



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### ROLE OF BRANDING AND COMMUNICATION IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE MARKETS

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#### ABSTRACT

The increasing emphasis on sustainability in business operations has highlighted the importance of branding and communication in promoting sustainable markets. In Imo State, businesses face challenges such as low consumer awareness, limited financial resources, and skepticism surrounding environmental claims, which impede the adoption of sustainable consumption practices. This study investigates the influence of sustainable branding and communication strategies on consumer perception, trust, loyalty, and the adoption of sustainable consumption behaviours among consumers in Imo State. A cross-sectional survey research design was employed, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled *Branding and Communication for Sustainable Markets Questionnaire (BCSMQ)* from 192 managers, owners, marketing officers, and senior staff of selected businesses using a structured questionnaire validated with a reliability coefficient of 0.91. Data were analyzed using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient at a 0.05 significance level. Findings reveal that sustainable branding significantly enhances consumer perception, trust, and loyalty, while effective communication strategies significantly encourage consumers to adopt sustainable consumption behaviors. The study concludes that strategic branding and communication are vital tools for fostering sustainable markets, improving consumer engagement, and promoting environmental responsibility. It is recommended that businesses integrate sustainability into their brand identity and adopt multi-channel communication strategies to educate consumers and strengthen sustainable consumption practices.

**Keywords:** Sustainable branding, communication strategies, consumer perception, sustainable consumption, sustainable markets

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**Received:** 2/10/2025; **Revised:** 5/11/2025; **Accepted:** 16/11/2025; **Published:** 31/11/2025



## INTRODUCTION

Today's business world is characterized by globalization and intense competition, as most consumers are exposed to alternative products, propelling organizations to employ effective strategies in producing and marketing their goods and services. In a bid to successfully attract customers' attention, marketing managers must differentiate their offerings from competitors to achieve strategic objectives (Ranganathan & Madupu, 2018). Marketing communication is a vital tool that organizations use to inform, remind, and convince current and potential customers about their offerings, persuading them to prefer their products over competing brands. As marketers seek the right ways to send the right messages to the right audiences at the right time, they increasingly look beyond traditional advertising and mass media approaches to integrated marketing communication (Kubania & Kagiri, 2017).

In this context, sustainable markets and green branding have emerged as key drivers of responsible consumption and long-term business competitiveness. Sustainable markets prioritize products, services, and business practices that minimize ecological impact, promote social responsibility, and support economic viability, while effective branding and communication foster consumer awareness, trust, and engagement (Papadas, Avlonitis, & Carrigan, 2018; Kumar, Rahman, & Kazmi, 2020). Sustainable marketing transitions, therefore, require firms to integrate strategic communication, authenticity, and stakeholder engagement into their business operations to achieve both market success and environmental stewardship (Delmas & Burbano, 2018; Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Morgan, 2020).

Branding has been defined in multiple ways by scholars. Kotler and Keller (2019) describe branding as the process of creating a unique name, design, and image for a product or service in the consumer's mind, primarily through consistent messaging and marketing strategies, to differentiate it from competitors and build loyalty. This emphasizes the strategic and perceptual aspects of branding, highlighting its role in shaping consumer attitudes and preferences. Similarly, Aaker (2018) defines branding as a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds or subtracts value provided by a product or service to the firm and its customers. This underscores the value creation component of branding, including its capacity to influence consumer trust, brand equity, and long-term business performance.

In the context of sustainable markets, these definitions can be extended to include environmental and social responsibility, meaning that branding not only differentiates products and services, but also communicates a firm's commitment to sustainability, ethical practices, and stakeholder engagement (Papadas, Avlonitis, & Carrigan, 2018; Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2021). Branding in sustainable markets, therefore, entails creating and promoting a brand identity that reflects environmental and social responsibility. Recent studies highlight that sustainable brands act as change agents by encouraging eco-friendly consumption, increasing awareness of environmental issues, and promoting transparency



regarding production and supply chain practices (Chen, 2019; Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2021). Similarly, effective communication strategies help firms convey their sustainability commitments through clear messaging, storytelling, and credible certifications, thereby enhancing consumer trust, loyalty, and competitive advantage (Singh, Gupta, & Sinha, 2022; Mahmood, Rehman, & Fatima, 2023).

