

Leveraging Computational Models to Influence Sustainable Consumer Behavior: Strategies from Conscientious Brands

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The primary objective of this research is to thoroughly examine and evaluate the many tactics used by ethical brands to sway sustainable customer behaviour. The study's primary goal is to understand how marketing, product innovation, and technology support sustainable consumption habits. To address the issues of green washing and consumer scepticism, the study attempts to provide brand managers and strategists with insights into best practices for coordinating consumer behaviour with sustainability goals.

Methodology: Using a systematic literature review (SLR) technique, this study draws on industry reports, case studies from top ethical brands, and peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Using search criteria associated with "sustainable consumer behaviour," "ethical brands," "green marketing," and "consumer decision-making theories," pertinent literature was found. The results were combined to identify common brand strategies for influencing environmentally conscious consumption, emphasising product design, packaging innovations, marketing techniques, and cutting-edge technology like blockchain and artificial intelligence to increase transparency.

Findings: The assessment focuses on several tactics ethical firms use to promote sustainable consumer behaviour, such as eco-friendly product design, transparency programs, green marketing, and cooperative consumption models. Customer views are primarily shaped by education and awareness initiatives, but technology-driven solutions like blockchain and artificial intelligence (AI) increase transparency and foster customer trust. Nonetheless, issues like greenwashing and balancing sustainability and profitability remain significant. According to the survey, one promising area for future development is the growing trend of customised sustainability messages made possible by data analytics.

Relevance: For marketers, brand strategists, and corporate decision-makers looking to incorporate sustainability into their business models, this data is very pertinent. Connecting theoretical models of consumer behaviour with real-world brand tactics advances the scholarly conversation on sustainable consumption. It also responds to the increasing need for authenticity and brand transparency, which is becoming increasingly critical in consumers' decision-making.

Practical Implications: The report provides brand managers and marketers relevant insights into developing sustainability-focused strategies. It highlights the necessity of striking a balance between environmental objectives and financial success, the potential of technology to improve consumer engagement, and the significance of communication clarity in addressing greenwashing issues. Companies can obtain a competitive edge and increase enduring brand loyalty if they successfully match their operations with customer expectations for sustainability.

Keywords: Sustainable Consumer Behavior, Conscientious Brands, Green Marketing, Eco-friendly Product Design, Collaborative Consumption.

INTRODUCTION

Businesses that incorporate social, environmental, and ethical issues into their operations are known as conscientious brands. To appeal to environmentally sensitive consumers, these firms prioritise sustainability across their supply chains, goods, and marketing strategies (Kim & Kim, 2021). Purchasing eco-friendly goods or patronising companies that uphold moral standards are examples of sustainable consumer behaviour, which aims to reduce an individual's detrimental effects on the environment and society (Magnier & Schoormans, 2017). As the importance of sustainability in global brand management grows, businesses are looking for creative ways to sway consumer behaviour in favour of more ethical and environmentally friendly choices. This review examines the many models and techniques ethical brands use to shape customer preferences strategically.

Theoretical Framework

Using significant theories of consumer behaviour and brand influence models is necessary to comprehend sustainable customer behaviour. With a focus on attitudes, subjective standards, and perceived behavioural control, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is often used to explain consumers' intentions to engage in eco-friendly behaviours (Ajzen, 1991). Companies frequently take advantage of these elements by educating consumers, influencing social norms through brand activism, and creating simple products.

Furthermore, customers are driven towards sustainability by intrinsic motives such as personal values, ethical concerns, or environmental convictions, according to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Conscient brands' main goals are building trust, encouraging long-term behavioural change, and matching their values with their consumers (Hameed et al., 2021). According to brand equity models like Keller's Brand Resonance Pyramid, sustainability and authenticity can foster customer resonance with environmental or social problems, leading to deeper brand loyalty (Keller, 2001).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The impact of ethical brands on environmentally conscious behaviour has been well covered in the literature. For instance, Hameed et al. (2021) discovered that ethical communication and brand transparency are essential to sustaining customer loyalty. Research such as Ottman et al. (2006) shows that when done honestly, green marketing can effectively increase awareness and influence purchasing decisions. However, Delmas and Burbano (2011) caution against the dangers of "greenwashing," which can damage a brand's credibility with customers if its sustainability promises are viewed as flimsy or deceptive. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that behavioural nudges—like the application of eco-labelling—have a favourable impact on sustainable consumption (Sunstein & Reisch, 2014).

