

CONSUMER-CENTRIC SUSTAINABILITY: STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATING ETHICAL PRACTICES IN MARKETING AND ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES¹

Emre NALÇACIGİL²

ABSTRACT

The shift of sustainability from an outside issue to fundamental corporate management has driven changes in products people buy, business relationships, and organizational makeup. The research explores consumer-driven sustainability and ethical marketing strategies to determine their influence on buying patterns, brand relations, and corporate environmental initiatives. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys involving 1,200 participants with qualitative expert interviews (n=25) and focus groups (6 groups, n=48). The survey utilized adapted scales to measure consumer attitudes, trust, loyalty, and purchasing intentions. SEM and regression analysis revealed that ethical marketing and transparent communication are significant predictors of brand trust and loyalty. This survey indicates that 68.2% of consumers choose products from brands that actively announce sustainability commitments, but 38.8% have concerns about greenwashing. Governments should prioritize transparent sustainability communication because it builds trust between businesses and consumers and leads to stronger brand loyalty (58.3%), demonstrating the need for ethical marketing. Future investigations may study how sustainability-based programs affect organizations over extended periods and identify how modern technologies can aid businesses in displaying their sustainability initiatives transparently.

Keywords: Ethical Marketing, Consumer-Centric Branding, Brand Trust, Greenwashing, Stakeholder Theory, Value-Based Marketing, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Sustainable Business Strategies, Consumer Behaviour

¹ The Ethics Committee Approval Certificate: Cappadocia University Ethics Commission with document date and decision number: 19.12.2024-23.01.

² Asst. Prof. Dr., Kırşehir Ahi Evran University, Çiçekdağı Vocational School, Çiçekdağı Kırşehir Türkiye. emre.nalcacigil@ahievran.edu.tr, ORCID:0000-0001-9834-7472

TÜKETİCİ ODAKLI SÜRDÜRÜLEBİLİRLİK: PAZARLAMA VE KURUMSAL POLİTİKALARDA ETİK UYGULAMALARIN ENTEGRASYONU İÇİN STRATEJİLER

ÖZ

Sürdürülebilirliğin dıřsal bir sorun olmaktan çıkıp temel kurumsal yönetime kayması, insanların satın aldığı ürünlerde, iş ilişkilerinde ve organizasyonel yapıda deęişikliklere yol açmıştır. Arařtırma, tüketici odaklı sürdürülebilirlik ve etik pazarlama stratejilerini inceleyerek bunların satın alma kalıpları, marka ilişkileri ve kurumsal çevresel girişimler üzerindeki etkilerini belirlemektedir. 1.200 katılımcıyı içeren anketler, uzman görüşmeleri (n=25) ve odak gruplarıyla (6 grup, n=48) birleştirilen karma yöntem yaklaşımı kullanılmıştır. Ankette tüketici tutumlarını, güvenini, sadakatini ve satın alma niyetlerini ölçmek için uyarlanmış ölçekler kullanılmıştır. SEM ve regresyon analizi, etik pazarlama ve şeffaf iletişimin marka güveni ve sadakatinin önemli yordayıcıları olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu anket, tüketicilerin % 68,2'sinin sürdürülebilirlik taahhütlerini aktif olarak duyuran markaların ürünlerini tercih ettiğini, ancak %38,8'inin yeşil aklama konusunda endişe duyduğunu göstermektedir. Kamu kurumları, işletmeler ve tüketiciler arasında güven oluşturduğu ve daha güçlü marka sadakatine (58,3%) yol açtığı için şeffaf sürdürülebilirlik iletişimine öncelik vermelidir; bu da etik pazarlamaya olan ihtiyacı göstermektedir. Gelecekteki arařtırmalar, sürdürülebilirliğe dayalı programların uzun vadede kuruluşları nasıl etkilediğini inceleyebilir ve modern teknolojilerin işletmelerin sürdürülebilirlik girişimlerini şeffaf bir şekilde sergilemelerine nasıl yardımcı olabileceğini belirlemeye yönelik çalışmalar yararlı olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etik Pazarlama, Tüketici Odaklı Markalařma, Marka Güveni, Greenwashing (Yeşil Aklama), Paydař Teorisi, Deęer Temelli Pazarlama, Kurumsal Sosyal Sorumluluk (KSS), Sürdürülebilir İş Stratejileri, Tüketici Davranışı.

1. Introduction

Sustainability has shifted from being a specialized topic to becoming an obligatory practice for businesses when they adopt ethical standards across their organizational policies and marketing initiatives (Omowole et al., 2024). Consumer-centric sustainability is a framework between business strategies that respect consumer ethics and sustainable choice-based values. Traditional corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives are now supplemented by an approach that places sustainability at the operational centre and marketing initiatives of business operations. Consumers' rising interest in environmental destruction, social fairness, and responsible sourcing has triggered companies to maintain marketplace success and consumer confidence through sustainable operational methods (Iannuzzi, 2024). This transition is primarily driven by a growing consumer demand for transparency and ethical conduct. Despite this shift, a significant gap exists between corporate sustainability promises and consumer perceptions, often leading to accusations of greenwashing and eroding trust. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the precise mechanisms through which consumer-centric sustainability and ethical marketing influence consumer behaviours and how organizations can effectively integrate these practices into their core policies. This research makes an original contribution by empirically testing the relationships between ethical marketing, transparency, brand trust, and loyalty using a robust mixed-methods approach, providing a validated model for businesses to foster sustainable growth.

Sustainability receives increased attention; however, organizations struggle to create a complete connection between consumer-focused strategies and their ethical marketing and policy frameworks. Corporate sustainability remains peripheral in most businesses and does not align with their essential value delivery systems (Nicolò et al., 2024). Such misalignment results in negative consumer reactions that combine disbelieving perceptions and mistrust of environmental goodwill alongside operational failures. The research aims to connect sustainability methods with customer demands and organizational approaches while establishing trust relationships, brand loyalty, and long-term achievement.

The study focuses on two key objectives: 1) understanding consumer sustainability preferences and their impact on purchasing behaviour and brand loyalty, and 2) investigating successful organizational policy mechanisms that support the integration of authentic sustainability practices (Zaman et al., 2024).

A mixture of qualitative and quantitative analysis through this study will deliver complete knowledge about sustainability-focused consumer behaviour. The qualitative phase will further explore the 'why' behind these relationships and investigate organizational best practices. The investigation adds theoretical value by using Stakeholder Theory and Value-Based Marketing frameworks to explain findings. It provides direct, empirically-supported recommendations for businesses seeking effective, ethical sustainability implementation.

Sustainability now serves as a fundamental corporate strategy component in the contemporary business world instead of an optional external requirement. Businesses must embed

sustainability throughout their operations because consumers now demand environmentally conscious practices which protect brand reliability while securing market competition. Companies that neglect to match their marketing plans to customer expectations forfeit their customer trust, brand commitment, and ability to thrive in the long run. A dedicated focus on sustainability has emerged because of immediate requirements to handle climate change, resource shortages, and disparities between different social groups. Promoting corporate sustainability through regulatory bodies, environmental regulations, sustainability reporting requirements (EU CSRD), and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has increased among governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Christensen et al., 2021, 1180; United Nations, 2015, 1). External pressures alongside changing consumer attitudes demand business organizations restructure their traditional profit-centred approaches into sustainable management frameworks (Eccles et al., 2014, 2840-2842; Grewal et al., 2024, 4).

