious practices into their daily routines, the broader cultural shift toward sustainability becomes more pronounced. This paper explored the experiences of environmental advocates of sustainability, emphasizing habit formation as a fundamental driver of long-term ecological responsibility. Environmental advocates (n = 20) from the Visayas, Philippines, were purposively sampled for interviews. Participants expressed a deep personal commitment to sustainability as a lifelong responsibility. Participants actively promoted sustainability through education, advocating for

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responsible consumption, and participating in community-driven environmental initiatives. When individuals develop habits such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and responsible consumption, these actions become second nature, requiring minimal cognitive effort to sustain over time. This consistency is vital in addressing environmental challenges, as one-time actions are insufficient to create lasting change. Collaborative initiatives, community engagement, and institutional support are essential for achieving lasting environmental impact. Nevertheless, the findings can inform educational programs, policy-making, and community-driven sustainability initiatives, reinforcing the idea that both individual actions and collective efforts are necessary to address environmental challenges effectively.

Keywords: Advocacy; Environmental Preservation; Sustainability; Sustainable Habit

1. Introduction

The escalating environmental challenges have sparked a global call for individual efforts toward sustainability [1]. Issues such as ecosystem degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change are no longer remote phenomena but direct consequences of collective human actions. Individuals bear the responsibility of evaluating their environmental impact and minimizing harm to the planet whenever possible [2]. These environmental changes have led to heightened environmental stress, stemming from the awareness of the deteriorating state of nature and its implications for future generations. Protecting essential resources, including freshwater resources and biodiversity, has become increasingly difficult, especially when such efforts must simultaneously safeguard human populations [3].

Research within the field of development has long acknowledged the environment as a critical factor in human well-being [4]. Typically, this research focuses on specific natural resources, aiming to reduce environmental impacts or maintain ecological health. This psychological burden motivates individuals to reevaluate their behaviors and adopt practices that align with environmental preservation.

Climate change threatens humanity not only physically—through heat waves, floods, and droughts—but also psychologically, particularly for vulnerable groups. The resulting insecurity, instability, and chaos have profound short- and long-term psychological impacts [5]. In this context, transitioning from harmful behaviors to eco-friendly practices becomes crucial, emphasizing the role of consistent personal efforts in achieving broader environmental objectives.

Environmental stress often acts as a catalyst for behavioral change, compelling individuals to confront the consequences of inaction [6]. While stress is often viewed negatively, it can foster a stronger sense of responsibility and engagement. Selye [7] conceptualized stress as a unified response to environmental conditions that disrupt an organism's physiological balance. When individuals perceive their contributions to sustainability as meaningful and impactful, they are more likely to maintain eco-friendly behaviors. In addition, education and awareness are vital in enhancing understanding and providing the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of sustainable living [8].

While research has extensively examined individual pro-environmental behaviors, the relationship between different types of behaviors and the consistency of their adoption remains underexplored [9]. Studies suggest that individuals are more likely to adopt additional pro-environmental behaviors when they share similarities [9,10]. Consequently, Freschi et al. [11] suggest that psychologists should help address climate challenges by utilizing the diverse conceptual frameworks and intervention strategies within their field. Their contributions should extend beyond mental well-being to include insights into human behavior, attitudes, group dynamics, and decision-making processes across various levels of analysis and their interconnected influences.

In the advent of social psychology, the value/attitude-behavior gap still exists—emphasizing the disconnect between recognizing the severity of climate change and agreeing on the need for action, yet failing to make consistent lifestyle changes [12]—has raised an important research question for psychologists and behavioral scientists: why do individuals fail to act? Various cognitive, affective, and social barriers have been identified [13], leading to the application of different explanatory and predictive theories. This study identified several psychological drivers behind

self-motivated sustainability efforts. It examined the motivations and experiences that inspire sustainable actions and identified strategies for sustaining these behaviors over time. Incorporating sustainability into educational curricula is a relevant approach to embedding these principles in society [14]. These findings offer a valuable basis for understanding how individual actions can create lasting environmental change, highlighting the power of personal agency in building a sustainable future.

2. Literature Review

The push for a sustainable environment has increasingly emphasized the pivotal role of individual actions in tackling ecological challenges. Personal experiences, often termed as "*the power of real experience*," play a crucial role in shaping eco-friendly behaviors. Encounters with environmental issues, such as witnessing habitat destruction or participating in conservation activities, have a profound impact on an individual's commitment to sustainability [15]. These experiences provide tangible insights into the urgency of environmental preservation. Similarly, Wang et al. [16] emphasized that an individual's connection to nature is vital in addressing issues like water pollution caused by emerging contaminants. Such real-world encounters serve as catalysts for self-awareness and inspire self-motivated contributions toward environmental sustainability, addressing the pressing ecological challenges of today.

