

# Hashtag Activism and the Eco-Social Transformation of Local Production in Georgia

**Mari Matcharashvili**

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University  
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,  
Program: Mass Communication (PhD)

## Abstract

In the digital era, hashtag activism has emerged as a form of social mobilization that intertwines economic, cultural, and ecological dimensions. This study examines the hashtag #იყიდექართული (#BuyGeorgian) as a local example through which digital solidarity, agro-ecological awareness, and support for local production are formed. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the hashtag gained particular relevance as platforms such as Facebook and TikTok became digital spaces where citizens, small entrepreneurs, and organizations aligned around shared values-local products were increasingly perceived as sustainable and environmentally conscious choices.

The theoretical framework draws on Castells' theory of the network society and Bennett and Segerberg's logic of connective action, both of which help explain how individual digital practices become integrated into broader collective narratives. Methodologically, the study employs digital discourse and content analysis, alongside in-depth interviews with small entrepreneurs whose responses illuminate the ecological, economic, and marketing-related significance of local production. The research also includes a selective analysis of social media posts tagged with #იყიდექართული, identifying key patterns and tendencies of hashtag-based practices.

The study aims to analyze how #იყიდექართული has evolved into a form of digital mobilization that simultaneously strengthens the local economy, fosters ecological responsibility, and generates new modes of collective action within social media environments.

Keywords: #BuyGeorgian (#იყიდევართული), hashtag activism, local production, ecological responsibility

## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary world, social media has become a central tool for disseminating information, expressing protest, and enabling collective actions and mobilization. Various forms of activism on social networks frequently coalesce around hashtags, which structure information, enhance thematic visibility, and strengthen public engagement. The dynamics of hashtag activism have become especially prominent over the past decade, with movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, #ClimateStrike, #GreenNewDeal, and others transforming into critical platforms for digital solidarity and public visibility. These campaigns demonstrate that a hashtag is not merely a technical marker; the phrases grouped around the symbol act as discursive instruments that generate new digital publics, shape modes of mobilization, and elevate specific issues into broader societal concerns.

Hashtag campaigns also play a significant role within Georgia's social, political, and ecological landscape. Particularly notable in the local digital environment is the hashtag #იყიდევართული, which promotes the support of the local economy, advances environmental awareness, and popularizes sustainable practices. As a hashtag-driven campaign, #იყიდევართული creates an online space in which economic choice, ecological responsibility, and civic engagement converge into a shared narrative.

Studying this hashtag enables us to understand how individual patterns of consumption transform into collective social actions, how social media facilitates new models of eco-social transformation in Georgia, and how small businesses and local brands use the hashtag to communicate identity, values, and social responsibility. Within this context, #იყიდევართული extends beyond the boundaries of marketing; its analysis allows us to examine how specific forms of digital activism take shape in Georgia.

Global analogues: #buylocal, #supportsmallbusiness, #familyfarm-demonstrate a worldwide trend toward supporting local production. On Facebook alone, the hashtag #buylocal has been used roughly 8 million times. International practice clearly shows that local-production-oriented discourse is frequently linked with ecological responsibility and sustainable consumption, often accompanied by hashtags such as #ecofriendly, #plasticfree, and #sustainable. Similarly, in the Georgian context, #იციდევსართული transcends its marketing origins and adopts a narrative aligned with eco-friendly responsibility.

In Georgia, a systemic, data-driven analysis of this process is virtually non-existent. Research that examines not only the economic but also the ecological narratives is particularly scarce. Consequently, this study fills an existing academic gap, providing an opportunity to understand how consumer attitudes and the practices of small entrepreneurs are changing within the digital space.

## **2. Theoretical Framework / Literature Review**

Manuel Castells (2012) emphasizes that in today's network society, information and communication technologies-including social media and hashtags-generate new opportunities for collective action and enhanced civic engagement. According to Castells, hashtag-based communication not only raises awareness and unites public interests in virtual environments but also creates possibilities for tangible social change. This is particularly relevant for local eco-social initiatives, which often operate with limited resources and small activist groups seeking meaningful social impact in environmental protection and community development. Castells argues that hashtag activism does not remain confined to online spaces; it initiates dialogue, strengthens public participation, and supports the formation of collective thinking (Castells, 2012, pp. 223-225).