A multidisciplinary field that incorporates insights from consumer behaviour theories, green marketing, brand management, and emerging technology is reflected in the literature on conscientious brands and sustainable consumer behaviour. This analysis summarises the main tactics used by ethical brands to promote environmentally conscious consumption, including technical developments, marketing breakthroughs, and issues like greenwashing.

Research Objectives

Objective 1: To systematically analyse the strategies employed by conscientious brands in influencing sustainable consumer behaviour, including green marketing, transparency initiatives, product design, and collaborative consumption models.

Objective 2: To investigate the role of emerging technologies, such as AI, blockchain, and digital marketing, in enhancing the effectiveness of sustainability messages and fostering consumer engagement with sustainable practices.

Objective 3: To assess conscientious brands' challenges, such as consumer scepticism and greenwashing, and to evaluate how brands balance sustainability goals with profitability.

Objective 4: To provide actionable insights and best practices for brand managers on how to develop, implement, and measure the impact of sustainable branding strategies in a way that fosters long-term consumer loyalty.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the most effective strategies employed by conscientious brands to influence sustainable consumer behaviour, and how do these strategies align with consumer behaviour theories?

RQ2: How do emerging technologies, such as AI and blockchain, enhance the transparency and credibility of sustainability claims, and what impact do they have on consumer trust and engagement?

RQ3:What are conscientious brands' significant challenges in promoting sustainable behaviour, particularly in addressing consumer scepticism and avoiding perceptions of greenwashing?

RQ4:What are the best practices for brand managers to measure and communicate the impact of sustainable strategies, and how can these practices lead to stronger consumer loyalty and competitive advantage?

Qualifications for Inclusion

Search query string:("sustainable consumer behaviour" OR "eco-conscious consumer behaviour" OR "environmentally responsible consumption" OR "ethical consumption" OR "green consumer behaviour" OR "conscious consumerism")

AND ("conscientious brands" OR "ethical brands" OR "sustainable brands" OR "green brands" OR "socially responsible brands" OR "purpose-driven brands" OR "CSR brands")

AND ("consumer behaviour theories" OR "Theory of Planned Behavior" OR "Self-Determination Theory" OR "Theory of Reasoned Action" OR "behavioural economics" OR "nudging" OR "cognitive biases")

AND ("green marketing strategies" OR "sustainability marketing" OR "eco-labelling" OR "green advertising" OR "ethical communication" OR "brand transparency" OR "brand activism" OR "CSR communication")

AND ("sustainable product design" OR "eco-friendly packaging" OR "circular economy" OR "product lifecycle" OR "collaborative consumption" OR "sharing economy" OR "zero waste design")

AND ("greenwashing" OR "consumer scepticism" OR "brand authenticity" OR "perceived risk" OR "barriers to sustainable consumption" OR "consumer trust")

AND ("AI" OR "blockchain" OR "digital marketing" OR "personalisation of sustainability messages" OR "technology and sustainability" OR "data-driven sustainability" OR "IoT and sustainability")

AND ("brand management" OR "sustainable branding" OR "measuring environmental impact" OR "sustainability performance indicators" OR "communicating sustainability impact" OR "ESG reporting")

Databases considered: Scopus and Web of Science

Data Synthesis:

Thematic analysis from the study indicates our understanding of the research subject, which goes as follows:

1. Understanding Sustainable Consumer Behavior

Making choices that reduce environmental damage and encourage social responsibility defines sustainable consumer behaviour (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019). These habits include reducing consumption, selecting environmentally friendly goods, and endorsing companies that highly value moral behaviour (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). However, companies must frequently use focused tactics that support long-term behavioural change and are consistent with consumer values to shift customer preferences towards sustainable options.

Research indicates that identity signalling, social influence, and norms are essential in determining sustainable behaviour. For instance, White, Simpson, and Argo (2014) contend that when consumers feel that sustainable behaviour would improve their standing in social groups or is consistent with their social identity, they are more likely to adopt it. Similarly, Griskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh (2010) discovered that sustainability messaging can encourage eco-friendly behaviours that emphasise status or peer acceptability.

2. Theories of Consumer Behaviour Associated with Sustainability

Several theories of consumer behaviour offer a framework for comprehending how brands impact sustainable consumption. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), attitudes, perceived behavioural control, and subjective standards influence consumer intentions. Companies may encourage sustainable behaviour by establishing favourable perceptions of eco-friendly goods, promoting sustainability-related social norms, and giving customers the tools and knowledge they need to adopt these practices. By highlighting the significance of intrinsic motivation in consumer decision-making, the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) also advances this knowledge. Brands have a better chance of influencing sustainable behaviour when they match sustainability initiatives with consumers' core values, such as social justice and environmental preservation (Pelletier & Sharp, 2008).