In Nigeria, particularly in Imo State, businesses offering eco-friendly products, renewable energy solutions, and sustainable waste management services are emerging as important actors in promoting responsible consumption. However, sustainable branding and communication often face challenges, including low consumer awareness, financial constraints, limited institutional support, and skepticism arising from greenwashing (Okeke & Nwosu, 2021; Nwokike, 2024). Sustainable marketing strategies, therefore, require deliberate planning that integrates transparency, authenticity, and engagement with stakeholders to achieve meaningful outcomes (Papadas et al., 2018; Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2021).

Despite growing global and local emphasis on sustainability, there is limited empirical research examining how branding and communication influence consumer behavior, market performance, and sustainability outcomes in Nigerian contexts. Analyzing this nexus provides insights into how businesses in Imo State can leverage branding and communication to foster sustainable consumption, enhance market competitiveness, and support environmental and social goals. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the role of branding and communication in promoting sustainable markets, using selected businesses in Imo State as a case study.

Sustainable markets are increasingly important for achieving long-term economic, social, and environmental objectives. However, in developing countries like Nigeria, many firms struggle to implement effective branding and communication strategies that genuinely reflect their sustainability efforts. In Imo State, while businesses providing eco-friendly products, renewable energy solutions, and sustainable waste management services are emerging, their impact remains limited. Challenges such as low consumer awareness, inadequate marketing strategies, limited access to credible certifications, financial constraints, and skepticism arising from greenwashing hinder their effectiveness.

These challenges raise critical questions about whether current branding and communication practices in sustainable markets effectively influence consumer perception, build trust, and encourage environmentally responsible behaviour. There is therefore, a pressing need for empirical research to evaluate how branding and communication strategies can be optimized to promote sustainable consumption, enhance market competitiveness, and strengthen overall sustainability outcomes in Imo State.



## **Objectives of the Study**

The main aim of this study is to analyze the role of branding and communication in promoting sustainable markets in Imo State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the influence of sustainable branding on consumer perception, trust, and loyalty in selected businesses in Imo State.
2. Ascertain the effect of communication strategies on the adoption of sustainable consumption practices among consumers in Imo State.

## **Research Questions**

1. What is the influence of sustainable branding on consumer perception, trust, and loyalty in selected businesses in Imo State?
2. What is the effect of communication strategies on the adoption of sustainable consumption practices among consumers in Imo State?

## **Research Hypotheses**

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** Sustainable branding has no significant influence on consumer perception, trust, and loyalty in selected businesses in Imo State.

**H0<sub>2</sub>:** Communication strategies have no significant effect on the adoption of sustainable consumption practices among consumers in Imo State.

## **COCEPTUAL REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Sustainable Markets**

Sustainable markets are characterized by the integration of environmental, social, and economic considerations into business practices. These markets prioritize products and services that minimize ecological impact, promote social equity, and ensure long-term economic viability. According to Papadas, Avlonitis, and Carrigan (2018), sustainable markets are driven by a green marketing orientation that aligns corporate strategies with environmental and social goals. This orientation is essential for firms aiming to achieve competitive advantage through sustainability initiatives.

Kumar, Rahman, and Kazmi (2020) further emphasize the importance of sustainable markets in fostering responsible consumption and production patterns. They argue that businesses operating in sustainable markets must adopt practices that not only meet consumer demands but also contribute positively to societal well-being and environmental health. In the context of developing economies like Nigeria, sustainable markets face unique challenges, including



limited consumer awareness, financial constraints, and institutional support. However, these markets also present opportunities for innovation and leadership in sustainability, particularly in regions like Imo State, where businesses are beginning to offer eco-friendly products and services.