In the Philippines, organizations play the key role in environmental preservation. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) governs and oversees the country's environmental efforts [17]. World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Philippines adopts a comprehensive conservation strategy, focusing on marine protection, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy. The Haribon Foundation is a leader in biodiversity conservation, while the Ecowaste Coalition prioritizes pollution prevention and effective waste management. The coalition advocates for sustainable consumption, recycling campaigns, reduces plastic usage, and ensures proper disposal of hazardous waste. These organizations contribute to collective environmental efforts and advocate for a sustainable environment in preserving the country's natural resources, reinforcing the interconnectedness of organizational and ecological systems—a relationship increasingly examined in organizational sociology [18].

Social psychology asserts that behavioral intention serves as a reliable predictor of actual behavior [19,20]. Within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior, intentions—or an individual's motivation or planned course of action—are regarded as the most significant determinants of behavior [21]. Attitude is a fundamental component of TPB [21], as it signifies the extent to which an individual perceives a behavior favorably or unfavorably [22]. The development of pro-environmental behaviors, such as forest conservation, necessitates the establishment of a positive attitude toward such actions [23,24]. Similarly, individuals' perspectives on forest protection significantly influence its long-term sustainability [25]. Self-motivated contributions are deeply rooted in personal motives, experiences, and the desire to effect meaningful change. Individuals often adopt sustainable practices to align with personal values, educate future generations, or mitigate climate change. Abbas et al. [26] highlighted that these motives inspire sustained engagement with environmental preservation.

Another component of the Theory of Planned Behavior is the subjective norm, which pertains to the influence of social expectations and pressures on an individual's decision-making process [27]. A social norm is shaped by the perceived influence of significant individuals in one's social environment, whose opinions and behaviors impact decision-making [28]. In addition, it reflects an individual's belief regarding the extent to which others endorse or oppose their behavioral choices [29].

Negahdari et al. [30] examine the environmental behavior of villagers in Ilam province regarding the protection of oak forests in the South Zagros region. The analysis assessed the relationship between key psychological factors and villagers' intentions to engage in conservation efforts. The findings confirmed the reliability and validity of the proposed model, highlighting that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control significantly influenced villagers' intentions to protect the forests. In addition, factors such as time perspective and spatial attachment contributed to their actual conservation behavior. Overall, the study demonstrated that behavioral intentions serve as a strong predictor of environmental actions and conservation efforts in rural communities.

Environmental stress can be a significant motivator for individuals to reassess their behaviors and adopt sustain-

able practices. This stress arises from growing awareness of environmental degradation and its impacts on biodiversity, ecosystems, and human well-being [31,32]. Unlike theoretical understanding, the personal effects of environmental stress deeply connect individuals to the consequences of inaction, prompting behavioral changes. When channeled constructively, such stress can drive profound shifts in mindset and habits, fostering enduring contributions toward ecological health [33].

Facilitating this shift requires examining how individuals alter their actions to align with sustainable principles. Young people, in particular, contribute to sustainability in various ways, ranging from simple, low-effort practices to deeply committed actions [34]. This behavioral transition demands self-reflection and adaptability, as people shift from wasteful habits to adopting environmentally conscious practices [35]. The study highlights how personal responsibility and commitment drive these behaviors, underscoring the psychological challenges and motivators behind such changes. Sustainability competencies further involve a future-oriented perspective, enabling individuals to collectively envision and evaluate desirable pathways for the future[36]. Assessing the consistency and longevity of these personal efforts is crucial for fostering sustainable practices that mitigate human impacts on the environment.

The influence of real experiences and consistent, sustainable behaviors extends beyond the individual, shaping social norms and encouraging collective efforts. Behavioral change suggests that leading by example generates a ripple effect, inspiring others to adopt similar practices. Administrators, policymakers, and practitioners recognize that transforming both individual and collective behaviors is vital to achieving sustainability goals [37–39]. Yamin et al. [40] emphasized that addressing environmental and social challenges necessitates long-term changes in daily behaviors. Individuals demonstrating *self-driven contributions* foster a culture of sustainability, challenging societal norms that harm the environment. These actions underscore the interconnectedness of personal and collective efforts, demonstrating that even small, self-initiated steps can have a significant environmental impact. As Dominicis et al. [41] noted, meaningful environmental solutions require individuals to fundamentally change their behaviors.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This paper explored the habits and self-efforts of Filipino environmental advocates in their efforts to preserve the environment. Preliminary inquiries seek to establish a basis for topics that have not been extensively explored or lack significant prior research [42,43]. With interviews, these inquiries allow scholars to examine social or psychological dynamics in depth, capturing their complexity [44,45]. Exploration prioritizes detecting trends, emphasizing meaningful insights, and pinpointing essential themes rather than validating hypotheses or reinforcing established theories [46,47]. Though occasionally criticized for its lack of methodological rigor, their effectiveness in supplying initial data and fresh viewpoints is widely recognized [48]. This paper addresses a critical question: *how do personal habits reinforce environmental preservation and sustainability?* Understanding this could shed light on how to effectively maximize environmental campaigns that encourage individuals to take responsibility for social change.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