Many organizations struggle to develop a smooth relationship between their sustainability promises and consumer-oriented strategies, although sustainability has become essential to organizational success (Rösler et al., 2025). Poor alignment between sustainability policies made by companies and public understanding of their environmental efforts leads to general doubt and suspicion, which causes consumers to claim that such practices are greenwashing tactics. Greenwashing continues to emerge as a primary issue because customers insist on truthful and genuine information about sustainability claims from corporations. Many consumers choose sustainable brands, although they doubt corporate sustainability programs because of dishonest or unclear corporate promises. The current disconnect between sustainable practices and effective, ethical marketing communication requires business entities to implement sustainable practices and establish proper ethical marketing strategies (Vangeli et al., 2023). All sustainability efforts within branding and corporate communication require verifiable commitments and third-party certifications followed by transparent reporting mechanisms.

2. Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

2.1. Consumer-Centric Sustainability and Its Impact on Marketing

Consumer-centric sustainability focuses on aligning business practices with customer expectations regarding environmental and ethical needs. Studies indicate that modern consumers strongly prefer brands that demonstrate genuine dedication to sustainability, moving beyond superficial claims (Ottman, 2011, as cited in Namaz, 2024). White et al. and Hardisty and Habib (2019) demonstrated that consumers prefer brands that share their ethical beliefs, provided these beliefs are demonstrated through transparent and verifiable actions. The success of companies like Patagonia and Unilever stems from this alignment of brand identity with authentic sustainability messaging.

Sustainable marketing strategies must therefore have dual missions: advocating for eco-friendly products while providing unequivocal transparency regarding their impact (Mandung, 2024). As noted by Peattie and Crane (2005), effective sustainable marketing should focus on fostering

enduring behavioral change rather than relying on short-term, pragmatic promotion strategies (Udeh et al., 2025). This requires embedding sustainability into the core brand narrative.

2.2. Ethical Marketing's Influence on Consumer Trust, Loyalty, and Decision-Making

Ethical marketing, characterized by transparency and fairness, forms the foundation of consumer-centric sustainability. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) confirmed that ethical marketing is crucial for strengthening consumer trust, which is indispensable for long-term brand success (Batuwael et al, 2024). Trust and loyalty are critical mediators in developing sustainable consumer behaviour. that ethical brands are found enjoy elevated consumer trust, leading to repeat purchases and organic advocacy (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Research shows that ethical factors are significant purchase decision drivers, especially among millennials and Gen Z (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). In the digital age, social media and online reviews empower consumers to scrutinize corporate ethical behaviours, making it imperative for companies to align their marketing with consumer expectations on sustainability to avoid losing a valuable customer base.

2.3. Sustainability Integration into Organizational Policies

For sustainability initiatives to be successful, they must be deeply integrated into core organizational principles, moving beyond marketing rhetoric. Elkington's (1997) Triple Bottom Line framework provides a foundational model, emphasizing the balance between people, planet, and profit (Zaharia & Zaharia, 2021). Strong organizational policies are critical for supporting this integration. Bansal and Roth (2000) argue that robust sustainability policies lead to superior stakeholder satisfaction and improved risk management.

However, implementation faces obstacles such as high costs, organizational resistance, and weak regulatory frameworks (Bello et al, 2024). Porter and Kramer (2011) suggest that these challenges can be overcome by creating shared value, where business success and social welfare are interconnected (Roszkowska, 2023). Adopting international frameworks like the UN SDGs and ESG criteria can enhance credibility and stakeholder engagement.

2.4. Theoretical Context: Stakeholder Theory and Value-Based Marketing

Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) posits that businesses must manage the interests of all stakeholders, including consumers, employees, suppliers, and the environment (Thiam, 2023). This stakeholder-oriented approach is shown to foster innovation, build brand trust, and create shared value, leading to sustained competitive advantage (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

Value-Based Marketing (Holbrook, 1999) complements this by asserting that organizations must fulfil consumer needs that extend beyond basic product utility (Bekele et al., 2021). Sustainable marketing strategies inherently provide ethical, environmental, and social value. The integration of these two theoretical frameworks allows businesses to build sustainable models that resonate with ethically-conscious consumers. Stakeholder Theory posits that a

firm's success is dependent on its ability to manage relationships with all entities it has a connection with, not just its shareholders (Freeman, 1984). This interconnected network is illustrated in Figure 1.

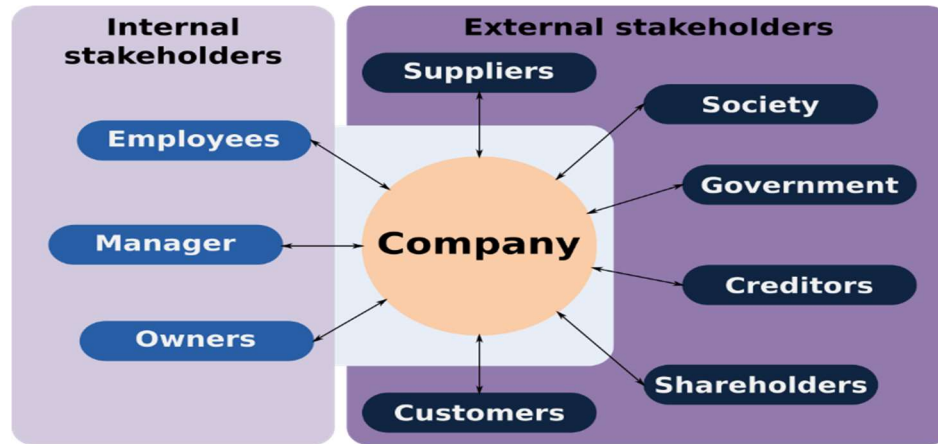


Figure 1: The Interconnected Relationship between an Organization and its Stakeholders (Adapted from Freeman, 1984)

2.5. Research Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework and literature review outlined above, the primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of consumer-centric sustainability and ethical marketing practices on consumer behaviours and brand relationships. To achieve this objective, the following hypotheses are tested:

H1: Perception of ethical marketing has a positive and significant effect on trust in corporate sustainability claims.

H2: Trust in corporate sustainability claims has a positive and significant effect on (a) brand loyalty and (b) purchase intention.

H3: Perception of ethical marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty.

H4: Brand loyalty mediates the relationship between perception of ethical marketing and purchase intention.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase involved a cross-sectional survey to quantify consumer attitudes and behaviours. This was followed by a qualitative phase comprising expert interviews and focus groups to provide depth, context, and explanation for the quantitative findings. This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and received ethical approval from Cappadocia University Ethics Commission with document date and decision number: 19.12.2024-23.01

3.2. Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data Collection: A structured online questionnaire was administered to 1,200 participants. The survey instrument was developed by adapting established scales from existing literature to ensure validity (See Appendix A for full questionnaire and sources).

Qualitative Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 experts in marketing, sustainability, and corporate policy. Furthermore, six focus group discussions were held with 48 participants who were active consumers of sustainable brands. Interview and discussion guides are provided in Appendices B and C.

