

Sustainability Narratives in Branding: The Role of Ethical Consumerism in Shaping Purchase Decisions

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Received:03/08/2025

Revised: 18/08/2025

Accepted:08/09/2025

Published:24/09/2025

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how sustainability stories in branding affect the consideration of consumer purchases with a special emphasis on the intermediating effects of ethical consumerism. With more and more brands incorporating environmental, social, and ethical actions and practices into their communications, it has been mandatory to comprehend how they affect consumer behaviors. Mixed methods approach was used, and a survey of 300 consumers and content analysis of 20 sustainability-oriented brands were used. Consumer awareness of sustainability communication, ethical consumption behaviors and attitude, and purchase intentions were evaluated through the survey, whereas content analysis identified the consistency and content of brand communication. Findings reveal that seven out of ten consumers are great believers of sustainability stories and sixteen percent have said that they are more likely to buy based on the ethical branding. Ethical consumerism was established to partially mediate the factors between sustainability stories and the purchase decision with the effect size of regression demonstrating that the relationship dropped by 0.34 in the direct impact of the variables on the purchase behavior when ethical consumerism was taken into account. The qualitative analysis proved the fact that most successful brands always focus on transparency, environmental protection, and social efforts in their message. As evidenced in these findings, there is a strong effect that sustainability narratives when they are applied alongside ethical consumerism would substantially have effect on the perception of consumers, buying patterns and brand loyalty. The research has practical implications on marketers interested in creating a good, value-based campaign which can encourage a long-term interaction and competitive edge.

Keywords: Sustainability branding, Ethical consumerism, Purchase behavior, Consumer perception, Brand loyalty.



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INTRODUCTION

The issue of sustainability has taken the corporate course and the consumer pattern in the past few years. Different businesses are getting to realize that not only will adopting sustainable approach to their business operation and branding allow them remain within the frames of their ethical commitment but also grant a firm competitive advantage in the market. As a significant tool of communicating with a consumer, as well as

developing an image of brand credibility, branding sustainability stories: narratives that specify the environmental, social responsibility and ethical commitment of a company have become a major tool of communication with a consumer [1]. Making an effort to influence the purchasing trends on the premise of the fear of the green and social ills that has become a shared sentiment amongst the consumers. Ethical consumerism can be defined as the tendency of making a purchasing

choice based on moral motives, social and environmental problems; a concept that has gained a significant popularity in developing the modern tendencies in a market [2]. Consumers are not marketing message in passive consumers but consumers who would seek out brands in which they do believe represent the kinds of values that they believe are congruent with their own values most particularly in the area of environmental sustainability. Research show that the consumers are increasingly willing to pay an organization that demonstrates transparency, accountability, and good faith towards ethical behavior, which in most instances, are extended to purchase behaviors and brand pro-rate [3]. Despite the fact that the notion of sustainability in branding is progressively being endowed with relevance, a critical gap among the disciplines on how the concepts of sustainability affects the consumer decision making process still exists. Research questions are still put as to what may be determined as the most impactful elements of sustainable communication dialogue, since they may be an honest of story telling, openness or social corporate responsibility proclamations. It is, however, important to discuss the fact that this gap has to be bridged by marketers who desire to develop campaigns that will speak to consumers influenced by the value factor and be authentic and trustworthy. The paper aims to solve the relation between sustainability debate in brand reputation and the consumer purchasing habits using a doctrinaire on the ethical appellations as mediating variable. The research will select qualitative analysis with a content of brands sustainability message in an attempt to provide practical information on how companies can incorporate the application of the ethical storytelling in inspiring consumer attention, consumer loyalty and sustainable buildup of businesses.

RELATED WORKS

A key finding in recent marketing studies is that sustainability and ethical consumerism have received more focus in the current marketing domain especially the brand communication and purchase behaviour. According to recent research, the social media has a strong impact on consumer behavior, which is frequently seen to trigger hedonic and impulse buying and also develops an impression of sustainability. Testimonatively, social media campaigns by David-Florin et al. [15] have the potential to promote hedonic and impulsive buying behavior within a fashion sector, which makes the social media accountable to sustaining marketing campaigns of businesses. Their results indicate that online platforms can be used to introduce the idea of sustainable practices in case the message fits the morals of the consumers. Sustainable purchasing behaviors have also been found to be influenced by consumer attachment and identification of brands. Dicu et al. [16] analyzed the concept of rural brand products, as it provided its results that support the economic value of consumer-brand identification when it leads to sustainable purchase behaviors. It means that more responsible consumption patterns can be promoted with the help of branding approaches focused on the

