

Ethical Consumerism and Brand Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Sustainability Communication



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Abstract

The increasing recognition of environmental and social challenges has transformed consumer preferences, establishing ethical consumerism as a significant element affecting brand loyalty. This research examined the function of sustainability communication employed by companies as a crucial intermediary factor connecting ethical consumerism to lasting customer loyalty. The survey engaged 185 respondents and employed a standardized questionnaire designed to investigate customer perceptions of ethical practices, the credibility of sustainability communication, and the loyalty behaviors that ensued. The findings indicate that individuals who emphasize ethical consumerism are more inclined to endorse businesses that clearly articulate their sustainability efforts. Transparent and authentic communication is crucial for building trust, which in turn strengthens brand loyalty. The study emphasizes the importance for organizations to incorporate sustainability into their operations and communication strategies in order to uphold consumer loyalty.

Keywords: Ethical consumerism, brand loyalty, sustainability communication, consumer trust, green marketing

Introduction

In recent years, ethical consumerism has emerged as a substantial factor affecting global market dynamics. Consumers are increasingly prioritizing the ethical dimensions of their purchasing choices, moving beyond traditional considerations of price and quality. Ethical consumerism involves the practice of acquiring goods and services that prioritize minimizing adverse effects on people, animals, and the environment. This subject encompasses a wide range of concerns, including fair labor practices, humane production techniques, sustainable packaging options, and the ethical procurement of raw materials. This transition indicates a notable awareness among consumers, who aim to synchronize their buying habits with their individual values.

In conjunction with this trend, the articulation of sustainability has emerged as an essential strategy for brands. Organizations need to transcend the basic implementation of sustainable practices; it is crucial that they communicate these initiatives to their customers in an effective and credible manner. Sustainability communication involves the diverse strategies through which organizations convey information about their environmental and social initiatives. This can occur through advertisements, product labeling, social media campaigns, or corporate sustainability reports. Effective communication serves to connect a company's actions with consumers' perceptions, thereby strengthening trust and alleviating skepticism regarding greenwashing practices.

The concept of brand loyalty, which is central to this study, denotes the degree to which consumers consistently favor and repurchase products from a particular brand. Trust, satisfaction, and emotional

connection are foundational elements of loyalty; however, in the contemporary marketplace, the significance of ethical considerations is increasingly prominent. Companies that effectively showcase a true dedication to ethical principles and sustainability tend to foster enduring loyalty among their clientele. This observation holds significant importance in a context where consumers are presented with a plethora of options and can readily transition to alternative providers that resonate more closely with their principles.

2.Review of Literature

Consumer interest in the moral dimensions of consumption has intensified in the last two decades, yet the researchers have repeatedly documented a frequent difference between pro-supporting approach and real purchasing behavior. Studies in sustainable consumption showed that favourable attitudes toward ethical products do not always translate into purchase intentions or actions, with factors such as perceived availability, perceived consumer effectiveness, and situational constraints shaping the attitude-behavior gap (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Building on this stream, Carrington, Neville, and Whitwell (2010) synthesized psychological and contextual explanations and proposed an integrated framework to explain why ethically minded consumers often "don't walk their talk," highlighting implementation intentions, behavioural control, and situational context as critical moderators of ethical purchase behaviour. These works establish that ethical consumerism is a complex, intention-laden phenomenon that cannot be understood solely by attitudinal measures.

Earlier experimental and survey research also showed that consumers' reactions to CSR are

contingent—positive CSR signals can improve purchase intentions and firm evaluations, but these effects depend on perceived motives and fit with the company's core business (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). This body of literature indicates that stability communication moves simple descriptive reporting; It acts as a strategic tool that can affect the relationship between moral consumer values and loyal results.

Simultaneously, rigorous analyses of greenwashing and misrepresentation highlight the fragility of the trust that sustainability communication seeks to build. Dalmás and Berbano (2011) made a comprehensive analysis of institutional, market, organizational and personal factors, which contribute to the firms eliminate their environmental claims or present incorrectly. Their findings suggest that Greenwashing can destroy consumer trust to a large extent and give rise to negative iconic results, eventually denying any positive effects related to moral branding. This field of research highlights the importance of communication quality-especially accuracy, transparency, and third-party verification-medieval models that combine morality and loyalty.