3.2.1. Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

A structured online questionnaire was administered to 1,200 participants. The survey instrument was developed by adapting established scales from existing literature to ensure validity (See Appendix A for full questionnaire and sources).

The quantitative phase of this research was conducted through an online survey created on the Google Forms platform. Data collection took place between February and June 2024. The survey link was distributed via email, professional social networks (primarily LinkedIn), and collaboration with sustainable consumer organizations to reach the target audience. Participation was entirely voluntary and based on informed consent. Participants were informed about the average completion time (15 minutes), data confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time. A total of 1,200 complete responses were obtained. To ensure data quality, attention check questions were included within the survey, and responses that failed these checks were excluded from the analysis.

Before the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted with 50 participants. The purpose was to assess the clarity of the questions, the reliability of the adapted scales, and to estimate the completion time. Cronbach's Alpha values calculated from the pilot data were all above 0.70. Based on participant feedback, minor grammatical adjustments were made to two items for better clarity.

The collected data was downloaded from Google Forms into Microsoft Excel for initial screening and then transferred to IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 22) for analysis. The data cleaning process involved: **Missing Data Analysis:** The dataset was examined for missing values. Cases with more than 10% missing data on the scale items were listwise deleted. For the remaining minimal random missing data, the Expectation-Maximization (EM) algorithm was used for imputation. **Outlier Analysis:** Univariate outliers were identified by calculating z-scores for each variable. Cases with a z-score exceeding ± 3.29 ($p < .001$) were thoroughly examined. As these were few and represented valid, albeit extreme, responses within the target population, they were retained in the analysis. **Normality Assumption:** The normality of the data distribution for each variable was assessed by examining skewness and kurtosis. The absolute values for skewness (< 2) and kurtosis (< 7) indicated that the data did not significantly deviate from normality, thus meeting the assumption for the planned parametric tests (CFA, SEM).

The data analysis employed a two-step approach using both IBM SPSS 22 and IBM AMOS 28 software, as recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988).

Measurement Model (Confirmatory Factor Analysis - CFA): The first step involved validating the measurement model through CFA in AMOS. This tested whether the observed variables (survey items) reliably measured their intended latent constructs. Model fit was evaluated using multiple indices: χ^2/df ratio (< 3), Comparative Fit Index (CFI $> .90$), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI $> .90$), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA $< .08$), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR $< .08$) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Convergent validity was assessed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE $> .50$) and Composite Reliability (CR $> .70$). Discriminant validity was confirmed if the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Structural Model (Structural Equation Modelling - SEM): After establishing a valid measurement model, the second step tested the hypothesized structural model using SEM in AMOS. This assessed the strength and significance of the causal pathways between the latent constructs (e.g., Ethical Marketing \rightarrow Trust). The maximum likelihood estimation method was used. The same fit indices from the CFA were used to evaluate the structural model's goodness-of-fit. Bootstrap analysis (2000 samples, 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals) was conducted to test the significance of the direct and indirect (mediation) effects outlined in the hypotheses.

Additional Analyses: Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) were calculated for all demographic variables and scale items in SPSS. The internal consistency reliability of each scale was confirmed by calculating Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, with all values exceeding the .70 threshold (Nunnally, 1978).

3.2.2. Qualitative Data Collection: Rationale and Procedures

A qualitative research design was employed to gain in-depth, nuanced insights that quantitative data alone could not provide. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain detailed, expert opinions and strategic-level insights from professionals. In contrast, focus group discussions were utilized to observe group dynamics, uncover shared perceptions, and stimulate conversations among consumers, which often reveals consensus and contradictions that individual interviews might not (Morgan, 1996; Krueger & Casey, 2014).

Interview Procedure: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 experts in marketing, sustainability, and corporate policy. The interviews were held online via Zoom/MS Teams between (January-February 2024), with each session lasting approximately 20-40 minutes. Prior to each interview, participants were sent an informed consent form and a brief overview of the topics. With permission, all interviews were audio and video recorded to ensure accuracy in data capture. The interviews were conducted using a flexible guide (Appendix B) that covered key themes (e.g., sustainability challenges, communication strategies, greenwashing concerns) but allowed for probing questions to explore emerging ideas in depth.

Focus Group Procedure: Six focus group discussions were held with 48 participants (8 participants per group) who were active consumers of sustainable brands. The sessions were

conducted online to facilitate participation from diverse geographic locations. Each focus group session lasted approximately 40-90 minutes. A trained moderator facilitated the discussions using a guide (Appendix C), while an assistant took notes and managed technical aspects. All sessions were audio and video recorded. The group dynamics allowed participants to build on each other's ideas, providing rich data on collective consumer attitudes and behaviours.

Data Management and Validity/Reliability: To ensure validity and reliability (trustworthiness) in the qualitative phase, several strategies were employed:

1. **Triangulation:** Data from interviews and focus groups were triangulated to cross-verify findings.
2. **Member Checking:** A summary of key points was sent to selected participants to confirm accuracy.
3. **Peer Debriefing:** The research team regularly discussed and interpreted the data to minimize individual bias.
4. **Detailed Documentation:** The entire process, from data collection to analysis, was thoroughly documented to ensure an audit trail.

The recorded audio files were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription app. Subsequently, the research team checked the transcripts against the recordings for accuracy. All identifying information was removed to ensure participant anonymity. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was then employed to analyse the data. This involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. NVivo software (version 14) was used to facilitate the coding and theme development process.

3.3. Sampling Strategy

The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure the representation of key demographic segments within the population of interest: consumers who are aware of and engaged with sustainability issues to some degree.

a) **Defining the Strata and Target Proportions:** The population was stratified based on four demographic criteria deemed most relevant to sustainability consumption patterns: age group, gender, income level, and geographical location (urban vs. rural). The target proportions for each stratum were determined based on latest national census data and market research reports on sustainable consumer demographics to enhance the sample's representativeness.

b) **Development of the Quasi-Sampling Frame and Recruitment:** A perfect, readily available sampling frame for the entire target population does not exist. Therefore, a quasi-sampling frame was constructed through a multi-channel recruitment strategy to approximate the stratified random sampling approach as closely as possible:

1. **Panel Provider:** A professional research panel provider was commissioned to recruit participants from their pre-existing database. The panel provider's database served as the initial

sampling frame. We provided the provider with the desired quotas (strata sizes) based on our target proportions.

2. Social Media Targeting: Paid advertisements on platforms like LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook were used. The advanced targeting tools of these platforms (e.g., targeting by age, location, interests like "sustainability," "organic products") allowed for the precise recruitment of participants into the pre-defined strata.

3. Collaboration with chambers of commerce, industry and Sustainable Brands: Partnerships with non-governmental organizations and retailers focused on sustainability helped reach niche segments of the population that are highly engaged in ethical consumption.

This hybrid approach, combining elements of quota sampling with a stratified random design from multiple frames, is a recognized methodology in contemporary digital research for accessing hard-to-reach populations while maintaining demographic proportionality (Callegaro et al., 2014).