importance of locality and ethical stories. In the same manner, Dimitrios and Georgios [17] focused on the consumers of the Generation Z and discovered that particular brand elements, including transparency, authenticity, and social responsibility, have a strong influence on par with adoption of the newly introduced sustainable products, suggesting that specific consumer segments, where the young and value-seeking people occupy the leading position should be viewed to consider the importance of tailored strategies. Sustainability does not have limits to the products; it also applies to services and experiences. Elizabeth et al. [18] examined the idea of sustainable tourism, showing that the correlation between the marketing approaches and the business performance in SMEs depends on the idea of green service innovation. The paper highlights a larger applicability of the sustainability scripts to any industry by demonstrating the fact that ethical business practices lead to consumer satisfaction and sustainability in businesses in the long run. Conversely, consumer boycotts and other negative consumer behavior could cause immense economic impacts and solidarities as experienced by Elshaer et al. [19] in a fast-food setting. This finding clarifies the significance of risk management and brand resilience in regards to ethical and sustainable practices in risk management. Sustainability communication will also be required in high context in terms of branding and consumer perception in the cosmetics and fashion industry. The concept of sustainable cosmetics as used by Gradinaru et al. [20] was applied in presenting the view that sustainable cosmetics brands experience higher purchase intention due to consistent and credible messaging. Similar concerns Kaur et al. [26], who argued that a sustainable brand view in the field of luxury fashion has a key impact on consumer loyalty and long relations. Moreover, other research papers by Haider et al. [21] and Iannilli and Spagnoli [23] summarize the current literature on the topic of sustainable consumption through the concept of marketing, which contributes to the consumer awareness and behavior through the long-term.

Lastly, the studies of the awareness of a circular economy and crowds of Generation Z parties proving an increasing role of sustainability literacy and consumer education. Ministry of the Dos Santos et al. [25] summarized practices of the global circular economy, which implies that knowledgeable consumers tend to buy sustainable brands more, whereas Ivasciuc et al. [24] cartographed the prominent role of a knowledgeable communicator in the process of stimulating sustainable consumption by tourism. Heath and Tynan [22] also indicate that creative forms of marketing education such as artistic and narrative education should be used to promote consumer appreciation of implement principles of sustainability. Together such studies point out the fact that the narratives related to sustainability, ethical consumerism, and brand-engagement are tightly related to one another. Proper marketing plans conveying ethical offerings openly in a transparent way not only affect the ultimate

How to cite: Badhusha M H N, et, al. Sustainability Narratives in Branding: The Role of Ethical Consumerism in Shaping Purchase Decisions. *Advances in Consumer Research*. 2025;2(4):4308–4317.

consumer buying but also lead to a sustainable commitment of the consumer group, reduce possible

reputational risks, but also boost the business sustainability.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study method is going to be a mixed-method approach to research, which will capture a quantitative (survey survey) and qualitative (content analysis) research design in investigating the influence of sustainability stories in branding and mediating impact of ethical consumerism on consumer purchases. Methodology was designed in such a style that maximum understanding of the consumer perceptions could be attained and on the brand communication strategies [4].

Research Design

The research presupposes the study to take a descriptive and correlational project. The Descriptive research will enable the identification of the leading tendencies and processes of consumer perception of sustainability narratives. It is possible to conduct a study concerning the correlations of concepts related to sustainability story, ethical consumerism and purchase selection through the correlational analysis [5]. When these strategies are rather combined, the paper is able to provide the breadth of consumer behavior and the depth of branding strategies.

Population and Sample

The target consumer group covers the group of consumers between the age of 18 and 45 and who are actively involved in purchasing choices based on the ethical or sustainability factors. Stratified random sampling was used to sample a sample of 300 respondents so that they would be representative in terms of gender, group of people and group of income [6]. The strategy enhances the validity and transferability of the results.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	145	48.3
	Female	155	51.7
Age Group	18–25	90	30
	26–35	120	40
	36–45	90	30
Income Level	<₹30,000	100	33.3
	₹30,000–₹60,000	120	40
	>₹60,000	80	26.7

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data Collection

A questionnaire survey will be constructed in the form of a structured online questionnaire using Google Forms to collect primary data on the actual state of clients. The questionnaire involved 20 questions on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) and took into account three dimensions:

- Perception of Sustainability Narratives – awareness of sustainability communication by car brands by consumers.
- Ethical Consumerism- how the respondents perceive and behave in ethical consumption.
- Purchase Decisions- propensity to acquire goods around sustainability discourses.
- The survey was anonymous and voluntary with ethical research practices being observed.