In preliminary inquiries, participant selection typically involves small, intentionally chosen groups, as the goal is to attain deep insights rather than achieve widespread applicability [45]. Researchers commonly utilize purposive sampling, a non-random technique in which individuals are specifically selected based on characteristics or experiences that directly align with the objectives [49]. This strategy enables scholars to concentrate on respondents who can offer relevant perspectives, ensuring that the collected information remains pertinent and closely tied to the research focus [50,51]. Unlike large-scale studies that rely on extensive participant pools for statistical generalization, preliminary research emphasizes adaptability and relevance over numerical breadth, prioritizing the exploration of critical variables and the identification of emerging patterns or themes rather than producing universally applicable findings [46,52]. For data collection, online purposive sampling [53] using open-ended inquiries was employed to obtain preliminary information from respondents. There were five characteristics used in selecting the participants:

(1) an environment advocate, (2) experience in implementing sustainability initiatives, (3) active involvement in community-based environmental programs, (4) demonstrated commitment to promoting ecological awareness, and (5) willingness to participate in one-on-one interviews. There were 65 environmental advocates who responded to the online open-ended questionnaires, but only 20 from Visayas, Philippines, were selected for interview using this sampling criterion (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Information of 20 sampled participants.

Name	Sex	Age	Background	Environmental Initiatives/Work
Mark	M	34	Local Tour Guide	Leads eco-friendly tours, promotes responsible tourism
Anna	F	42	Science Teacher	Educates students on sustainability and climate change
John	M	37	Park Ranger	Monitors wildlife, enforces environmental regulations
Maria	F	39	Community Organizer	Advocates for waste reduction and tree-planting drives
Peter	M	45	Environmental Engineer	Designs eco-friendly infrastructure projects
Sarah	F	36	NGO Volunteer	Conducts beach cleanups and plastic waste campaigns
James	M	50	Marine Biologist	Studies ocean conservation and coral reef protection
Emily	F	33	Sustainable Farmer	Implements organic farming and permaculture practices
Robert	M	41	Environmental Journalist	Reports on climate issues and conservation efforts
Laura	F	38	Urban Planner	Develops green spaces and sustainable city designs
Daniel	M	47	Renewable Energy Expert	Advocates for solar and wind energy adoption
Jessica	F	35	Wildlife Conservationist	Rescues endangered species and protects habitats
Chris	M	44	Environmental Lawyer	Fights legal battles for conservation policies
Angela	F	48	Climate Activist	Organizes awareness campaigns on climate action
Steven	M	40	Sustainable Architect	Designs eco-friendly buildings and structures
Rachel	F	37	Research Scientist	Conducts studies on pollution and biodiversity
Thomas	M	46	Waste Management Officer	Implements recycling programs and waste reduction
Olivia	F	34	Ecotourism Developer	Promotes sustainable travel and local eco-projects
Brian	M	43	Forestry Officer	Oversees reforestation and anti-deforestation efforts
Sophia	F	39	Environmental Educator	Teaches sustainability workshops and training

3.3. Instrumentation

The primary tool for data collection was semi-structured interviews designed to capture detailed narratives of participants' motivations and environmental practices. The interview guide included open-ended questions addressing their reasons for engaging in sustainability efforts, impactful personal experiences, and strategies for maintaining eco-friendly habits. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews or online discussions, allowing participants to share their thoughts, experiences, and decision-making processes [54]. The interviews also explored the impact of environmental stress on their actions and the behavioral transitions they underwent in pursuit of sustainability. Recordings and verbatim transcripts ensured precise and thorough documentation of participants' reflections [55]. **Table 2** presents the final interview questions.

Table 2. Final interview questions.

Objectives	Interview Questions
Determine motivations for contributing to sustainable environment.	1. What is your motive in contributing to sustainable environment? 2. What experience made you decide to advocate for sustainable environment? 3. Why is it important for each individual to make effort for sustainable environment?
Identify individual habits initiatives for protecting the environment.	1. Can you describe your individual efforts in preserving the environment? 2. How do you manage to consistently actualize self-preserving behavior for sustainable environment? 3. How do you think you can influence other individuals to contribute and actualize individual efforts to preserve the environment?