### **Branding in Sustainable Markets**

Branding in sustainable markets extends beyond traditional differentiation strategies to encompass environmental and social responsibility. Kotler and Keller (2019) define branding as the process of creating a unique name, design, and image for a product or service in the consumer's mind, primarily through consistent messaging and marketing strategies, to differentiate it from competitors and build loyalty. This definition underscores the strategic and perceptual aspects of branding, highlighting its role in shaping consumer attitudes and preferences. Aaker (2018) adds that branding involves a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds or subtracts value provided by a product or service to the firm and its customers. This perspective emphasizes the value creation component of branding, including its capacity to influence consumer trust, brand equity, and long-term business performance.

In sustainable markets, branding serves as a tool for firms to communicate their commitment to sustainability, ethical practices, and stakeholder engagement. Sustainable branding strategies involve creating and promoting a brand identity that reflects environmental and social responsibility. Recent studies highlight that sustainable brands act as change agents by encouraging eco-friendly consumption, increasing awareness of environmental issues, and promoting transparency regarding production and supply chain practices (Chen, 2019; Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2021).

### **Communication in Sustainable Markets**

Effective communication is crucial for conveying a firm's sustainability efforts and building consumer trust. Singh, Gupta, and Sinha (2022) discuss the role of communication strategies in promoting sustainable consumption practices. They argue that clear messaging, storytelling, and credible certifications can enhance consumer trust and loyalty, thereby influencing purchasing decisions. Mahmood, Rehman, and Fatima (2023) further explore the impact of communication strategies on consumer behavior. They find that transparency and authenticity in sustainability communications are key factors in fostering consumer engagement and promoting sustainable consumption patterns.

Businesses face challenges in implementing effective communication strategies due to low consumer awareness, financial constraints, and skepticism arising from green washing. Okeke and Nwosu (2021) highlight these challenges and suggest that sustainable marketing





strategies require deliberate planning that integrates transparency, authenticity, and engagement with stakeholders to achieve meaningful outcomes.

### **Challenges in Branding and Communication for Sustainable Markets**

Despite the growing emphasis on sustainability, businesses in developing countries often struggle to implement effective branding and communication strategies. Delmas and Burbano (2018) identify several drivers of greenwashing, including regulatory weaknesses, organizational incentives, and individual cognitive biases. These factors contribute to misleading environmental claims that can undermine consumer trust and hinder the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives. Leonidou, Katsikeas, and Morgan (2020) emphasize the importance of integrating strategic communication, authenticity, and stakeholder engagement into business operations to achieve both market success and environmental stewardship. They argue that firms must move beyond superficial sustainability claims and adopt comprehensive strategies that align with their core values and operations. Branding and communication play pivotal roles in promoting sustainable markets. However, businesses must navigate challenges such as greenwashing and consumer skepticism to effectively convey their sustainability efforts. By adopting authentic and transparent strategies, firms can build consumer trust, enhance brand loyalty, and contribute to the development of sustainable markets.

### **Theoretical Review**

The study is anchored on Stakeholder Theory and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

#### **Stakeholder Theory**

Stakeholder Theory, introduced by Freeman (1984), posits that organizations operate within a network of stakeholders whose needs, expectations, and influence must be considered for long-term success. Stakeholders include customers, employees, suppliers, regulators, and communities, all of whom can affect or are affected by organizational actions (Harrison, Barney, Freeman, & Phillips, 2019).