3.4. Measures and Scales

The survey instrument was developed by adapting well-established scales from the existing literature to ensure validity and reliability. Scales were selected based on their proven psychometric properties and relevance to the study's constructs. Specifically, the scale measuring Consumer Attitudes toward Sustainable Branding (4 items) was adapted from Mohr et al. (2001). The Trust in Corporate Sustainability Claims scale (4 items) was derived from the work of Chen and Chang (2013). Brand Loyalty (3 items) was measured using items adapted from Zeithaml et al. (1996), while Purchase Intention (3 items) was operationalized based on the scale developed by Spears and Singh (2004). Finally, the Perception of Ethical Marketing construct (5 items) was adapted from Singh et al. (2012). All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The original wording of items was slightly modified to fit the context of sustainability and ethical marketing while preserving their core meaning. The full questionnaire and detailed source references are provided in Appendix A.

3.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: Data were analysed using SPSS 22 and AMOS 28. Descriptive statistics were computed. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The measurement model was validated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized relationships between constructs. Furthermore, regression analysis was conducted to identify key predictors of brand loyalty.

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis was conducted on transcripts from interviews and focus groups using NVivo software. Codes were generated inductively and grouped into themes to extract meaningful insights.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

The adapted scales demonstrated high internal consistency, as shown in Table 1.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) confirmed the convergent and discriminant validity of

the constructs. All factor loadings were significant ($p < .001$) and above 0.6. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs was above 0.5, and Composite Reliability (CR) was above 0.7, indicating good convergent validity.

Table 1. Reliability and Validity of Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Attitudes toward Sustainable Branding	0.89	0.91	0.72
Trust in Sustainability Claims	0.87	0.89	0.67
Brand Loyalty	0.91	0.93	0.82
Purchase Intention	0.88	0.90	0.75
Perception of Ethical Marketing	0.90	0.92	0.70

4. Results

This section presents the study's findings, integrating quantitative survey data and qualitative insights from expert interviews and focus groups. The results focus on consumer perceptions of sustainable branding, the impact of ethical marketing on trust and loyalty, statistical analyses of sustainability preferences, and organizational approaches to sustainability integration. The findings comprehensively understand how sustainability influences consumer decision-making and business strategies.

4.1. Demographic Overview of Respondents

The study included 1,200 participants from diverse age groups, income levels, educational backgrounds, and geographic locations. The demographic distribution was carefully designed to ensure balanced representation, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of sustainability-related consumer behaviours. Additionally, 25 industry experts participated in qualitative interviews, offering insights into corporate sustainability policies and marketing practices. Moreover, six focus groups with 48 participants provided qualitative data regarding consumer attitudes toward sustainability and ethical business practices.

The age distribution of respondents revealed that younger consumers (18-34 years) accounted for more than half (54.1%) of the sample, highlighting the increasing awareness and preference for sustainability among younger generations. This aligns with previous research indicating that millennials and Gen Z consumers are more inclined toward ethical consumption. Additionally, respondents aged 35-54 (37.5%) demonstrated significant engagement with sustainability, particularly concerning ethical sourcing and environmental impact. Participants above 55 years (8.3%) showed lower engagement, suggesting generational differences in sustainability priorities.

A significant gender distribution trend emerged, with 52% female, 46% male, and 2% non-binary respondents. This reflects a slightly higher engagement with sustainability among women. Prior research has shown that female consumers often display stronger ethical behaviours, particularly concerning environmental and social responsibility.

Table 2. Demographic Distribution of Survey Respondents

Characteristic	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18-24	250	20.8
	25-34	400	33.3
	35-44	300	25.0
	45-54	150	12.5
	55+	100	8.3
Gender	Male	552	46.0
	Female	624	52.0
	Non-binary	24	2.0
Education Level	High School	240	20.0
	Undergraduate	480	40.0
	Postgraduate	480	40.0
Income Level	Low (<\$30K)	360	30.0
	Middle (\$30K-\$75K)	540	45.0
	High (>\$75K)	300	25.0
Geographic Location	Urban	720	60.0
	Suburban	360	30.0
	Rural	120	10.0

The demographic data reveal several important trends. Younger consumers, particularly those in the 18-34 age group, strongly prefer sustainability, indicating that businesses targeting these consumers should prioritize sustainable branding. The slightly higher female representation suggests that sustainability appeals more to women, possibly due to greater environmental awareness and ethical consumption habits. The correlation between education and sustainability engagement indicates that awareness campaigns should target less-educated demographics. Additionally, middle-income consumers exhibit the highest level of sustainability engagement, likely due to their increased purchasing power and value-based consumption habits. Urban consumers show the highest levels of sustainability awareness, while rural respondents demonstrate lower engagement, suggesting the need for targeted awareness programs in non-urban areas.

4.2. Quantitative Findings

4.2.1. Descriptive Statistics and Consumer Perceptions

Descriptive results for key consumer attitude items are summarized in Table 2. A strong majority of consumers (68.2%) reported a preference for sustainable brands, and 59.8% expressed willingness to pay a premium. However, trust remains a significant issue, with only 38.8% of respondents expressing agreement with trusting corporate sustainability claims

Table 3. Consumer Attitudes Toward Sustainable Branding (Descriptive Statistics)

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
I actively seek out sustainable brands	4.02	0.89

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am willing to pay more	3.75	1.02
I trust companies' claims	3.20	1.10
Sustainability influences my loyalty	3.88	0.95

4.2.2. Consumer Perceptions of Sustainable Branding

Sustainable branding plays a crucial role in shaping consumer purchasing behaviour. The survey assessed consumer attitudes toward sustainable brands, trust in corporate sustainability claims, and purchasing decisions influenced by ethical marketing. Most respondents (68.2%) said they prefer brands that actively promote sustainability, 23.4% indicated that sustainability is a secondary consideration, and 8.4% reported that it does not influence their choices. These findings suggest that while sustainability is important, other considerations such as price, quality, and convenience remain significant in purchasing decisions.

Table 4. Consumer Attitudes Toward Sustainable Branding

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
I actively seek out brands with sustainable practices	35.1	33.1	18.6	9.2	4.0
I am willing to pay more for sustainable products	28.4	31.7	21.8	12.5	5.6
I trust companies' sustainability claims	12.3	26.5	34.2	18.6	8.4
Sustainability influences my brand loyalty	30.2	36.5	20.1	9.8	3.4

The results indicate that nearly 70% of consumers prefer brands that integrate sustainability into their practices, highlighting a growing demand for ethical corporate behaviour. However, trust in corporate sustainability claims remains low, with only 38.8% of respondents expressing confidence in such claims. This suggests a need for greater transparency and accountability in sustainability communication. While 59.8% of respondents are willing to pay more for sustainable products, cost remains a barrier for some consumers. Over 66% of participants indicated that sustainability influences brand loyalty, demonstrating that ethical practices contribute to long-term customer retention.

The qualitative data from expert interviews reinforced these findings. Several experts highlighted that greenwashing remains a major issue, causing consumer scepticism. Focus group participants preferred brands with clear sustainability certifications and transparent reporting practices rather than vague environmental claims.

4.2.3. Impact of Ethical Marketing on Consumer Trust and Loyalty

Ethical marketing is a key driver of consumer trust and brand loyalty. The study examined how various sustainability marketing strategies affect consumer perception and engagement. Survey data revealed that ethical transparency significantly impacts consumer trust, with 64.7% of respondents indicating that they are more likely to trust brands that disclose their sustainability

efforts openly. Additionally, ethically marketed products are associated with stronger brand loyalty, as 72.1% of respondents reported repeat purchases from brands with proven sustainability commitments.