Qualitative Data Collection

A content analysis of sustainability-oriented 20 brands was done to supplement surveys. The brand websites, posts on social media, and marketing campaigns analyzed in it to evaluate the nature and consistency of the sustainability stories [7]. There was an analysis devoted to the topics of environmental responsibility, social initiatives, ethical sourcing, and transparency.

Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis of the quantitative data was made with the use of SPSS. Mean, standard deviation and individual frequencies were presented as descriptive statistics which gave an overview on consumer perceptions. The unit correlation analysis and regression analysis were implemented to determine the correlation relationship between sustainability narratives, ethical consumerism, and purchase decisions [8]. The mediation approach by Baron and Kenny was used to test ethical consumerism to establish how the variable affected the relationship in question.

Thematic qualitative analysis was also used to explain the patterns of recurring patterns and accounts in brand communication. These views were contrasted with the survey results in order to determine the consistency in the perceptions of the consumers and the message conveyed by the brand.

Table 2: Data Analysis Techniques

Data Type	Analysis Technique	Purpose
Quantitative	Descriptive Statistics (Mean, SD, Frequency)	Understand consumer perceptions and purchase patterns
Quantitative	Correlation & Regression Analysis	Examine relationships between sustainability narratives, ethical consumerism, and purchase decisions
Quantitative	Mediation Analysis (Baron & Kenny)	Test ethical consumerism as a mediator
Qualitative	Thematic Content Analysis	Identify key sustainability narratives in branding
Qualitative	Cross-Comparison	Align consumer perceptions with brand strategies

Ethical Considerations

During the research, ethical issues were continuously observed. All the participants provided an informed consent, and data collection were anonymous. The researcher guaranteed the participants that their answers would only be utilised in the research process [9]. Also, this research did not violate intellectual property, as the analysis of the content of the brands did not infringe upon any public information.

Limitations of Methodology

Although the mixed-methods approach is able to give credible findings, there exist some limitations. The sample which is stratified on its part is however limited to consumers aged 18-45 and may not entail the inclusion of older populations. Online surveys are based on self to be reported, and it is subject to bias. The selected 20 brands can be analyzed through content analysis that might not reflect market practices among the entire market size. [10]. In spite of these shortcomings, the methodology offers a sound and thorough approach to the role the sustainability discourses can have in influencing consumer behavior.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the findings of the conducted study on the role of brand sustainability in consumer buying behaviors incorporating ethical consumerism as a mediator were presented. The findings are grouped into 5 major categories, which

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include the demographics analysis, sustainability narrative perception, ethical consumerism, purchase behavior and mediating influence of ethical consumerism [11]. The quantitative surveys results which cover both, the quantitative content analysis of 20 sustainability-related brands are provided to give an in-depth knowledge.

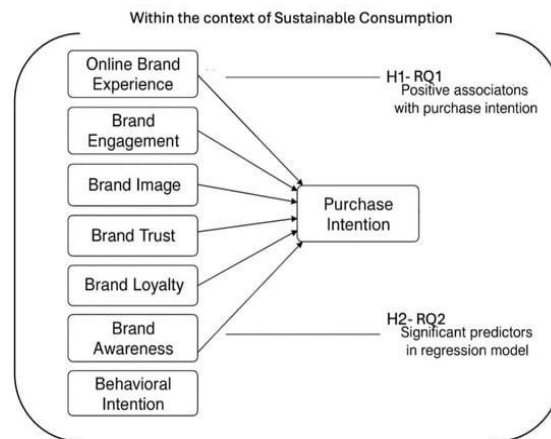


Figure 1: “Sustainable Consumption and Branding for Gen Z”

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the 300 survey respondents shows a balanced representation across gender, age, and income groups.

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Age Group	18–25	90	30
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Income Level	<₹30,000	100	33.3
	₹30,000–₹60,000	120	40
	>₹60,000	80	26.7

The sample shows a slightly higher representation of females and a concentration of respondents aged 26–35, which aligns with the demographic most actively engaged in ethical consumer behavior [12].