Furthermore, nudging—rooted in behavioural economics—has drawn interest in influencing customers to make more environmentally friendly decisions. Brands can promote sustainable behaviour without restricting consumer freedom by changing the choice architecture to make eco-friendly solutions more desirable or accessible (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). To encourage sustainable behaviour, for instance,

nudging strategies like providing reusable bags at the register or switching the default to energy-efficient settings have proven successful (Lehner, Mont, & Heiskanen, 2016).

3. Strategies Employed by Conscientious Brands Green Marketing and Communication Strategies

Green marketing is the practice of promoting goods and services by emphasising their positive environmental effects. Companies communicate their sustainability credentials to consumers through CSR communications, eco-labelling, and green advertising (Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Morgan, 2013). Since customers are growing wary of ambiguous or overblown sustainability promises, green marketing works best when it promotes openness and authenticity (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Research indicates that the clarity and veracity of a brand's sustainability promises impact how consumers view green marketing. Kärnä, Juslin, Ahonen, and Hansen (2001), for instance, contend that consumers are more inclined to believe firms that offer substantiated information, such as certificates from independent groups like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or Fairtrade. Additionally, Kotler and Keller (2012) emphasise that consistent, honest communication is critical for maintaining consumer trust and avoiding accusations of greenwashing.

Product Design and Packaging Innovations

Conscientious brands' tactics heavily emphasise environmentally sustainable product design and packaging. To reduce waste and save resources, the circular economy concept pushes firms to create items that can be recycled, reused, or composted (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013). The goal of eco-design projects is to reduce a product's adverse environmental effects at every stage of its lifecycle, from the extraction of raw materials to disposal (Maxwell & van der Vorst, 2003).

Innovations in packaging, such as decreased packaging and biodegradable materials, are also essential for encouraging environmentally friendly consumer behaviour. According to research, customers are more inclined to buy goods with environmentally friendly packaging since it demonstrates the brand's dedication to sustainability (Steenis et al., 2017). For example, Luchs, Naylor, Irwin, and Raghunathan (2010) discovered that customers view environmentally friendly packaging as an indication of quality and ethical responsibility, thereby boosting brand loyalty and reputation.

Incentive Programs and Collaborative Consumption Models

Sustainable consumption can be effectively promoted through incentive programs like loyalty plans and rebates for environmentally conscious behaviour. To encourage behaviour change, companies such as Starbucks and IKEA, for instance, provide incentives to consumers who bring reusable bags or cups (White et al., 2019).

Peer-to-peer services and sharing platforms are collaborative consumption patterns that contribute to sustainability. By encouraging consumers to share access to products and services, the sharing economy—typified by companies like Airbnb and Zipcar—reduces the need for individual ownership and promotes resource efficiency (Botsman & Rogers, 2010).

4. Role of Technology in Sustainable Branding

Technological breakthroughs have transformed how brands interact with sustainable consumer behaviour, especially in artificial intelligence and blockchain. The relevance and efficacy of green marketing initiatives are increased by AI-powered solutions that enable firms to evaluate customer data and convey tailored sustainability messaging (Pappas, Giannakos, & Sampson, 2017). Personalisation improves consumer participation by matching sustainability activities with individual tastes and values.

Blockchain technology improves transparency by offering a safe, traceable record of a product's movement across the supply chain. By enabling customers to confirm the veracity of sustainability promises, this technology fosters trust and allays worries about greenwashing (Saberri et al., 2019). Blockchain, for instance, is used by businesses like Everledger to trace the origin of diamonds, guaranteeing ethical sourcing and reducing environmental impact.

5. Challenges: Greenwashing and Consumer Skepticism

The problem of "greenwashing," in which companies embellish or misrepresent their sustainability initiatives to win over environmentally sensitive customers, is one of the biggest obstacles facing ethical brands (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Greenwashing undermines customer confidence and can harm a company's reputation over time. According to studies, overcoming scepticism requires claims that are unambiguous and verifiable. Marquis and Toffel (2012) stress that for businesses to remain credible, they must have quantifiable sustainability impacts backed by independent audits or certifications.

Additionally, consumers' scepticism towards sustainability promises has increased as more businesses try to cash in on the green craze without making significant improvements. According to Leonidou et al. (2013), a company must exhibit its dedication to sustainability through meaningful and visible actions and honest communication to overcome scepticism.