Table 5. Ethical Marketing Impact on Consumer Trust and Loyalty

Ethical Strategy	Marketing	Increases trust (%)	Increases loyalty (%)	No Effect (%)	Reduces trust (%)	Reduces loyalty (%)
Transparency in sustainability claims		64.7	58.3	22.6	8.9	5.5
Ethical Sourcing Fair trade		61.2	63.8	19.7	9.1	6.2
Eco-friendly packaging		54.8	50.4	27.3	12.1	5.4
Carbon neutrality pledges		47.9	42.7	35.6	9.8	6.5

The findings demonstrate that transparent sustainability claims are the strongest driver of consumer trust and loyalty. Eco-friendly packaging alone cannot build loyalty, suggesting consumers value broader commitments beyond packaging initiatives. Carbon neutrality pledges have the lowest impact on consumer trust, possibly due to scepticism surrounding corporate climate commitments.

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and bivariate correlations for the key study constructs are presented in Table 3. The mean scores indicate that participants generally held positive attitudes towards ethical marketing ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.89$) and reported moderate levels of brand loyalty ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.95$). However, the mean score for trust in sustainability claims was notably lower ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.10$), confirming the trust deficit identified in the frequency analysis. The correlation matrix reveals that all constructs are significantly and positively correlated in the expected directions. Specifically, the perception of ethical marketing shows strong positive correlations with trust ($r = .42$, $p < .01$), brand loyalty ($r = .51$, $p < .01$), and purchase intention ($r = .48$, $p < .01$), providing preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships in the structural model

Table 6. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Ethical Marketing	4.02	0.89	1			
2. Trust	3.20	1.10	.42**	1		
3. Brand Loyalty	3.88	0.95	.51**	.38**	1	
4. Purchase Intention	3.75	1.02	.48**	.35**	.65**	1

* $p < .01$

4.2.4. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) Results

SEM was used to test the proposed model depicting the impact of Ethical Marketing and Trust on Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intention. The model demonstrated a good fit with the data ($\chi^2/df = 2.81$, $CFI = 0.94$, $TLI = 0.92$, $RMSEA = 0.06$, $SRMR = 0.05$).

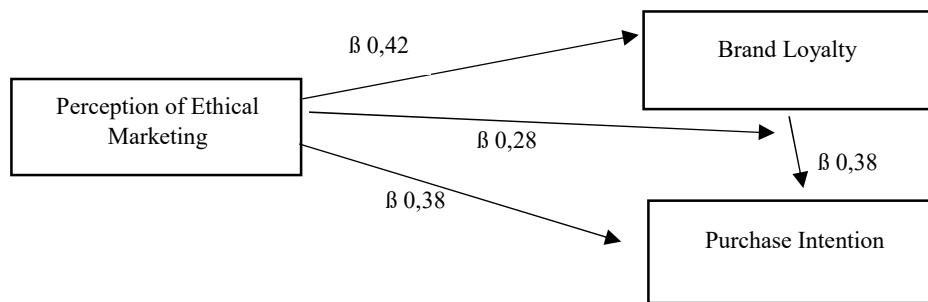


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model with Standardized Path Coefficients

The path analysis revealed that:

Perception of Ethical Marketing has a strong, significant positive effect on Trust in Sustainability Claims ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$).

Trust in Sustainability Claims has a significant positive effect on both Brand Loyalty ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$) and Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$).

Perception of Ethical Marketing also has a direct effect on Brand Loyalty ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$).

4.2.5. Regression Analysis

A regression analysis was performed with Brand Loyalty as the dependent variable. The model included Age, Income, Perception of Ethical Marketing, and Trust as independent variables. The results (Table 4) confirm that ethical marketing and trust are significant predictors of loyalty, even after controlling for demographics.

Table 4: Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Brand Loyalty

Variable	β	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
(Constant)		0.25	5.12	<0.001
Age	0.04	0.03	1.32	0.187
Income	0.07	0.04	1.87	0.062
Perception of Ethical Marketing	0.28	0.05	5.60	<0.001
Trust in Sustainability Claims	0.38	0.04	9.50	<0.001

$R^2 = 0.41$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.40$, $F = 85.32$, $p < 0.001$

4.3. Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups yielded three central themes:

The Transparency Imperative: Both experts and consumers emphasized that transparency is non-negotiable. Vague claims are immediately dismissed. Consumers actively seek third-party

certifications (e.g., B Corp, Fair Trade) and detailed sustainability reports to verify claims. "It's not about being perfect; it's about being honest about your journey and your shortcomings," stated one sustainability manager.

Greenwashing Scepticism: The prevalent scepticism towards corporate sustainability claims was a recurring theme. Participants expressed fatigue with "green" imagery without substance. Focus group participants described conducting their own research via apps and websites to uncover a brand's true environmental and ethical record.

The Value-Action Nexus: While consumers expressed a strong desire to act sustainably, they highlighted persistent barriers. Price remains a significant hurdle for many. However, participants consistently stated that if trust and transparency were established, they would be more loyal and willing to pay a premium over time, confirming the quantitative findings. "I'll pay more if I know it's real and it makes a difference. But I need proof," a focus group participant noted.

Prior to testing the hypotheses, the measurement model (CFA) and the structural model (SEM) were assessed for goodness-of-fit. As shown in Table 5, the fit indices for both models met the recommended thresholds, indicating that the models provided an acceptable fit to the data.

Table 5: Model Fit Indices for CFA and SEM

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Measurement Model (CFA)	Structural Model (SEM)
χ^2/df	< 3	2.81	2.85
CFI	> .90	.94	.93
TLI	> .90	.92	.91
RMSEA	< .08	.06	.06
SRMR	< .08	.05	.05

4.4. Hypothesis Testing Results

The results of the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis provided support for the proposed hypotheses. The path coefficients and their significance levels are summarized below:

- **H1**, which proposed that Perception of Ethical Marketing has a positive effect on Trust, was **supported** ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$).
- **H2a**, which proposed that Trust has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty, was **supported** ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$).
- **H2b**, which proposed that Trust has a positive effect on Purchase Intention, was **supported** ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$).
- **H3**, which proposed that Perception of Ethical Marketing has a direct positive effect on Brand Loyalty, was **supported** ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$).

- **H4**, which proposed that Brand Loyalty mediates the relationship between Ethical Marketing and Purchase Intention, was **supported**. The indirect effect was significant ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$), confirming partial mediation.

Table 6: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	p-value	Supported
H1	Ethical Marketing \rightarrow Trust	0.42	<0.001	Yes
H2a	Trust \rightarrow Brand Loyalty	0.38	<0.001	Yes
H2b	Trust \rightarrow Purchase Intention	0.35	<0.001	Yes
H3	Ethical Marketing \rightarrow Brand Loyalty	0.28	<0.01	Yes
H4	Ethical Marketing \rightarrow Loyalty \rightarrow Intent	0.11	<0.05	Yes (Med.)

5. Discussion

Based on these findings, managers should prioritize obtaining third-party certifications (e.g., B Corp, Fair Trade) and utilizing blockchain technology to provide transparent, immutable evidence of their sustainability claims throughout the supply chain. This moves beyond mere communication to providing verifiable proof, which is critical for overcoming consumer scepticism.