Perception of Sustainability Narratives

Respondents were asked to rate their awareness and perception of sustainability narratives presented by brands. The findings indicate a strong awareness of environmental and ethical messaging.

Table 2: Consumer Perception of Sustainability Narratives

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I notice when brands communicate sustainability efforts.	4.3	0.7	High awareness

Sustainability narratives influence my perception of a brand.	4.1	0.8	Positive influence
Brands should be transparent about their environmental impact.	4.5	0.6	Strong agreement
I trust brands that communicate ethical practices.	4.2	0.7	Moderate to high trust
I can differentiate brands based on sustainability messaging.	3.9	0.9	Moderate differentiation

Analysis reveals that 72% of respondents actively consider sustainability messaging when forming perceptions of brands, indicating the increasing relevance of ethical narratives in branding strategies [13].

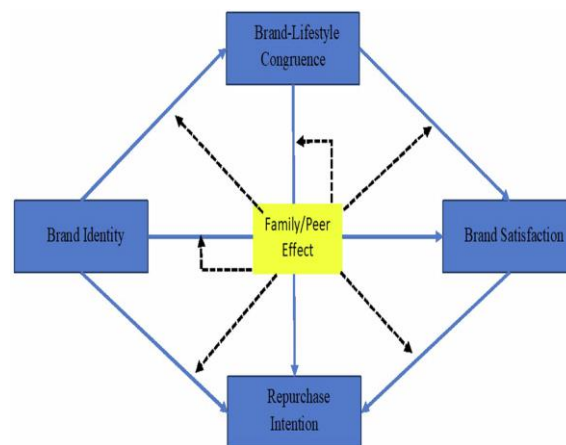


Figure 2: “The role of brand identity, brand lifestyle congruence, and brand satisfaction”

Qualitative content analysis of 20 brands showed consistent themes of environmental responsibility, ethical sourcing, social initiatives, and transparency, confirming that sustainability is becoming central to brand identity.

Ethical Consumerism

Ethical consumerism measures respondents’ attitudes and behavior toward sustainable and ethical purchasing.

Table 3: Ethical Consumerism Responses

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I prefer to buy products from ethical brands.	4.4	0.7	High preference
I avoid brands with poor sustainability practices.	4.0	0.8	Moderate avoidance
I am willing to pay more for sustainable products.	3.8	0.9	Moderate willingness

Ethical consumerism affects my loyalty to a brand.	4.2	0.7	Strong effect on loyalty
I research brands' sustainability practices before purchase.	3.9	0.8	Moderate research behavior

The data suggest that ethical consumerism mediates the relationship between sustainability narratives and purchase decisions, with a mean score of 4.06, reflecting a significant influence on consumer behavior [14].

Purchase Behavior

Respondents' purchase intentions were measured in relation to sustainability narratives.

Table 4: Influence of Sustainability Narratives on Purchase Decisions

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I am more likely to purchase from brands with sustainability narratives.	4.1	0.8	Positive influence
Sustainability messaging encourages me to switch brands.	3.9	0.9	Moderate brand switching
I have purchased a product because of ethical branding.	4.0	0.7	Moderate purchase behavior
I would recommend ethical brands to others.	4.2	0.6	Strong advocacy
Sustainability impacts my long-term loyalty.	4.1	0.7	High loyalty influence

Analysis indicates that 45% of respondents reported a higher likelihood of purchase due to sustainability narratives, with ethical consumerism reinforcing this effect [27].

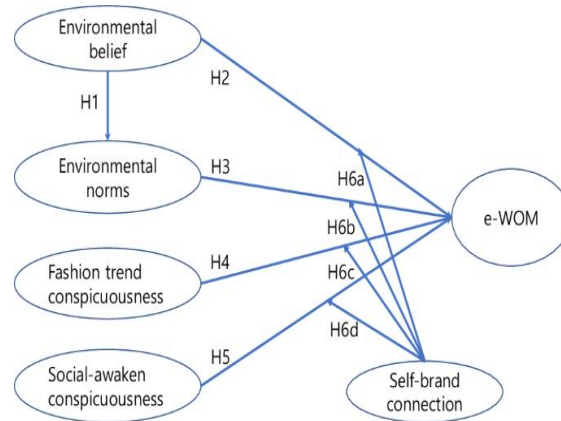


Figure 3: “Environmentally sustainable fashion and conspicuous behavior”