6. Emerging Trends in Sustainable Branding

Technology integration and personalisation are two significant themes in sustainable branding. As companies look to develop customised, data-driven communications that connect with specific customers, personalised sustainability messaging is becoming more and more substantial (Pappas et al., 2017). By using this tactic, brands can increase engagement and loyalty by delivering pertinent messages that reflect the beliefs and behaviours of their target audience. Additionally, technology is becoming more important in promoting sustainable practices. Big data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) are assisting brands in better understanding consumer preferences and creating sustainable strategies. Because consumers can follow products' ethical and environmental impacts in real time, blockchain increases transparency and lowers the danger of greenwashing (Saber et al., 2019).

Education and Awareness Campaigns: Providing consumers with clear information about how products affect the environment fosters involvement and confidence. According to research by Janssen and Hamm (2012), consumers are more confident in sustainable items when they see certification labels like fair trade and organic.

Product Design and Packaging Innovations: Companies that cater to consumers' growing environmental concerns by providing eco-friendly designs, such as recyclable packaging or energy-efficient products (Rokka & Uusitalo, 2008). Product take-back programs and other innovations in circular economy techniques assist in prolonging product lifecycles and minimising waste (Bocken et al., 2016).

Loyalty schemes and incentive programs: Loyalty schemes that promote environmentally friendly practices, such as recycling products or recyclable packaging, reinforce sustainable decisions. According to Grolleau et al. (2016), brand loyalty is increased by behavioural incentives such as loyalty points for sustainable purchasing.

Collaborative Consumption Models: By encouraging people to share, rent, or lease goods instead of buying them outright, collaborative consumption lowers waste and resource consumption (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). Several industries, including fashion (Rent the Runway) and transportation (car-sharing platforms), have successfully adopted these ideas.

Case Studies: Patagonia's "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign: Patagonia's audacious marketing tactics, which discourage needless purchasing, have successfully encouraged sustainable consumer behaviour. The brand establishes itself as an ethical leader by promoting less consumption, which increases customer advocacy and loyalty (Ottman et al., 2006). IKEA's Circular Product Strategy: IKEA's dedication to sustainability is demonstrated by its long-term furniture design and provision of repair and recycling services. Customers have responded favourably to this strategy, which has helped IKEA maintain its standing as a socially conscious company (Bocken et al., 2016).

Challenges and Limitations

Conscientious brands encounter multiple obstacles as the end goal of these practices might not be the most efficient way of operating, potentially leading to a less-than-ideal top line. However, on other fronts, another challenge faced is Consumer scepticism, which is frequently made worse by greenwashing, one of the biggest obstacles ethical brands must overcome to encourage sustainable consumer behaviour. When companies make false claims about the environmental advantages of their goods or services to make them seem more sustainable than they are, this is known as "greenwashing" (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). False statements undermine consumer trust, resulting in reputational harm and decreased customer loyalty, even if green marketing can improve a brand's image (Leonidou & Skarmas, 2017). To avoid the backlash associated with greenwashing, brands must be honest and support their sustainability claims with quantifiable, verifiable evidence, as suggested by Marquis and Toffel (2012).

Furthermore, Levin et al. (2014) contend that consumers are growing more dubious of ambiguous marketing claims like "natural" or "eco-friendly" without supporting data as they gain knowledge about sustainability. By giving a brand's environmental initiatives legitimacy, third-party certifications from respectable groups (like Fairtrade or Rainforest Alliance) might help allay this scepticism (Kärnä et al., 2001).

Striking a Balance between Profitability and Sustainability Objectives

For many ethical firms, balancing sustainability and profitability is still being determined. Despite their desire for more ecologically friendly items, consumers frequently only pay a little more for them (Luchs et al., 2010). Profit margins may be strained by the increased production costs related to eco-friendly packaging, ethical labour practices, and sustainable materials. Furthermore, according to Nidumolu, Prahalad, and Rangaswami (2009), sustainability programs sometimes call for large expenditures in research, technology, and innovation, which can financially put brands—especially smaller ones—at risk. Therefore, brands must develop creative solutions to lower the cost of sustainable production without sacrificing quality or guaranteeing profitability. This frequently necessitates businesses to reconsider their supply chain management procedures, sourcing plans, and business models (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

Consumer Habits and Resistance to Change

One of the biggest obstacles to encouraging sustainable behaviour is altering consumer behaviour. Many consumers are hesitant to change their consumption habits despite being aware of environmental issues because of convenience, price sensitivity, or a lack of apparent benefits right away (Prothero et al., 2011). Even consumers who indicate a desire for sustainable items may not always transfer that into actual purchase behaviour, according to research by White, Habib, and Hardisty (2019). This phenomenon is referred to as the intention-behavior gap.