This study provides robust empirical evidence that consumer-centric sustainability and ethical marketing significantly influence brand trust, loyalty, and purchase intentions. The findings strongly support the theoretical frameworks of Stakeholder Theory and Value-Based Marketing, demonstrating that businesses prioritizing genuine stakeholder engagement and ethical value creation achieve superior consumer outcomes.

The results align with previous research (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2021) but offer greater precision. The SEM analysis quantifies the strong mediating role of trust ($\beta = 0.38$) between ethical marketing and loyalty, a relationship often assumed but less frequently measured with such rigor. The regression model further confirms that ethical marketing and trust are more significant predictors of loyalty than demographic factors like age or income.

The qualitative findings richly contextualize the quantitative results. The identified themes of "The Transparency Imperative" and "Greenwashing Scepticism" directly explain why the Perception of Ethical Marketing construct was such a powerful predictor. It is not marketing about sustainability that matters, but marketing that is perceived as ethical and transparent. This addresses the critical gap highlighted in the literature between corporate promises and consumer belief (Ottman, 2011; Vangeli et al., 2023).

The study also confirms the relevance of Elkington's Triple Bottom Line and Porter and Kramer's Shared Value concepts. The qualitative data shows that consumers are evaluating the

social and environmental performance of companies ("people" and "planet") alongside product quality and price ("profit"). Companies that succeed in integrating sustainability, like those cited (Unilever, IKEA, Tesla), do so by making it a core operational principle, not just a marketing message.

This study backs up various scholarly investigations showing that a sustainable approach centred on customers along with fair marketing greatly influences consumer choices of brands and their loyalty preferences. The sustainability principles surpassed traditional corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects to develop as an essential brand identity component affecting consumer relationship trust and commitment (Cooley, 2021). The value-based marketing model supports the notion that customers now evaluate ethical elements, sustainability factors, and product quality beyond pricing when they buy products. Seven out of ten consumers choose brands that make explicit sustainability promises, but overall, corporate sustainability claims receive minimal trust from shoppers. The current lack of trust between consumers and brands requires marketing strategies based on transparency and authenticity because, according to Ottman (2011) and Hardisty & Habib (2019) (Udeh et al., 2025), customer doubts about corporate sustainability approaches lead to consumer disinterest. Companies must surpass surface-level sustainability expressions by embedding sustainability throughout their business frameworks and supplying chain operations and future strategic frameworks (Chavhan et al, 2024).

The main contribution of this research sheds light on ethical marketing strategies that create trust in consumers and develop sustained brand loyalty (Tiep et al, 2023). Credibility in environmental markets now demands ethical marketing practices, which have become essential for companies that want to keep their customer base in this growing awareness period. Companies that present transparent sustainability information gain increased consumer trust by 64.7% while building stronger brand loyalty by 58.3% since consumers value businesses whose ethical values match their personal beliefs. Kotler & Armstrong (2018) support this finding by demonstrating that companies linking ethics to marketing practices develop better consumer relationships, safer reputations, and stronger brand value (Chong et al, 2023). The continued greenwashing, which consists of companies falsely promoting sustainable actions, creates a significant obstacle. A combination of organized expert interviews and focus group studies reveals that customers actively recognize false sustainability claims. However, they support brands demonstrating verified endorsements from independent entities while offering complete product effect data and substantial sustainability plans. Businesses must establish direct correspondence between marketing claims and company operations as an essential requirement to establish and protect customer trust.

This research identifies sustainability-based branding as a substantial factor that guides consumer purchase decisions (Kinnunen et al, 2022). Research shows that consumer interest in sustainable brands reaches 68.2% of the market, while 59.8% are willing to pay additional costs for sustainable products. The study findings show that sustainability delivers distinctiveness between competitors, but consumers still judge prices as essential for purchasing. The study was conducted by Peattie & Crane (2005), which demonstrates that sustainable marketing

strategies need environmental messages coupled with consumer-focused benefits such as product quality improvements and extensions and cost-save cost-saving for extended periods (Barr et al., 2024). Research conducted by Carrigan and Attalla (2001) reveals that sustainable purchasing behaviour demonstrates stronger intensity among the younger demographic, including millennials and Gen Z consumers because these groups value ethical consumption above traditional brand commitments. Businesses face dual benefits from this consumer generational transformation because sustainable attributes provide competitive advantages while necessitating proper ethical commitment management.

This study delivers applicable knowledge about implementing sustainability within business organizational policies. Elkington's (1997) Triple Bottom Line framework finds strong backing from the study's results since it emphasizes balancing three social, environmental, and economic performance pillars (Zaharia & Zaharia, 2021). Unilever and IKEA, alongside Tesla, have proven by their success that pursuing sustainability through business models allows sustainable growth and ethical dignity without compromising financial gain. Several organizations encounter ongoing impediments when establishing sustainability as part of their fundamental business strategies. High implementation expense changes and inadequate regulatory control produce challenges that stop the widespread adoption of sustainability practices. According to Porter & Kramer (2011), companies will overcome sustainability obstacles by adopting shared value creation, producing economic prosperity and social advantages (Menghwar & Daood, 2021). The research supports businesses' need to use sustainability frameworks that follow international standards, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Environmental Social Governance rating system. The active application of these frameworks produces improved trust from stakeholders while simultaneously providing organizations with better resistance to regulatory changes and modifying consumer demands.

The research/study uses stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) to demonstrate how businesses should place various stakeholders—consumers, employees, suppliers, and policymakers—as their key strategic priorities for sustainability work. Organizations implementing sustainability initiatives that bring together multiple stakeholders achieve better brand reputations with heightened consumer trust and substantial employee contentment. In support of Donaldson & Preston (1995), stakeholder-oriented business models create long-term success and competitive advantages for organizations. Value-based marketing principles (Holbrook, 1999) help substantiate companies' need to integrate ethical, environmental, and social value into their offerings because they effectively attract contemporary consumers (Forsman & Laumala, 2024). Successful integration of sustainability throughout their brand identity proves more effective than treating sustainability as an afterthought because it establishes better lasting relationships with customers and extended market success.

Business strategies focusing on sustainability offer numerous benefits but face obstacles in determining their long-term effects on programs (Ekins & Zenghelis, 2021). The survey demonstrates that ethical marketing methods with sustainable branding boost customer

interaction, yet sustainability patterns require continuous monitoring for long-term analysis. Future studies need to understand how sustainability commitments transform throughout time and what stimuli affect consumer preference changes between economic cycles or regulatory changes and novel sustainable solutions (Elhoushy & Jang 2023). This research relies mainly on consumer perceptions and self-reported behaviours, while potential social desirability effects create potential biases in its data. Future research needs to adopt behavioural experiments, purchase tracking mechanisms, and longitudinal studies to validate and develop the current research findings.

6. Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research

6.1. Conclusion

This investigation conclusively shows that consumer-centric sustainability is vital for contemporary business strategy. The research demonstrates that ethical marketing, characterized by radical transparency and verifiable actions, is a primary driver of brand trust and loyalty. Businesses must move beyond superficial claims and embed sustainability into their core operations and value chains. By aligning their practices with consumer values and effectively communicating these efforts through transparent, ethical marketing, organizations can build durable competitive advantage and achieve sustainable growth in an increasingly conscious marketplace. This investigation shows why sustainability focused on consumers is vital for contemporary business and marketing strategies. Consumers actively seek brands that communicate their ethical commitment, transparent sustainability goals, and environmentally progressive operations. Organizations that connect sustainability plans to consumer values achieve better brand credibility and maintain customer loyalty throughout extended timeframes, leading to sustainable economic growth.