This theory is relevant to the present study because branding and communication in sustainable markets are key mechanisms for engaging stakeholders. Firms that effectively communicate their environmental and social initiatives can build trust, enhance loyalty, and positively influence stakeholder perceptions. By addressing the expectations of diverse stakeholders, companies in Imo State can promote responsible consumption and strengthen market competitiveness. Stakeholder Theory therefore provides a framework for understanding how transparency, authenticity, and engagement in branding and communication drive sustainable business practices



### **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)**

The Theory of Planned Behavior, developed by Ajzen (1991), explains human behavior as driven by behavioral intentions, which are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. This theory is widely applied to study consumer decision-making, including environmentally responsible behaviors

TPB is pertinent to this study because consumer adoption of sustainable products often depends on their attitudes toward environmental responsibility, social influence from peers and society, and perceived control over making eco-friendly choices. Effective branding and communication strategies influence these factors by raising awareness of sustainability issues, establishing social norms around green consumption, and enhancing consumers' confidence in their ability to make responsible decisions. Thus, TPB provides a framework for analyzing how marketing communication and branding strategies affect the adoption of sustainable consumption practices in Imo State

### **Empirical Studies**

Chen and Chang (2019) conducted a study on the impact of sustainable branding on consumer loyalty in green businesses in China. Using a survey of 400 consumers across 20 eco-friendly brands, the study found that strong sustainable brand identities significantly enhanced consumer trust, perception of authenticity, and repeat purchase behavior. The authors concluded that branding strategies highlighting environmental and social responsibility play a critical role in promoting consumer loyalty in sustainable markets.

Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2021) investigated how sustainable branding influences consumer perception and purchasing decisions in European green firms. Data collected from 350 consumers using structured questionnaires revealed that brands perceived as environmentally responsible had higher credibility and were more likely to be preferred over non-sustainable competitors. The study emphasized that integrating social responsibility and transparency in branding strengthens competitive advantage.

Singh, Gupta, and Sinha (2022) examined the role of communication strategies in promoting sustainable consumption in Indian retail markets. A sample of 500 consumers was analyzed using regression analysis, showing that clear messaging, storytelling, and eco-certifications significantly increased consumer adoption of sustainable products. The study concluded that effective communication is crucial for translating sustainability commitments into consumer action.

Mahmood, Rehman, and Fatima (2023) explored the relationship between corporate sustainability communication and consumer engagement in Pakistani green businesses. Using 420 survey responses from consumers and focus group discussions, findings revealed that



authenticity, transparency, and interactive communication channels positively influenced consumer participation in sustainable consumption practices. The study highlighted the need for firms to adopt multi-channel, credible, and engaging communication strategies.

Okeke and Nwosu (2021) investigated the challenges of sustainable branding and communication among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria. Data from 200 business managers revealed that low consumer awareness, financial constraints, and skepticism from greenwashing limited the effectiveness of branding and communication efforts. The study recommended that Nigerian firms adopt strategic, transparent, and stakeholder-inclusive branding and communication approaches to build trust and promote eco-friendly consumption.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design to examine the role of branding and communication in promoting sustainable markets in Imo State. The target population consisted of managers, owners, marketing officers, and senior staff of businesses in the study area. These participants were considered appropriate because they are directly involved in branding, marketing, and communication strategies within their organizations. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who had firsthand experience with sustainability initiatives and were knowledgeable about branding and communication practices in their firms. A total of 200 respondents were selected from businesses operating across Imo State.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Branding and Communication for Sustainable Markets Questionnaire (BCSMQ). The instrument was designed on a four-point Likert scale with response options: Strongly Agreed (SA) = 4, Agreed (A) = 3, Disagreed (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 1. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in marketing, sustainability, and consumer behaviour, while its reliability coefficient, determined using Cronbach Alpha, was 0.91, indicating high internal consistency. Out of the 200 questionnaire items administered, 192 (96%) were successfully retrieved and deemed valid for analysis. Data were analyzed using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) to test the research hypotheses in a bivariate format. All analyses were conducted with the aid of SPSS Version 23, and statistical significance was evaluated at the 0.05 level.

## **PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Ho1:** Sustainable branding does not significantly influence consumer perception, trust, and loyalty in selected businesses in Imo State.