3.1. Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection involved conducting interviews in accessible and familiar settings to create a comfortable environment for participants to share their experiences [56]. Participants were invited to discuss their contributions to environmental sustainability, with tailored questions designed to uncover personal motivations, specific actions for environmental preservation, and the influence of psychological factors, such as stress and behavioral consistency, on their efforts.

3.2. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative technique that systematically detects and interprets recurring patterns of meaning within narrative information [57]. This approach is particularly valuable for investigating shared experiences and uncovering significance within participants' accounts, making it an effective means of understanding the complexity of lived realities [58]. Due to its adaptability, thematic analysis is especially suitable for preliminary research, allowing themes to surface naturally as researchers engage with the dataset [44,59]. The coding process follows a progressive structure—from basic descriptive codes and gradually integrating into more interpretative analyses—enabling scholars to develop structured themes [60,61]. Particularly, a reflexive thematic analysis was conducted to examine the responses from the interviews. Reflexive thematic analysis highlights the researcher's active role in meaning-making, acknowledging that their perspectives, biases, and lived experiences inevitably shape the interpretative process [62]. Given this subjectivity, researchers must critically assess how their viewpoints influence the emerging findings [63]. To mitigate bias, this study employed an inductive approach, allowing patterns and themes to emerge organically from the dataset rather than being imposed by preexisting theories or assumptions, thereby ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the findings [8,64]. The study followed the six-phase framework (**Figure 1**) of reflexive thematic analysis, as established by Braun and Clarke [65], involving the continuous reassessment and refinement of themes as new insights and relationships emerged.

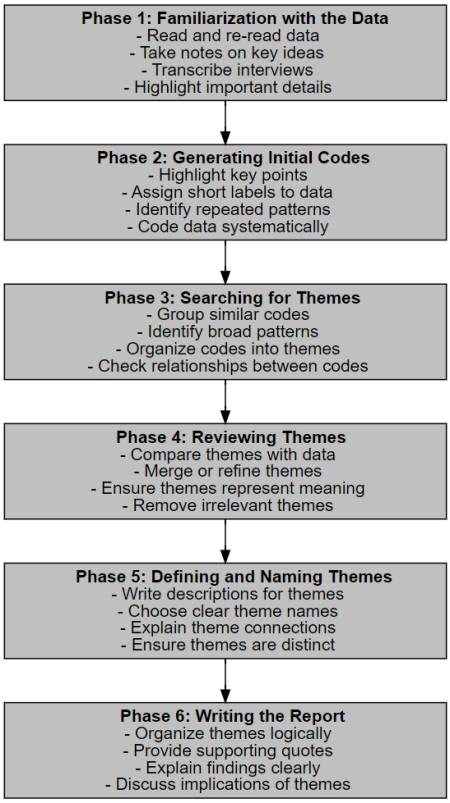

Figure 1. Workflow of data analysis process.

4. Results

Objective 1: Determine Motivations for Contributing to a Sustainable Environment.

The findings revealed that participants' motivations for contributing to environmental sustainability were rooted in three key themes: commitment, sense of urgency, and solidarity. Respondents demonstrated a strong personal commitment to sustainable practices, viewing environmental responsibility as a lifelong obligation that required continuous learning and action. Many participants expressed a sense of urgency, recognizing the immediate need for proactive measures to address environmental degradation and climate change. They emphasized the necessity of urgent, informed actions to mitigate long-term ecological damage. In addition, the concept of solidarity emerged, highlighting the belief that collective efforts and community-driven initiatives were essential for achieving meaningful environmental change. Participants recognized the importance of collaboration, advocacy, and shared responsibility in creating a sustainable future.

Theme 1: Commitment

Participants viewed sustainability as a continuous effort rather than a short-term goal. Their commitment was reflected in their dedication to educating themselves about the environmental impact of their actions.

Rather than perceiving sustainability as a fixed objective, participants viewed it as an evolving responsibility that necessitates adaptability and informed decision-making. Their commitment was evident in their proactive approach to environmental education, which enabled them to make conscientious choices in their daily lives.

> "I've always believed that sustainability is a long-term commitment. I make an effort to educate myself about the environmental impact of my daily choices, from the food I eat to the products I buy."

> "For me, sustainability is not just a habit but a lifelong responsibility. I continuously look for ways to reduce my ecological footprint."

> "I see environmental responsibility as an ethical duty. I hold myself accountable for my actions and how they impact nature."