By making eco-friendly items the default option or providing incentives for sustainable behaviour, brands can overcome this obstacle and encourage consumers to make more sustainable decisions (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

Emerging Trends and Future Directions

The significance of technology in encouraging environmentally friendly consumer behaviour is growing. According to Pappas et al. (2017), brands may customise sustainability messaging and products to individual tastes and behaviours using AI and big data analytics to gather and analyse customer data. As to Saberi et al. (2019), businesses can promote more sustainable consumption by providing tailored suggestions based on consumer purchase behaviours.

Blockchain technology is also transforming supply chain transparency by enabling customers to track the provenance of goods and validate sustainability claims (Saberi et al., 2019). Companies such as Everledger are utilising blockchain technology to track the diamonds' route to ensure ethical sourcing and lower the risk of conflict materials.

The way brands convey sustainability to consumers is changing due to the growing popularity of personalisation in marketing. Using data-driven insights, personalised sustainability communications provide highly relevant material that speaks to the beliefs and behaviours of specific customers (Pappas et al., 2017). AI-powered platforms, for instance, can provide personalised suggestions for environmentally friendly products based on a customer's expressed interests or previous purchases.

According to research, as personalised messaging speaks to the consumer's innate motives and sense of self, it is more successful at encouraging sustainable behaviour (Pelletier & Sharp, 2008). Brands will use personalisation more and more in the future to promote long-term behaviour change and deeper engagement with sustainability programs.

Conscientious brands increasingly adopt the circular economy concept, which encourages resource efficiency, recycling, and product reuse (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013). The circular economy pushes companies to design products with their entire lifecycle in mind, guaranteeing that resources may be recovered and reused at the end of their life, in contrast to the conventional linear "take-make-dispose" paradigm (Maxwell & van der Vorst, 2003). Companies like Patagonia and IKEA spearhead the movement by providing take-back programs and encouraging product repair and recycling. As customers' concerns about the effects of their consumption on the environment grow, this tendency is probably here to stay.

Implications for Brand Management

To effectively influence sustainable consumer behaviour, brand managers must integrate sustainability into every aspect of their business strategy. This involves:

Authentic Communication: To gain consumers' trust and prevent charges of greenwashing, brands should be open and honest about their sustainability initiatives and refrain from making exaggerated promises (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Credibility can be further strengthened by impact reporting and third-party certifications (Marquis & Toffel, 2012).

Consumer Education: It's important to inform customers about how their purchase decisions affect the environment and society. Brands can educate consumers about sustainability initiatives through product labelling, social media, and content marketing (Leonidou et al., 2013).

Leveraging Technology: Brands may maximise customer engagement and customise their sustainability messaging using AI and data analytics. In response to consumer demands for authenticity, blockchain technology can improve supply chain traceability and transparency (Saber et al., 2019).

Measuring and Communicating Impact: Effectively assessing and explaining the effects of sustainability programs is one of the main issues facing brand management. Environmental performance is frequently evaluated using resource efficiency, waste diversion, and carbon footprint reduction metrics. However, companies also need to convey these metrics in a way that appeals to customers (Porter & Kramer, 2006). According to research, customers react favourably to straightforward messaging, emphasising sustainability initiatives' observable advantages (Luchs et al., 2010). As a result, brand managers ought to concentrate on clearly and interestingly conveying their goods' social and environmental effects.

CONCLUSION

This systematic analysis of the literature offers a thorough summary of the tactics used by ethical brands to sway sustainable customer behaviour. The review emphasises how crucial technical advancements, green marketing, and consumer behaviour theories influence environmentally friendly consumption trends. It also highlights several obstacles brands must overcome to effectively promote sustainability, such as customer scepticism, greenwashing, and the intention-behaviour gap.

Brands now have more chances to interact with consumers and encourage long-term behaviour change thanks to emerging trends like the use of AI and blockchain in supply chain management and marketing and the growth of customised sustainability messages. The need for firms to embrace sustainable product design and lifecycle management strategies is further highlighted by the circular economy's increasing popularity.

The main lesson for brand managers is that in the sustainable industry, fostering trust and loyalty requires sincerity, openness, and consumer education. Brands incorporating these ideas into their strategy will be well-positioned to succeed as consumers' decisions increasingly centre on sustainability.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this review has synthesised existing knowledge, further research is needed to explore:

- The long-term impact of personalised sustainability messages on consumer behaviour.
- The role of blockchain in preventing greenwashing and enhancing supply chain transparency.
- Consumer perceptions of circular economy initiatives and their willingness to engage with product reuse and recycling programs.

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