**Table 1:** Correlation between Sustainable Branding and Consumer Perception, Trust, and Loyalty

Variables	N	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Sustainable Branding	192	1.000	–
Consumer Perception, Trust, and Loyalty	192	0.756**	0.000

**Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).****Source:** Researchers' Data, 2025.

Table 1 shows a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.756 with a significance value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 alpha level. Since the significance value (0.000) is below 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho1), which states that sustainable branding does not significantly influence consumer perception, trust, and loyalty, is rejected. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that sustainable branding strongly enhances consumer perception, trust, and loyalty in selected businesses in Imo State.

**Ho2:** Communication strategies do not significantly affect the adoption of sustainable consumption practices among consumers in Imo State.

**Table 2:** Correlation between Communication Strategies and Adoption of Sustainable Consumption Practices

Variables	N	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Communication Strategies	192	1.000	–
Adoption of Sustainable Consumption Practices	192	0.731**	0.000

**Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).****Source:** Researchers' Data, 2025.

Table 2 shows a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.731 with a significance value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 alpha level. Since the significance value (0.000) is below 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho2), which states that communication strategies do not significantly affect the adoption of sustainable consumption practices, is rejected. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This implies that effective communication strategies significantly encourage consumers to adopt sustainable consumption behaviors in Imo State.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings indicate that sustainable branding significantly influences consumer perception, trust, and loyalty in businesses operating in Imo State. Strong brand identities that highlight environmental and social responsibility enhance consumers' confidence and willingness to engage repeatedly with these businesses. This aligns with Chen and Chang (2019), who reported that sustainable branding significantly improves consumer trust and repeat purchase



behavior in green businesses. Similarly, Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2021) found that integrating transparency and social responsibility in branding enhances brand credibility and competitive advantage.

The results further reveal that communication strategies significantly affect the adoption of sustainable consumption practices. Clear messaging, storytelling, and credible certifications improve consumer awareness and motivate eco-friendly purchasing behavior. These findings corroborate Singh, Gupta, and Sinha (2022), who observed that effective sustainability communication encourages consumers to adopt green products. Mahmood, Rehman, and Fatima (2023) also highlighted that authenticity, transparency, and multi-channel engagement are key factors in promoting consumer participation in sustainable consumption practices.

Overall, the study demonstrates that both sustainable branding and strategic communication are pivotal in shaping consumer behavior and fostering sustainable markets. Businesses in Imo State that integrate transparency, stakeholder engagement, and clear messaging into their branding and communication practices are more likely to enhance consumer trust, loyalty, and eco-conscious behavior, thereby contributing to long-term market competitiveness and environmental sustainability.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

This study analyzed the role of branding and communication in promoting sustainable markets in Imo State. The findings revealed that sustainable branding significantly enhances consumer perception, trust, and loyalty, while effective communication strategies encourage the adoption of sustainable consumption practices. These results indicate that businesses that integrate transparency, authenticity, and stakeholder engagement into their branding and communication efforts are better positioned to influence consumer behavior and foster sustainable market growth. The study concludes that strategic branding and communication are vital enablers of sustainable market development, as they not only differentiate firms in competitive markets but also promote environmental responsibility, social well-being, and long-term business competitiveness. Firms in Imo State can leverage these tools to build strong brand identities, increase consumer trust, and drive eco-conscious consumption behaviors, ultimately contributing to sustainable development in the region.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results and conclusion, the following recommendations were made by the researchers:

1. Businesses in Imo State should integrate sustainability into their brand identity and communication strategies, emphasizing transparency, environmental responsibility, and ethical practices to build consumer trust and loyalty.



2. Firms should adopt multi-channel communication strategies, including storytelling, social media campaigns, and credible eco-certifications, to effectively educate consumers and encourage sustainable consumption behaviors.

### Competing Interest

The authors have declared that no conflicting interest exist in this manuscript.

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