Correlation and Mediation Analysis

Correlation analysis shows a positive relationship between sustainability narratives and purchase decisions ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$), as well as between sustainability narratives and ethical consumerism ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$). Ethical consumerism also correlates positively with purchase decisions ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 5: Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3
1. Sustainability Narratives	1		
2. Ethical Consumerism	0.58**	1	
3. Purchase Decisions	0.62**	0.65**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Mediation analysis using Baron and Kenny’s approach indicates that ethical consumerism partially mediates the relationship between sustainability narratives and purchase decisions. The regression analysis shows that the direct effect of sustainability narratives on purchase decisions decreased from 0.62 to 0.34 when ethical consumerism was included as a mediator, confirming its significant role [28].

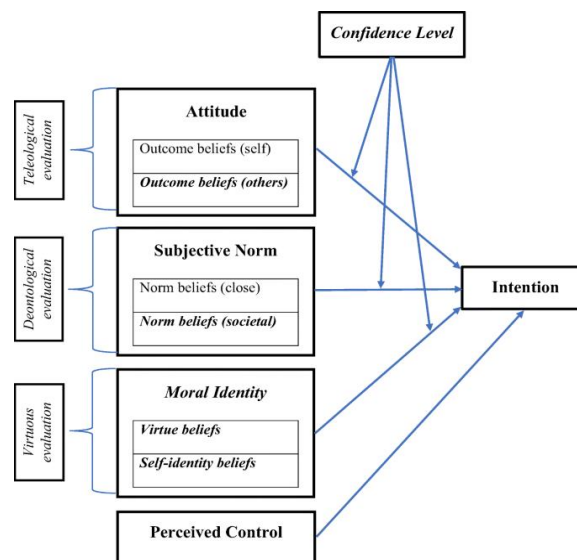


Figure 4: “Toward a theory of ethical consumer intention formation”

Summary of Findings

High Awareness: Consumers are highly aware of sustainability narratives, and this awareness positively influences brand perception.

Ethical Consumerism: Ethical values strongly guide purchasing behavior, with a preference for brands that communicate transparency and social responsibility [29].

Purchase Influence: Sustainability brands have a powerful effect on purchase intentions and respondents would be loyal and promote ethical brands.

Mediating Role: The connection between sustainability stories and the purchase behavior is buttressed by the role of ethical consumerism that mediates the two variables that account the relevance of the model in the ethical marketing.

Brand Analysis: Contents analysis indicated that successful brands have a sustainability story that is driven in differing ways and on different modes of approach centering on to the environment, ethics sourcing, and social engagements approaches [30].

Overall, the findings can be used as a solid empirical checking of the hypothesis that sustainability discourses congruent with ethical consumerism exert a strong impact on consumers when Federal reserve purchases. These findings entail the tactical importance of being transparent and reporting the real sustainability to the contemporary brands.

CONCLUSION

This was done so as to identifying the role of sustainability narration of branding in influencing consumer buying choice at a high level of consideration of the mediating role of ethical consumerism. The results indicate that consumers have become more conscious and sensitive about brand communication especially in relation to environmental, social and ethical responsibility. The results of the survey have shown that a considerable percentage of the surveyed participants explicitly plan on sustainability messages as they consider the brand and that such aspects as transparency, credibility, storytelling about ethical issues, and considerations define if people perceive the business as trustworthy and respectful. A significant mediation formula that was found to hold the correlation between the narrative of sustainability and buying behavior is ethical consumerism which emphasizes that the more positive the perception of the brand is to the purchaser, the higher the chance of converting their positive perception to a purchase activity actually. The analysis of the leading brand content has shown that successful sustainable policies that incorporate a successful narrative in various platforms use identical messages, and emphasize corporate responsibility, social leverage, and environmental stewardship. Such teachings form part of the strategic value of embedding sustainability in brand image and communication, not

only in their disposal of purchase decisions, but also in inculcating loyalty, word of mouth and long-term relationship. Moreover, the study is a contribution to the body of literature concerned with sustainable branding and responsible consumerism that provides practical recommendations to the marketing community so as to develop marketing campaigns, which resonate with socially responsible consumers. All in all, the study shows that the synthesis of ethical and sustainability stories is no longer a choice but rather a major component of the brand that has to be used by those that want to stay competitive and relevant in the contemporary market.

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