Bennett and Segerberg (2012, p. 50) contend that digital networks enable a new logic of connective action, wherein individual behaviors are woven into shared cultural narratives, producing forms of digital solidarity. In this process, hashtags serve as key mediating nodes that

not only bring individuals together but also create platforms for coordinated action.

Diani (2003, pp. 45-48) argues that social movements frequently operate through networks wherein individuals and groups are linked by shared goals and values. Such structures allow for effective information exchange, resource sharing, and mobilization of collective action. For eco-social initiatives with limited resources, these networked configurations are especially valuable, enabling the dissemination of information and the amplification of participation.

Earl and Kimport (2011, pp. 15-20) highlight that digital media facilitates organizational processes and participant engagement within social movements, particularly in resource-constrained contexts. Online platforms allow activists to process information rapidly, design campaigns, and mobilize participants for offline events.

Theocharis and Valenzuela (2015, pp. 1180-1185) emphasize that hashtags function as symbols that bring together individuals around shared interests and problems, increasing public engagement in local social and ecological initiatives. The authors argue that digital solidarity strengthens connections not only online but also within community-level changes.

Bonilla and Rosa (2015, pp. 742-745) underscore that hashtag activism generates digital arenas where communities articulate viewpoints and interests in an organized manner, reinforcing collective thinking and broadening the support base for ecological and social initiatives. Dion (2018, pp. 102-106) similarly notes that digital platforms contribute to the dissemination of innovative and sustainable practices and empower small activist groups seeking wider community involvement.

Zeynep Tufekci (2017, pp. 39-44) provides a detailed account of how social media transforms the dynamics of collective action, offering opportunities that were once available only to large, resource-rich movements. Digital platforms, she argues, enable “coordination without formal organization,” granting visibility and mobilization capacity even to small groups. Hashtags play a pivotal role in this dynamic: they serve as narrative anchors, generate rapidly spreading

“public attention surfaces,” and facilitate collective focus around specific issues. Her analysis is particularly relevant for eco-social campaigns, where hashtags often represent the primary mechanism enabling small groups to exert influence at both local and national levels.

Loader and Mercea (2011, pp. 758-763) conceptualize social media as a new civic space in which online interactions evolve into practices of civic engagement. According to the authors, hashtags create temporary, interconnected social spaces where individuals with diverse perspectives and experiences unite around shared topics. Such spaces strengthen initiatives focused on ecological responsibility, local economic development, and social awareness—even when they operate with minimal resources. Hashtag campaigns thus function as “digital civic laboratories,” transforming issues into platforms for collective action.

This research therefore relies on the theoretical contributions of Castells’ network society, Bennett and Segerberg’s logic of connective action, Diani’s networked social movement model, and Earl and Kimport’s framework of digitally mediated mobilization—all of which collectively explain how hashtags are utilized to advance civic participation and collective engagement.

**Note:** The literature review incorporates AI-assisted text generation; however, all cited sources have been independently verified and are included in the bibliography.

## **2.1 The Emergence and Evolution of the #BuyGeorgian Campaign**

Years ago, “Buy Georgian” functioned as an offline economic campaign implemented by both state institutions and private-sector actors. Its primary goal was to support local producers, strengthen Georgia’s economy, and reduce dependence on imports. The campaign periodically appeared at international exhibitions, agricultural and small business forums, and local markets. It was not intended to raise ecological awareness; rather, it operated primarily as a slogan-based initiative aimed at promoting Georgian products.

## 2.2 Hashtag-Based Mobilization and the Formation of the Online Space

With the steady growth of social media users in Georgia, the “Buy Georgian” initiative underwent a gradual transformation, shifting entirely into the online environment and eventually becoming established as the hashtag #იყიდევართული (#BuyGeorgian). In an effort to enhance information dissemination, foster solidarity, and raise awareness, the hashtag continues to be widely used by small and medium-sized businesses, handmade product creators, farmers, and agro-startup entrepreneurs.

In recent years, #იყიდევართული has undergone thematic expansion. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it transformed into a campaign aimed at helping small producers survive the crisis. During this period, several related hashtags emerged alongside it, including: #ქართულიპროდუქტი (#GeorgianProduct); #ანარმომეჯართული (#ProduceGeorgian); #დამზადებულიასაქართველოში (#MadeInGeorgia); #ქართულიადაკარგია (#GeorgiansValuable); #zerowastegeorgia (same meaning in English); #ეკომეგობრული (#EcoFriendly); #ფერმერისპატრიოტია (#TheFarmerIsAPatriot)

These complementary hashtags reinforce the campaign’s core message and emphasize themes such as the promotion of sustainable local initiatives and the strengthening of civic solidarity.