One participant emphasized that sustainability is not a one-time effort but a continuous process that requires alignment between personal values and daily actions. This perspective suggests that individuals who are deeply committed to environmental responsibility integrate sustainable practices into all aspects of their lives, ensuring that their behaviors reflect their ethical and ecological beliefs.

> "Long-term environmental commitment requires consistency. I make sure my actions align with my values to promote sustainability in my personal and professional life."

> "Living sustainably is part of my commitment to social change. I make decisions with a focus on minimizing environmental harm and have community responsibility."

> "I see sustainability not only as an academic subject but as a moral imperative."

Participants expressed that their motivation to contribute to environmental sustainability stemmed from a deep sense of responsibility toward both the natural world and future generations. They viewed sustainability not merely as an individual choice but as a moral obligation to preserve ecological balance for those who would come after them. This perspective demonstrated their awareness that present actions have long-term environmental consequences, reinforcing their commitment to sustainable practices in their everyday decisions in life.

> "My motive in contributing to a sustainable environment comes from the responsibility I feel to the natural world and future generations."

> "My commitment to the environment is reflected in the choices I make, from using reusable products to advocating for policies that support sustainability."

> "Committing to a sustainable lifestyle means making conscious decisions every day, whether it's conserving water, reducing waste, or supporting green businesses."

Theme 2: Sense of Urgency

Aside from commitment to a sustainable environment, some also mentioned the sense of urgency needed in mit-

igating the impacts of environmental degradation. This urgency motivated them to engage actively in awareness campaigns, policy advocacy, and personal lifestyle changes that contributed to environmental preservation.

Participants expressed a strong sense of urgency regarding environmental sustainability, recognizing that immediate action was necessary to mitigate the escalating consequences of climate change and pollution. They perceived sustainability as a time-sensitive issue, emphasizing that delays in taking action would only worsen environmental degradation.

> "I'm motivated by a sense of urgency to educate students about the science of pollution and climate change so that they can understand the underlying mechanisms and, ultimately, use that knowledge to devise solutions."

Their motivation stemmed from the belief that climate change was rapidly progressing and that waiting for institutional policies or large-scale interventions would not be sufficient. Many participants felt a personal responsibility to take immediate steps, such as educating students about environmental science, reducing their carbon footprint, and promoting sustainable practices within their communities. They believed that by acting now, they could help prevent irreversible damage and create a more sustainable future.

> "With the rapid changes in climate, I feel an immediate responsibility to take action rather than wait for policies to be enforced."

> "I constantly remind myself and those around me that environmental action must happen now—not later—if we want to preserve our world for future generations."

> "Every small action counts because time is running out. I try to educate and encourage people to act before the damage becomes irreversible."

Some highlighted the importance of proactive decision-making in daily life. They stressed that even small actions, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and advocating for sustainable policies, collectively contributed to significant environmental improvements. Their sense of urgency pushed them to remain vigilant and consistent in their efforts, reinforcing the idea that sustainability was not just an ideal but an immediate necessity.

> "There is no time to hesitate when it comes to sustainability. Every day, I strive to make informed decisions that lessen my impact on the planet."

> "The urgency of environmental issues pushes me to be proactive. I take part in initiatives that promote immediate and effective solutions."

Theme 3: Solidarity

Participants viewed solidarity as a crucial factor in achieving sustainability, emphasizing that collective efforts were more effective than individual actions. They believed that environmental challenges, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem degradation, were the result of individual decisions, making it essential for communities to work together toward sustainable solutions. In this case, their motivation stemmed from the understanding that environmental issues transcended personal responsibility and required a shared commitment from society.

> "I believe in the power of collective action, and I try to lead by example in my personal life."

> "Every individual has a role to play in sustainability because our actions collectively shape the environment we live in."

> "The degradation of ecosystems, loss of biodiversity, and climate change are not distant problems; they are the result of millions of small decisions made by individuals every day."

Participants expressed that knowing others were equally committed to environmental protection provided them with encouragement and a greater sense of purpose. They believed that real change occurred when individuals united for a common goal, whether through advocacy, education, or policy influence.

> "I find strength in knowing that I'm not alone in this mission. When communities come together, real environmental change happens."

> "Working towards sustainability is a shared responsibility. I take part in environmental movements that emphasize unity and collaboration."

Lastly, some participants recognized that solidarity created a ripple effect, where inspiring others to adopt sustainable practices amplified the overall impact of their actions. They believed that by leading by example, they could influence their families, colleagues, and communities to make more environmentally conscious choices.

> "I believe that inspiring others to act sustainably creates a ripple effect, strengthening our collective impact."