Through this research, Stakeholder Theory and Value-Based Marketing receive a theoretical extension to develop sustainability-based business approaches. Organizations must implement sustainability at their business heart since it functions as an operational cornerstone rather than an extra marketing advantage. Keeping consumers trusting and loyal requires business practices that protect ethics in marketing, transparent sustainability messaging, and the development of sustainable products. Structural sustainability frameworks in business management systems should incorporate ethical supply chains, clear sustainability reporting, and activities involving customers. Organizations integrating sustainability into their branding programs and operational methods will acquire market superiority in today's environmentally responsive markets.

Based on these findings, managers should prioritize obtaining third-party certifications (e.g., B Corp, Fair Trade) and utilizing blockchain technology to provide transparent, immutable evidence of their sustainability claims throughout the supply chain. This moves beyond mere communication to providing verifiable proof, which is critical for overcoming consumer scepticism.

The research supports sustaining marketing that revolves around customer interests and protects their ethical and environmental expectations for sustained business growth. Research should investigate continuously developing consumer behaviours patterns, regulatory mandates, and breakthroughs in sustainable business methodology to improve best practices for sustainable enterprise growth.

6.2. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the data is cross-sectional, capturing attitudes and intentions at a single point in time. The sample, while diverse, was drawn from a single geographic region, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings across different cultural contexts. Despite using validated scales, the self-reported nature of the survey data may be subject to social desirability bias.

Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs to track changes in consumer behaviour over time. Cross-cultural comparative studies are needed to understand the nuances of sustainability perceptions globally. Research should also incorporate behavioural data (e.g., actual purchase data) to complement self-reported intentions. Finally, investigating the role of emerging technologies like blockchain for supply chain transparency and AI for personalizing sustainability communication presents a promising avenue for future study.

From a theoretical perspective, this study was grounded in Stakeholder Theory and Value-Based Marketing. To provide a more multi-faceted explanation, future research could integrate additional theoretical lenses, such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (to better capture behavioural intention) or Signalling Theory (to deeply analyse how sustainability claims act as signals in the market).

Consumer insights gathered through this study have limited their duration to short. The study detects contemporary sustainability trends, yet developing comprehension about future consumer preference directions requires longitudinal research methods. Research strategies should analyse the impact of sustainability-based marketing methods in future periods. The investigation primarily analyses how customers respond to corporate sustainability initiatives. Additional investigations are needed to evaluate how regulatory policies, government interventions, and industry partnerships succeed at advancing sustainability initiatives.

Research expansion, including investigations of new sustainability trends such as carbon footprint reduction technologies with blockchain-based supply chain transparency and sustainability customization through AI, would deliver useful insights to businesses. Including sustainability metrics in financial assessments reveals a thorough view of business sustainability value.

Furthermore, this study focused on a direct relationship model. Future studies could introduce moderating variables (consumer ethnocentrism, brand familiarity) to understand under which

conditions these relationships are strengthened or weakened. Additionally, exploring other potential mediating mechanisms (brand love, perceived risk) could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological processes underlying consumer behaviours.

References

- Anderson, J. C., & Gerbing, D. W. (1988). Structural equation modelling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychological Bulletin*, 103(3), 411–423
- Bansal, P., & Roth, K. (2000). Why companies go green: A model of ecological responsiveness. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(4), 717–736.
- Barr, S., Gilg, A., & Shaw, G. (2024). *Helping People Make Better Choices': exploring the behaviour change agenda for environmental*. *Applied Geography*.
- Batuwael, M. A., Fauziyah, A. R., & Hwihanus, H. (2024). The Influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on Customer Loyalty Across Countries. *Ethics and Law Journal: Business and Notary*, 2(2).
- Bekele, N., Muffatto, M., & Ferrati, F. (2021). Value-based framework development for consumer internet of things (ciots): A design thinking approach. In *Proceedings of the European Conference on Innovation and Entrepreneurship, ECIE* (pp. 80–88).
- Bello, H. O., Idemudia, C., & Iyelolu, T. V. (2024). Navigating financial compliance in small and medium-sized enterprises (smes): overcoming challenges and implementing effective solutions. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 23(1), 042–055.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Callegaro, M., Baker, R. P., Bethlehem, J., Göritz, A. S., Krosnick, J. A., & Lavrakas, P. J. (Eds.). (2014). *Online panel research: A data quality perspective*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Carrigan, M., & Attalla, A. (2001). The Myth of the Ethical Consumer—Do Ethics Matter in Purchase Behavior? *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 18, 560–577. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/07363760110410263>
- Chavhan, R., & Dutta, P. (2024). Redesigning quick commerce fresh and short food supply chains: circular economy strategies for sustainable last-mile operations. *British Food Journal*.
- Christensen, H. B., Hail, L., & Leuz, C. (2021). Mandatory CSR and sustainability reporting: economic analysis and literature review. *Review of Accounting Studies*, 26, 1176–1248. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11142-021-09609-5>
- Chen, Y. S., & Chang, C. H. (2013). The Determinants of Green Product Development Performance: Green Dynamic Capabilities, Green Transformational Leadership, and Green Creativity. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 116, 107–119. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1452-x>
- Chong, W. K., & Patwa, N. (2023). The value of integrity: Empowering SMEs with ethical marketing communication. *Sustainability*, 15(15), 11673.

- Cooley, S. L. (2021). *Impact of corporate social responsibility and sustainability practices on brand trust and purchase intention in the wine industry*.
- Donaldson, T., & Preston, L. E. (1995). The Stakeholder Theory of the Corporation: Concepts, Evidence, and Implications. *The Academy of Management Review*, 20(1), 65–91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258887>
- Eccles, R. G., Ioannou, I., & Serafeim, G. (2014). The impact of corporate sustainability on organizational processes and performance. *Management Science*, 60(11), 2835-2857. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2014.1984>
- Ekins, P., & Zenghelis, D. (2021). The costs and benefits of environmental sustainability. *Sustainability Science*, 16, 949-965.
- Elhoushy, S., & Jang, S. (2023). How to maintain sustainable consumer behaviours: A systematic review and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 47(6), 2181-2211.
- Elkington, J. (1997) *Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business*. Capstone, Oxford.
- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(1), 39–50.
- Forsman, L. J., & Luomala, H. (2024). Sensing physical properties for subjective meanings: Putting Emergent Consumer Perceived Value (ECPV) into the marketers' toolbox. *AMS review*, 1-26.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Pitman Publishing.
- Grewal, D., Herhausen, D., & Ludwig, S. (2024). The Future of Digital Communication and Relationship Marketing. *Journal of Retailing*, 100(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2024.01.001>
- Hardisty, D. J., & Habib, R. (2019). How to Shift Consumer Behaviors to be More Sustainable: A Literature Review and Guiding Framework. *Journal of Marketing*, 83(3), 22-49.
- Holbrook, M. (1999) *Consumer Value: A Framework for Analysis and Research*. Routledge, New York.
- Hu, L., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 6(1), 1-55.
- Iannuzzi, A. (2024). *Greener products: The making and marketing of sustainable brands*. CRC Press.
- Kinnunen, J., Saunila, M., Ukko, J., & Rantanen, H. (2022). Strategic sustainability in the construction industry: Impacts on sustainability performance and brand. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 368, 133063.

- Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2018). *Principles of Marketing* (17th ed.). The University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing.
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2014). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Mandung, F. (2024). The Impact of Sustainability and Environmental Ethics in Product Marketing Campaigns: A Qualitative Study with a Sociological and Economic Approach. *Golden Ratio of Data in Summary*, 4(2), 911–922.
- Menghwar, P. S., & Daood, A. (2021). Creating shared value: A systematic review, synthesis and integrative perspective. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 23(4), 466-485.
- Mohr, L.A., Webb, D.J. and Harris, K.E. (2001) Do Consumers Expect Companies to Be Socially Responsible? The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Buying Behaviour. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 35, 45-72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6606.2001.tb00102.x>
- Morgan, D. L. (1996). Focus groups. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22(1), 129-152.
- Namaz, L. (2024). *Exploring City Brand Engagement: Uncovering the Values of Engaged Stakeholders in Budapest* (Doctoral dissertation, Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem).
- Nguyen, T., & van der Lee, P. (2021). *The Uncanny Valley Effects: Influence of Enhancing the Human-Likeness of E-Commerce Chatbot on Perceived Social Presence and Patronage Intention*.
- Nicolò, G., Zanellato, G., Esposito, B., & Tiron-Tudor, A. (2024). Cultural dimensions and sustainability disclosure in the banking sector: Insights from a qualitative comparative analysis approach. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 33(8), 8086–8101.
- Nunnally, J. C. (1978). *Psychometric theory*. McGraw-Hill.
- Omowole, B. M., Olufemi-Philips, A. Q., Ofodili, O. C., Eyo-Udo, N. L., & Ewim, S. E. (2024). Conceptualizing green business practices in SMEs for sustainable development. *International Journal of Management & Entrepreneurship Research*, 6(11), 3778–3805.
- Ottman, J. (2011). *The New Rules of Green Marketing: Strategies, Tools, and Inspiration for Sustainable Branding*. Routledge Press.
- Peattie, K., & Crane, A. (2005). Green marketing: Legend, myth, farce or prophesy? *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 8(4), 357–370.
- Porter, M.E. and Kramer, M.R. (2011) The Big Idea: Creating Shared Value. *Harvard Business Review*, 89, 2-17.

- Roszkowska-Menkes, M. (2023). Porter and Kramer's "shared value". In *Encyclopedia of Sustainable Management* (pp. 2621–2626). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Rösler, F., Kreyenschmidt, J., & Ritter, G. (2025). Discussing Food Waste Online: Current Trends in the Food Processing Industry and Future Directions. *Sustainability*, 17(3), 835.
- Singh, J. J., Iglesias, O., & Batista-Foguet, J. M. (2012). Does having an ethical brand matter? The influence of consumer perceived ethicality on trust, affect and loyalty. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 111(4), 541–549.
- Spears, N., & Singh, S. N. (2004). Measuring Attitude toward the Brand and Purchase Intentions. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 26(2), 53–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10641734.2004.10505164>
- Thiam, S. (2023). *The B Corp Impact Assessment: a value beyond certification? A study on the uses of the BIA to influence companies' CSR strategies* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Tiep Le, T., Ngo, H. Q., & Aureliano-Silva, L. (2023). Contribution of corporate social responsibility on SMEs' performance in an emerging market—the mediating roles of brand trust and brand loyalty. *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, 18(8), 1868–1891.
- Udeh, E., & Dugba, A. (2025). An Analysis of The Potential Integration's of Sustainability into Marketing Strategies by Companies. *European Journal of Management and Marketing Studies*, 9(3).
- United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/70/1). https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf
- Vangeli, A., Małecka, A., Mitreğa, M., & Pfajfar, G. (2023). From greenwashing to green B2B marketing: A systematic literature review. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 115, 281–299.
- Zaharia, R. M., & Zaharia, R. (2021). Triple bottom line. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Corporate Social Responsibility*, 75–101.
- Zaman, S. I., & Kusi-Sarpong, S. (2024). Identifying and exploring the relationship among the critical success factors of sustainability toward consumer behavior. *Journal of Modelling in Management*, 19(2), 492–522.
- Zeithaml, V., Berry, L. and Parasuraman, A. (1996) The Behavioral Consequences of Service Quality. *Journal of Marketing*, 60, 31-46. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1251929>

Appendix

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

The following survey questions were used to assess consumer perceptions of sustainability and ethical marketing practices:

Section 1: Demographics

1. Age:
 - 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55+
2. Gender:
 - Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary
 - Prefer not to say
3. Education Level:
 - High School
 - Undergraduate
 - Postgraduate
4. Income Level:
 - Less than \$30K
 - \$30K-\$75K
 - More than \$75K
5. Residential Area:
 - Urban
 - Suburban
 - Rural

Section 2: Consumer Attitudes Toward Sustainable Branding (Adapted from Mohr et al., 2001)

6. I actively seek out brands with sustainable practices.
7. A company's sustainability record influences my purchase decisions.
8. I consider the environmental impact of my purchases.
9. I am willing to pay more for sustainable products.

Section 3: Trust in Corporate Sustainability Claims (Adapted from Chen & Chang, 2013)

10. I trust the environmental claims made by most companies. (R)
11. Most companies are honest about their environmental impact.
12. I believe companies are committed to the sustainability goals they advertise.
13. I am sceptical about the truthfulness of companies' sustainability reporting.

Section 4: Brand Loyalty (Adapted from Zeithaml et al., 1996)

14. I consider myself loyal to brands that are truly sustainable.

15. I will recommend sustainable brands I trust to others.

16. I would choose a trusted sustainable brand over a cheaper conventional alternative.

Section 5: Purchase Intention (Adapted from Spears & Singh, 2004)

17. I intend to buy products from sustainable brands in the future.

18. I will make an effort to find and buy sustainable products.

19. I plan to increase my purchases from sustainable brands.

Section 6: Perception of Ethical Marketing (Adapted from Singh et al., 2012)

20. This company provides honest information about its products' environmental impact.

21. This company is transparent about its supply chain practices.

22. This company's sustainability marketing is credible.

23. This company avoids exaggerating its environmental benefits.

24. This company uses third-party certifications to back its claims. Appendix B: Interview

Appendix B: Guide for Expert Participants

The following semi-structured questions were used in expert interviews:

1. What role does sustainability play in your company's marketing strategy?
2. How do you ensure transparency in sustainability communication?
3. What are the biggest challenges in implementing sustainable business practices?
4. How do consumers respond to your company's sustainability efforts?
5. What measures do you take to prevent greenwashing in your sustainability initiatives?

Appendix C: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Discussion topics for focus groups included:

1. What factors influence your decision to purchase from a sustainable brand?
2. How do you verify whether a brand's sustainability claims are genuine?
3. Are you willing to pay more for a product if it is marketed as sustainable? Why or why not?
4. What role do ethical marketing strategies play in building trust with consumers?
5. How do you perceive sustainability certifications and third-party endorsements?