## 3. Methodology

This study employs digital discourse analysis and content analysis to examine how eco-social and economic awareness is shaped and developed through hashtag-based communication. This methodological approach enables the investigation of not only what users express in posts, videos, or images tagged with #იყიდევართული, but also how they interpret and frame the hashtag itself.

Two social media platforms: Facebook and TikTok-were selected for analysis within the context of the campaign. Content was examined

using purposive sampling, meaning only materials directly related to the promotion of local production and actively employing #იციდევართული were included. Each post is treated as an element of digital discourse that reflects public attitudes and forms of mobilization. For Facebook, the study covers 2020-2024, while for TikTok, engagement is examined between 2021-2025.

The second stage involves conducting in-depth interviews with small farmers, local producers, NGO representatives working on the issue, and activists participating in #იციდევართული or related initiatives. The aim is to explore how these actors understand the eco-social significance of the campaign and how they perceive the hashtag's influence on the local economy and environmental consciousness.

### **3.1 Research Aim and Objectives**

The aim of the research is to examine how #იციდევართული functions as a tool of digital mobilization that contributes to strengthening local production, ecological sustainability, and economic self-awareness.

#### **Research Objectives:**

- To analyze the discourse and thematic dynamics surrounding the use of #იციდევართული on social media.
- To determine how this discourse intersects with ecological issues and the rising awareness of sustainable consumption.
- To identify how different stakeholder groups perceive #იციდევართული and evaluate the significance they attribute to the campaign.
- To assess how the digital campaign has evolved into a social movement and identify the factors driving its social and economic impact.
- To analyze the role of social media and hashtag-based campaigns in promoting eco-oriented worldviews in Georgia.

## **4. Empirical Analysis**

### **4.1 Selection of Platforms and Description of Materials**

Within the scope of the study, 200 units of digital content were selected using a purposeful sampling strategy. The dataset included 120 Facebook posts/photos and 80 TikTok videos, all of which contained the hashtag #იყიდექართული (#BuyGeorgian) or its related variations. This volume is sufficient for identifying hashtag narratives, thematic lines, and user behavior trends. In addition, the hashtag #იყიდექართული frequently co-occurred with environmentally oriented hashtags such as: #ბიოპროდუქტი (#BioProduct), #ეკომეგობრული (#EcoFriendly), and #მდგრადიპროდუქტი (#SustainableProduct). This indicates a growing public interest not only in locally produced goods but also in environmentally responsible consumption. Consequently, the empirical analysis examined these hashtags alongside #იყიდექართული.

**Table 1. Thematic Classification of Hashtags**

The classification of posts was based on a multi-coding analytical approach. Each post (photo or video) could contain several thematic codes, resulting in a total number of coded instances that exceeds the number of posts.

Category	Description	Facebook/ 120 limit	TikTok /80limit
Local production #იყიდექართული	The focus is placed on Georgian production	120	80
Eco-friendly/ Bioproduct	The focus is on product's environmental friendliness	75	57
Marketing/advertisement	Promotions/ Branding	110	75
Cultured/traditional elements	The focus is on traditional and handmade items	56	33
Social values	Support for local businesses	73	22

The quantitative differences between categories primarily stem from the sampling strategy. Accordingly, the higher numbers observed on Facebook reflect the size of the sample rather than a direct indicator of platform-level communicative activity. Nonetheless, comparative analysis across thematic categories revealed several dominant trends: support for local production, eco-friendly practices and marketing-oriented content. Furthermore, Facebook demonstrated a stronger presence of cultural-traditional and social value-related themes, aligned with the platform’s discursive characteristics and the audience’s preference for more text-based, value-laden communication. In contrast, such themes were less prevalent on TikTok, consistent with its visual and fast-paced content format.