> "The health of our environment is intertwined with our collective efforts. I actively engage in discussions and initiatives that bring people together for a common goal."

> "No single person can solve environmental problems alone, but together, we can create lasting change. That's why I support and advocate for group-led sustainability projects."

Objective 2: Identify Individual Habits Initiatives for Protecting the Environment.

Further analysis revealed that participants actively engaged in various individual habits and initiatives to protect the environment. Their efforts were primarily categorized into three key themes: education, positive consumerism, and social engagement.

Participants emphasized the significance of education as a foundation for sustainable behaviors, highlighting how raising awareness and integrating environmental knowledge into learning spaces encouraged long-term commitment to sustainability.

Some consciously make sustainable lifestyle choices, such as reducing waste, supporting ethical consumer practices, and advocating for responsible consumption. They believed that individual purchasing decisions had the power to influence industry practices and promote environmental sustainability on a broader scale.

Social engagement emerged as a crucial factor in reinforcing sustainable behaviors. Participants actively participated in community-based environmental initiatives, awareness campaigns, and policy advocacy efforts, recognizing the importance of collective action in driving meaningful environmental change. Their commitment to sustainability was strengthened through collaboration with peers, local organizations, and broader social networks.

Theme 1: Education

Many participants were driven by the belief that knowledge could empower individuals to make informed decisions that aligned with sustainability goals. They actively integrated environmental education into their professional and personal lives, using their platforms—such as classrooms, research, and community engagement—to educate others. They recognized that raising awareness about sustainability was essential for inspiring long-term change and encouraging a culture of environmental responsibility.

> "Education is the first step in changing behavior. When people understand how their actions impact the environment, they become more likely to take personal responsibility for sustainability."

> "…learning about sustainability, individuals not only gain the knowledge to make better decisions but also recognize the power of their own actions."

Participants sought to inspire students by highlighting the power of social behavior in driving meaningful change. They believed that by equipping students with knowledge and analytical tools, they could empower them to take proactive steps toward sustainability. This commitment extended beyond theoretical discussions, as participants actively engaged in research and teaching strategies that emphasized practical solutions to environmental challenges.

> "I also use my classroom to teach students about the cumulative impact of individual actions on global environmental health."

> "Our social behavior has the power to create significant change, and that's why I try to inspire students to take responsibility for their environmental impact."

> "Through research and teaching, I aim to equip students with the tools to understand these processes and, hopefully, work toward mitigating the damage we've already done."

> "I want my students to see that sustainability isn't a fad or a trend, but a necessity for long-

term survival."

Beyond teaching in classrooms, some also emphasized the importance of extensive coverage of environmental education. Participants viewed education as an ongoing process that required engagement beyond textbooks. They actively participated in sustainability initiatives, such as community workshops, public campaigns, and social advocacy programs, to ensure that environmental knowledge reached a wider audience. By doing so, they aimed to instill environmental consciousness in individuals from diverse demographic backgrounds, fostering a culture of responsibility across various social institutions.

> "I believe environmental education should not be confined to the classroom. I take part in community workshops and outreach programs to raise awareness about sustainable practices."

> "Education is a powerful tool for change, but it must be accessible to everyone. That's why I collaborate with local organizations to provide training and resources for sustainable living."

Theme 2: Positive Consumerism

Positive consumerism played a crucial role in fostering a culture of environmental protection by promoting sustainable habits that reduced waste, conserved resources, and shaped market trends. Participants actively integrated eco-friendly practices into their daily routines, ensuring that their consumption choices aligned with sustainability principles.

> "I've always been interested in how social norms and behaviors evolve, and I began noticing how deeply embedded consumerism is in our culture."

> "I advocate for sustainable living because I believe that the collective choices we make as consumers can force industries to rethink their practices."

They engaged in waste reduction by avoiding single-use plastics, composting organic materials, and opting for reusable alternatives. They also prioritized energy efficiency by using sustainable appliances and limiting unnecessary consumption, recognizing the long-term benefits of conservation.

> "I reduce waste by composting, minimize energy consumption with efficient appliances, and make mindful choices about the food I eat."

> "I focus on building sustainable habits that are part of my routine, like using public transportation, supporting local farmers, and minimizing single-use plastic."

Participants also supported environmentally responsible industries by choosing locally sourced products, avoiding fast fashion, and advocating for ethical consumerism. Their choices not only minimized their ecological footprint but also contributed to shifting market demand, pressuring businesses to adopt greener practices. Likewise, sustainable transportation choices, such as public transit and reducing reliance on private vehicles, reflected a broader commitment to lowering carbon emissions.

> "I use public transportation, avoid fast fashion, compost, and limit my energy usage."