**Table 2. Frequency and Overlap of Key Hashtags**

Hashtag	Facebook	TikTok	Total count
#იყიდექართული (#BuyGeorgian)	120	80	200
#ქართულიადაკარგია (#Georgianisgood)	92	54	146
#madeinGeorgia	78	44	122
#გააძლიერეშენიქვეყნისეკონომიკა (#supportyourNationalEconomy)	57	13	70
#ქართულიბრენდი (#Georgianbrand)	47	56	103
#ხელნაკეთი (#handmade)	33	25	58
#ბიოპროდუქტი (#BioProduct)	48	35	83
#ეკომეგობრული (#EcoFriendly)	56	39	95

Observations across Facebook and TikTok indicate that hashtags associated with Georgian-made products-particularly

#იციდექართული, along with other local-production tags-demonstrate high levels of activity.

**Table 3. User Engagement (Interaction Metrics)**

To assess user engagement, 40 posts were selected from each key thematic category (20 from Facebook and 20 from TikTok). The sampling was conducted randomly, and average interaction indicators were calculated.

Category	Like Facebook	Like Tik Tok	Comment Facebook	Com ment Tik Tok	Share Facebook	Share TikTok
Local Production	490	510	380	430	230	90
Eco Friendly	480	445	365	310	195	60
Marketing	475	675	375	460	245	75
Cultured/ traditional elements	260	135	190	370	110	45
Social values	245	140	210	120	135	30

The empirical data reveal that: For Georgian Facebook users, posts relating to local production and eco-friendly products are particularly engaging. These posts receive high levels of likes and shares, indicating strong user resonance. Marketing-oriented content demonstrated significant influence across both platforms -supported by the number of comments, which shows that users not only react (via likes) but also express opinions, interests, and evaluations in the comment sections. On TikTok, comment counts were somewhat lower. however, the number of likes was comparatively high, reflecting platform-specific behavioral patterns. Overall, the thematic structure of hashtag activism reflects intertwined interests in local production,

marketing communication, and eco-friendly practices. This underscores the importance of strategically curated and thematically coherent content in social media environments, where user engagement is closely tied to the relevance and framing of digital narratives.

## **4.2 Analysis of In-Depth Interviews**

The second stage of the research involved conducting in-depth interviews with small entrepreneurs, representatives of non-governmental organizations working on relevant issues, and consumers who, within the context of hashtag activism around *#აიციღებრაულო* (*#BuyGeorgian*), prefer local and eco-friendly products. The interviews aimed to understand how producers and environmental organizations interpret the social significance of *#აიციღებრაულო* and how they link it to ecological responsibility and sustainable practices. The interviews were semi-structured, and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

### **4.2.1 Perceptions of Local Production and Social Values**

#### **Respondent 1 - Small Entrepreneur**

The respondent operates a small enterprise specializing in mushroom production, using high-quality, locally sourced raw materials. He notes that he relies on unique mushroom and mycelium varieties.

“My main motivation is that it’s a Georgian product, and Georgian products need support. We should replace imported goods with Georgian alternatives.”

#### **Respondent 2 - Small Entrepreneur**

According to the participant, the value of Georgian production is rooted not only in identity but also in eco-friendly and responsibly executed practices. She avoids using materials harmful to human health and produces decorative candles exclusively from natural raw materials. This approach, in her view, strengthens consumer trust and reinforces the perception that local production is linked to social responsibility and environmental values.

“Yes, I am Georgian-I make and create Georgian products, and I want everyone to recognize and know my work.”

### **Respondent 3 - Consumer**

The respondent states that she frequently chooses Georgian handmade products, especially when selecting gifts for foreign friends. She explains that this choice simultaneously supports small Georgian producers and demonstrates to foreigners that Georgia can offer products that meet European standards.

## **4.2.2 Ecological Responsibility and Sustainable Practices**

### **Respondent 3 - Consumer**

This participant prefers eco-friendly brands and chooses products that do not cause additional environmental harm. She emphasizes that her purchases should not contribute to further ecological pressure in an already polluted environment.

### **Respondent 4 - Small Entrepreneur**

A representative of a social enterprise explains that since the establishment of their business, they have refrained from using single-use plastic items, opting instead for products made from wood or cardboard. Their goal is to minimize waste and promote eco-friendly consumption habits. In recent years, the enterprise has incorporated a stronger social responsibility component by involving children in environmental awareness activities. Through this initiative, children collect plastic bottles and deliver them to the enterprise, simultaneously learning environmentally responsible behavior and participating in community engagement.

“For us, ecological responsibility is not just a marketing strategy-it’s a core value we established from day one.”

### **Respondent 5 - NGO Representative, CENN**

The representative of CENN notes that the organization supports sustainable development through various programs, including assistance for eco-entrepreneurs, awareness campaigns, and grant

projects. Eco-friendly production and the promotion of local products are viewed as essential pathways for building a green economy.

#### **Respondent 6 - Georgian Farmers' Association**

According to the representative, eco-friendly and sustainable practices require significant investment-in capital, operational expenses, and employee training. These investments are often not reflected in sales unless producers obtain proper certification and access appropriate markets.

#### **4.2.3 Assessing the Effectiveness of Hashtag Practices**

##### **Respondent 1 - Small Entrepreneur**

The participant explains that using hashtags on social media increases product visibility and consumer interest. He adds that user engagement and feedback during hashtag campaigns serve as motivation for small producers.

##### **Respondent 4 - Small Entrepreneur**

The representative of the social enterprise notes a substantial increase in hashtag use within their organization in recent years. Social media hashtag activism contributes to audience engagement, particularly during periods of intense ecological campaigning.

“Hashtag usage increases every year because it’s no longer just marketing- it’s an expression of our enterprise’s social responsibility.”

##### **Respondent 5 - NGO Representative, CENN**

According to the respondent, hashtags on social media are often used to cluster information within specific topics and make it easier to locate. She emphasizes that the assumption that Georgian-made products are automatically eco-friendly is not always accurate and requires monitoring from responsible organizations. CENN promotes only those enterprises that demonstrably meet environmental and social standards, helping reduce the risk of greenwashing.

## Respondent 6 - Georgian Farmers' Association

The respondent explains that the organization has run multiple online campaigns over its 13-year history, including one of its earliest and most far-reaching initiatives, #ფერმერისპატრიოტი (#TheFarmerIsAPatriot). The campaign aimed to highlight the importance of farmers and replace outdated terminology with a more respectful one. He emphasizes that hashtags increase campaign visibility and connect participants, but content quality remains crucial—materials must be clear, accessible, and visually appealing.

“Based on our many projects, we’ve seen that a farmer may not have an email address, but they almost always have a Facebook account. That’s why we use Facebook and hashtags actively in our campaigns. In today’s world, online campaigning increases visibility and makes it easier to reach diverse audiences.”

**Summary of Interview Findings** The interviews show that for small entrepreneurs, local production is not merely an economic activity but is strongly tied to cultural and social values. Participants highlight that their products, made from natural materials, embody Georgian identity-enhancing consumer perceptions of authenticity, quality, and local significance. Respondents also emphasize their commitment to ecological and sustainable practices, which in turn strengthens consumer trust and support. Regarding hashtag practices, participants state that hashtags increase user engagement and interest. However, the data indicate that hashtags must be used responsibly to avoid generating misleading associations. CENN, for example, promotes only those enterprises that meet confirmed environmental and social standards, reducing the risk of greenwashing. The findings further show that social media plays an important role in shaping environmental strategies and policy processes in Georgia. For many entrepreneurs, hashtags provide faster and more effective communication with citizens, though limited internet access in certain regions constrains these opportunities. As one respondent explains: “Data from social media can be just as important as information gathered through other means when designing environmental strategies and policies. Social media, due to its widespread use, is a valuable tool for both communication and data

collection. However, in many regions of Georgia, internet access remains limited, so inclusive and participatory engagement must also rely on offline strategies -including direct communication and public meetings.”

## **5. Conclusion**

The research demonstrates that in the Georgian context, hashtags play an active role in promoting local products. Based on the ongoing #იყიდევართული campaign, it is evident that consumer awareness in Georgia is gradually increasing, and accordingly, the social responsibilities of small producers have evolved.

Analysis of Facebook and TikTok content revealed several dominant trends: promotion of local production remains the leading category; marketing-oriented content continues to play a significant role; environmental and sustainability narratives are becoming increasingly prominent, particularly within eco-friendly production. These transformations were reinforced by the in-depth interviews. Entrepreneurs use hashtags not only to boost sales but also as a communication tool for social responsibility, ecological values, and sustainable production. Environmental responsibility has become part of product identity, and consumers actively seek such attributes.