> "Sustainable practices like reducing waste or choosing renewable energy sources can drive demand for eco-friendly products and services, which in turn pushes businesses to adopt greener practices."

> "I make conscious decisions to minimize waste, like bringing reusable bags, buying less plastic, and composting."

Through these collective efforts, positive consumerism evolved into more than just a set of individual habits; it fostered a shared mindset that emphasized the importance of responsible consumption. With consistent, environmentally conscious choices, participants contributed to normalizing sustainability, demonstrating that even small actions, when practiced collectively, had the potential to drive significant and lasting environmental change.

> "People often don't think twice about waste or overconsumption, but those small daily actions add up to a huge environmental toll."

> "I advocate for sustainable living because it's not just about technology or policy it's about shifting the collective mindset toward values of conservation and respect for the planet."

Theme 3: Social Engagement

Participants actively participated in community-based initiatives, such as clean-up drives, tree-planting activities, and waste reduction programs. These efforts not only contributed to the immediate improvement of local environments but also encouraged a culture of shared responsibility, where sustainability became a communal practice rather than an individual effort.

> "I'm active in promoting clean air and water initiatives in my community because I believe that protecting these resources is essential for public health."

> "I also engage in local community sustainability projects, from organizing clean-up events to participating in discussions about environmental policies."

They collaborated with organizations to advocate for cleaner air and water, supported policy changes promoting sustainability, and educated others about the long-term benefits of environmental stewardship. Engaging in eco-friendly practices with the community—such as promoting waste reduction at events or reinforcing sustainability among family, colleagues, and students—they contributed to the normalization of environmentally conscious habits.

> "Being involved in social initiatives, such as tree-planting programs and waste reduction drives, helps strengthen my commitment to environmental sustainability."

> "I make an effort to integrate sustainability into social events, encouraging my peers to adopt eco-friendly habits in their daily lives."

Consistency in eco-friendly behaviors was strengthened through interactions with family, colleagues, and students, as engaging with like-minded individuals encouraged accountability and motivation. Being part of a community that shared similar values made it easier to sustain environmentally conscious actions, as collective efforts reinforced the importance of sustainability in daily life. For example, collaboration with local organizations enabled them to expand their impact beyond individual actions, including participation in policy advocacy and hands-on environmental initiatives. These collective efforts ensured that sustainability was not only a personal commitment but also a shared responsibility within their communities.

> "For me, consistency comes from reinforcing these behaviors with the people around me my family, colleagues, and students."

> "It's easier to maintain when I feel part of a community that shares these values."

> "I actively participate in awareness campaigns, as I believe that educating others about sustainability is just as important as practicing it myself."

> "Collaborating with local organizations allows me to make a bigger impact, whether it's through policy advocacy or hands-on environmental restoration efforts."

5. Discussion

The paper aimed to explore self-preserving behaviors and specific personal contributions toward sustainability. Findings revealed that these actions are profoundly shaped by a sense of individual accountability, community advocacy, and a steadfast dedication to long-term environmental protection. Participants emphasized responsibility and innovation as core motivations, driven by their awareness of the environmental consequences of human activities and their commitment to addressing these impacts through education and technological solutions [66].

Two core psychological elements—stimulus and the establishment of habits—emerged as key drivers of participants' sustainability practices. Awareness of ecological crises created a sense of urgency, motivating participants to re-evaluate their behaviors. Rather than acting as a deterrent, this stress encouraged deliberate and impactful actions. Habit formation, conversely, was integral to embedding sustainability into daily life, with strategies like energy conservation, waste reduction, and mindful consumption becoming routine. Individuals' perceptions of these threats often depend on their experiences with environmental events, access to information, and value systems [67,68].

Participants were driven by commitment to educat-

ing future generations on scientific principles, a moral obligation to address environmental degradation, and the strategic use of technology to develop effective solutions [69]. For teachers, sustainability was integrated into their teaching, emphasizing the interconnectedness of ecological systems and the importance of informed decision-making. As a globally significant concept, sustainable development seeks to balance societal, economic, and environmental priorities. Given their central role in formal education, teachers play a crucial role in delivering sustainability-focused content and cultivating the skills required to achieve these objectives [70].

Gkargkavouzi, Halkos and Matsiori [71] explored the impact of eleven socio-psychological factors on behavior. They discovered that pro-environmental values strongly shape an individual's identity and worldview. These elements, in turn, influence social norms, attitudes, and perceived control, which, along with habits, affect both the intention to act and actual pro-environmental behavior. In Theory of Planned behavior, three key factors determine behavior: (i) attitude toward the behavior, based on expected outcomes; (ii) social norms, or the degree of social pressure to conform; and (iii) perceived behavioral control, or how feasible the behavior appears [72]. It has been widely used to explain various environmental behaviors, such as recycling and sustainable consumption. Likewise, having a strong sense of responsibility in environmental preservation reflects a positive attitude toward sustainability, indicating that interventions should focus on reinforcing the belief that sustainable behaviors lead to desirable outcomes.