However, the findings also highlight the need for stronger labeling standards and greater support mechanisms for small producers and farmers. Empirical insights align with Manuel Castells’ theoretical framework, which conceptualizes modern networked societies as creators of “meaning-driven public spaces,” where economic, political, and cultural narratives merge with digital practices. Similarly, #იყიდევართული has become a networked movement in the digital sphere, integrating economic interests with environmental values.

## **6. Recommendations**

For Small Entrepreneurs

- It is recommended to continue using #იყიდევართული and related hashtags to promote local products. When applicable, highlight hashtags such as #ეკომეგობრული (#EcoFriendly) and

#ბიოპროდუქტი (#BioProduct), provided the products genuinely meet these standards.

For the NGO Sector and Government Institutions

- Develop additional programs that increase public engagement and strengthen awareness of eco-friendly practices.
- Offer financial and legislative support for small and medium-sized entrepreneurs and farmers.
- Prioritize full nationwide internet accessibility to enable farmers to use social media platforms effectively for communication and market visibility.

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**Note on Translation:** Portions of this work were translated with the assistance of AI to ensure clarity and academic accuracy.

## **Appendix A. In-Depth Interviews**

### **Respondent 1 - Small Entrepreneur**

Question: As a small entrepreneur, how would you describe your business, and what makes your product unique in the Georgian market?

Answer: My product is made from Georgian raw materials, using unique mushroom and mycelium varieties. I believe the product's quality meets international standards.

Question: How often do you use the hashtag #იყიდევართული (#BuyGeorgian), and what motivated you to start using it?

Answer: I do not use hashtags daily, but I use them to promote my products, mainly on Facebook. I believe Georgian products need support, and imported goods should be replaced with local alternatives. Therefore, it is important to maximize the use of social media, including hashtags.

Question: Do you associate your products with supporting local production, ecological responsibility, or sustainable practices?

Answer: Yes, I do.

Question: What advice would you give to small entrepreneurs starting out who want to use hashtags to promote their brand or product?

Answer: First and foremost, I recommend that small and medium entrepreneurs create a high-quality product. Only then should they focus on social media and hashtags, because low-quality products diminish interest in Georgian goods and harm the reputation of other local producers.

## **Respondent 2 - Small Entrepreneur**

Question: As a small entrepreneur or brand, how would you describe your business, and what makes your product unique in the Georgian market?

Answer: I produce handmade, scented decorative candles. The uniqueness of my products lies in the fact that they stand out not only in the Georgian market but also internationally. I personally oversee the quality and every detail, working manually and without competition.

Question: How often do you use #იყიდევართული (#BuyGeorgian), and what motivated you to start using it?

Answer: I use #იყიდევართული quite often. For me, using this hashtag on social media is a way to affirm that, yes, I am Georgian, I create this product, and I want everyone to know about it.

Question: In your observation, how has using hashtags affected consumer engagement, interest, or sales?

Answer: Using the hashtag on social media positively impacts visibility, and consumer interest has generally increased.

Question: Do you associate your products with supporting local production, ecological responsibility, or sustainable practices?

Answer: Yes, I associate my products with ecological responsibility because I work with natural raw materials, avoid substances harmful to health, and monitor these aspects as much as possible.

### **Respondent 3 - Consumer**

Question: What types of products do you purchase most frequently when choosing between local and foreign options?

Answer: I always try to choose Georgian, handmade products, especially when giving gifts to my foreign friends. This supports small Georgian producers and demonstrates to my friends that Georgia produces goods that meet European standards.

Question: What is your main criterion when making a choice? (e.g. quality, eco-friendliness, brand)

Answer: The most important criterion for me is product quality. I consistently prioritize eco-friendly brands and try to ensure that my purchases do not add further stress to an already heavily polluted environment.

Question: How accessible do you think eco-friendly, locally made products are in Georgia?

Answer: In recent years, demand for eco-friendly products has increased significantly, and Georgian entrepreneurship has responded quickly. Eco-friendly Georgian products are quite accessible to people across various financial capacities and tastes.

### **Respondent 4 - Small Entrepreneur (Social Enterprise, Café “Mziuri”)**

Question: Do you associate your products with ecological responsibility or sustainable practices?

Answer: At our social enterprise, our products are linked to sustainability and ecological responsibility. Since our establishment, we have avoided single-use plastic items, opting for wood- and cardboard-based products. We strive to make our products as eco-friendly as the Georgian market allows.