Participants' behaviors evolved through direct experiences with environmental issues, such as witnessing the destruction caused by deforestation or participating in clean-up initiatives [73]. These encounters served as triggers for shifts in attitudes and habits, encouraging participants to transition from harmful practices to sustainable behaviors. This behavioral change is influenced by the dual forces of stress and adaptation, wherein individuals reflect on the consequences of environmental degradation and adopt practices that align with conservation goals. Environmental considerations have become integral not only to personal routines but also to the operations of modern organizations [74,75].

While knowledge influences behavioral change, research suggests that scientific understanding alone is insufficient to drive pro-environmental actions [76]. External conditions, such as the convenience of engaging in sustainable practices, also play a role—for example, access to recycling facilities significantly impacts recycling behavior [77]. When a person experiences strong environmental stewardship from the community, they are more likely to internalize sustainable behaviors as part of their personal and social identity, reinforcing both subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. When individuals observe consistent pro-environmental actions within their community—such as strict enforcement of waste management policies, financial incentives for sustainable choices, and active environmental campaigns—they perceive these behaviors as both expected and feasible. For example, the emphasis on collective solidarity highlights the importance of perceived behavioral control—individuals are more likely to act when they feel capable and supported by their communities. This, in turn, strengthens their intention to engage in sustainability practices, highlighting the critical role of structural and social reinforcements in translating environmental awareness into tangible action.

The importance of collective action and community engagement was a recurring theme among participants. While earlier studies suggest limited evidence that perceived effectiveness directly predicts engagement in collective efforts [78], participants demonstrated the significance of working collectively through initiatives such as waste reduction campaigns, local sustainability projects, and advocating for policies related to renewable energy and urban planning. These collective actions reflect an understanding that sustainability thrives on communal efforts, with individual contributions sparking wider societal change [79,80].

Future studies could explore the capacity of individual agency in advancing global sustainability goals. Participants demonstrated how informed choices, personal values, and consistent efforts can effectively address environmental challenges. Human behavior, even when not intentionally harmful, remains a primary contributor to sustainability problems. Both individual and collective decisions can intensify environmental, social, and economic issues [81]. Addressing critical challenges, such as crossing planetary boundaries [82], requires a shift in perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, alongside the development of con-

ditions that enable such transformations [82,83].

6. Conclusion

This study addressed how attitudes, motivation, and habits could contribute to environmental protection and stewardship. The findings indicated that motivations for contributing to environmental sustainability were driven by commitment, urgency, and solidarity, emphasizing personal responsibility, the need for immediate action, and the power of collective efforts. Participants viewed sustainability as an ongoing ethical duty that required continuous learning and lifestyle adjustments. In addition, participants actively engaged in various sustainable habits and initiatives, integrating environmental awareness into educational and professional settings, supporting ethical consumerism, and participating in advocacy and community-based sustainability efforts. Consequently, the motivations and strategies individuals adopt to promote environmental sustainability emphasize the connection between personal commitment, informed decision-making, and collective action.

7. Limitations

There were limitations that should be acknowledged to strengthen future research. One notable constraint is the sample size, which may not be sufficiently large or diverse to ensure the generalizability of the findings. Expanding the sample to cover a wider demographic and geographic scope would enhance the robustness of the results. The reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of response biases, such as social desirability and recall bias, which could affect the accuracy and objectivity of the findings. To mitigate these concerns, future studies could employ randomized sampling techniques, integrate objective behavioral measures, and utilize mixed-method approaches to triangulate data and improve validity. Lastly, longitudinal research designs could offer insight into the evolving nature of environmental sustainability efforts, capturing long-term behavioral changes and the effectiveness of various interventions over time. Understanding these limitations, future research can contribute to a comprehensive and critical understanding of environmental sustainability, develop interventions, and assess long-term environmental changes.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; methodology, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; software, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; validation, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; formal analysis, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; investigation, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; resources, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; data curation, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; writing—original draft preparation, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; writing—review and editing, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; visualization, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; supervision, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; project administration, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C.; funding acquisition, A.L.C., R.A.B.M., K.L.Q., S.C.C., N.J.M.B, J.V.D., R.A.M., E.E.B.J. and Y.C.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects in-

volved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data is unavailable due to the privacy and confidentiality agreement with the participants.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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