Question: How frequently do you use hashtags associated with sustainability or eco-friendliness on social media?

Answer: We frequently use these hashtags, and audience engagement grows year by year. This is not just marketing; it represents our social responsibility. This year, we added a component focusing on children -encouraging them to collect plastic bottles and bring them to our social enterprise.

Question: How engaged are consumers with Café “Mziuri’s” initiatives, and do these initiatives raise public awareness?

Answer: Our social enterprise has been active for ten years, and there have been noticeable changes in public behavior. Initially, we collected paper and plastic, but people often disposed of other waste in the plastic containers. Now, attitudes have changed: large quantities of plastic bottles are collected and properly delivered.

Question: How often should institutions and small entrepreneurs engage in eco-friendly initiatives, and what impact could this have?

Answer: Everyone must take responsibility for environmental protection. We all live in the same environment, and supporting sustainability and Georgian products is crucial. Isolated efforts are insufficient; it is important that both small and large businesses actively participate in sustainable development.

### **Respondent 5 - NGO Representative, CENN**

Question: How would you define CENN’s role in supporting local, eco-friendly products and promoting sustainable development?

Answer: CENN promotes sustainable development in the South Caucasus through various programs. We work on climate change, environmental protection, energy efficiency, agriculture, rural development, and youth education. Our projects contribute to the economic, social, and green growth of individual regions, cities, and communities. Regarding eco-friendly and local product support, CENN strengthens local entrepreneurs through informational campaigns, grant programs, and other initiatives.

Question: What role does social media play in encouraging environmental civic engagement?

Answer: In Georgia, social media is a primary source of information for a large part of the population. Therefore, these platforms provide an effective way to reach the right audience. CENN actively uses social media to engage citizens on environmental issues through online campaigns, competitions, and other interactive activities. Our target audience often includes young people, whose interest and motivation spread widely.

Question: How do you assess the trend of #იყიდექართული (#BuyGeorgian) being associated with environmental hashtags such as #ბიოპროდუქტი (#BioProduct) or #ეკომეგობრული (#EcoFriendly)?

Answer: Hashtags are often used to cluster information under specific topics for easier discovery. However, equating Georgian-made products automatically with eco-friendly standards is ambiguous. While raising awareness of eco-friendly products is positive, attention must be paid to whether the product truly meets eco-friendly standards. Incorrect associations may lead to misconceptions that local production automatically implies bio or eco-certified products. Organizations like CENN promote only enterprises that demonstrably comply with environmental and social requirements, minimizing greenwashing risks.

Question: How important are social media data-based studies for planning environmental policies and strategies?

Answer: Data from social media can be as significant as information gathered through other means for developing environmental strategies and policies. Social media, due to its widespread use, is a valuable tool for disseminating information and collecting data. However, many regions in Georgia still lack full internet access, so inclusive and participatory engagement requires additional strategies, including direct communication and public meetings.

## **Respondent 6 - Georgian Farmers' Association**

Question: How would you define the Association's role in supporting local production, agro-business, and sustainable development?

Answer: The Georgian Farmers' Association supports farmers and entrepreneurs by providing knowledge through formal and informal courses and sharing practical experience. We believe knowledge and modern approaches are crucial in agriculture. Beyond training, key components include agronomic services, food safety standards, and grant programs.

Question: What challenges do small and medium farmers face when adopting eco-friendly or sustainable practices?

Answer: Eco-friendly and sustainable practices require investments in capital, operational costs, and staff training. These investments are often not reflected in sales unless certification is obtained and products can be marketed appropriately. Financing these investments is a major barrier.

Question: How do social media, hashtags, and online campaigns contribute to promoting local products and increasing consumer engagement?

Answer: Over 13 years, the Association has conducted numerous online campaigns. One of our first major campaigns, #ფერმერისპატრიოტი (#TheFarmersAPatriot), covered the entire country. Its goal was to highlight the importance of farmers and replace the term "peasant" with "farmer." The hashtag increases visibility and connects campaign participants. However, content quality is crucial - messages must be clear and visually appealing. For instance, a recent campaign video reached nearly 10,000 views on an Instagram page with 700 followers, without paid promotion. Our experience also shows that while a farmer may not have email, they are almost always registered on Facebook, so we actively use Facebook for online campaigns.