Scholars have therefore argued that communication about corporate sustainability and social responsibility plays a central role in converting ethical attitudes into consumer support. Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010) offered a conceptual account of how CSR and sustainability communication shape stakeholder attributions, trust, and ultimately business returns; they emphasized that message content, source credibility, issue fit, and communication channels determine whether CSR communication strengthens or undermines consumer response

Empirical investigations have established a link between CSR and communication, demonstrating their influence on tangible loyalty and advocacy behaviors. Research found that perceived CSR can foster emotional attachment and supportive behaviors such as donations, repeat purchase and word-of-mouth under certain reputational and fit conditions (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). However, the findings are often contingent and mediated by trust, perceived authenticity, and consumers' attributions of corporate motives. In short, the extant literature provides a strong theoretical rationale for examining sustainability communication as a mediator: ethical consumer values create predispositions toward supportive behaviour, but whether those predispositions crystallize into brand loyalty depends on how firms communicate, the credibility of those communications, and the absence of perceived greenwashing (Du et al., 2010; Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

Despite these advances, relatively few quantitative studies have rigorously tested mediation models that

place sustainability communication between ethical consumerism and brand loyalty using robust samples and measurement of communication credibility and trust. This gap motivates the present study: by explicitly modelling sustainability communication (and its credibility) as the mediating pathway, the research aims to clarify the mechanisms through which ethical consumer dispositions are, or are not, translated into lasting brand loyalty.

3. Research Objective:

The primary objectives for the paper are:

- To analyze the correlation between ethical consumerism and brand loyalty among consumers.
- To investigate the mediating function of sustainability communication in enhancing the relationship between ethical consumerism and consumer loyalty.
- To examine the impact of consumer trust in sustainability communication on brand-switching behavior.
- To evaluate demographic variations in consumer perceptions of ethical practices and their influence on loyalty.

4. Research Methodology

A cross-sectional survey research design was utilized to investigate the influence of ethical consumerism on brand loyalty, along with the mediating role of sustainability communication. This methodology was deemed appropriate as it enabled the collection of insights on perceptions, attitudes, and loyalty behaviors from a varied group of consumers at a particular point in time. The survey comprised 185 participants, including adult consumers from urban and semi-urban areas, reflecting a diverse array of demographic characteristics, including age, gender, occupation, and income levels.

A purposive-cum-random sampling technique was utilized to guarantee the participation of individuals knowledgeable about branded products and equipped to assess sustainability communication. The execution of random selection within this pool significantly reduced sampling bias, while the purposive aspect ensured that participants had sufficient knowledge of ethical and sustainable brand practices. This methodology enabled the gathering of data from consumers who possessed a strong understanding and represented a diverse range of backgrounds.

The data collection process employed a structured questionnaire comprising eight closed-ended questions, which utilized five-point Likert-type response options. The inquiry encompassed three principal domains: ethical consumerism, sustainability communication, and brand loyalty. The design of the survey prioritized clarity and

standardization, which in turn enabled a thorough quantitative analysis of consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. The selection of an online data collecting approach was driven by considerations of efficiency and accessibility, enabling respondents to complete the survey with ease.

The study's hypotheses were articulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1:

H₀: "There is no significant relationship between ethical consumerism and consumer brand loyalty."

H₁: "There is a notable relationship between ethical consumerism and brand loyalty."

Hypothesis 2:

H₀: "There is no significant mediating effect of

sustainability communication on the relationship between ethical consumerism and brand loyalty."

H₁: "Sustainability communication serves as an essential mediator in the relationship between ethical consumerism and brand loyalty."

Hypothesis 3:

H₀: "There is no significant difference in the perceptions of sustainability communication across various demographic groups, including age, gender, and income."

H₁: "A significant difference is observed in the perceptions of sustainability communication when examined across diverse demographic categories, such as age, gender, and income."

5. Empirical Results

Table 1: When choosing a product, how important is a brand's ethical practices (e.g., fair trade, cruelty-free, labor rights) to you?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Not important at all	15	8.11%	8.11%	8.11%
Slightly important	22	11.89%	11.89%	20.00%
Moderately important	37	20.00%	20.00%	40.00%
Very important	56	30.27%	30.27%	70.27%
Extremely important	55	29.73%	29.73%	100.00%
Total	185	100.00%	100.00%	

Interpretation:

A majority of respondents (30.27% very important and 29.73% extremely important) emphasized that ethical practices strongly influence their purchase decisions. Only 20% considered it moderately important, while a smaller segment (20%) regarded it as slightly or not important. This indicates that ethical consumerism is a crucial factor for most buyers.

Table 2: How often do you consider a brand's environmental responsibility before making a purchase?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Never	12	6.49%	6.49%	6.49%
Rarely	25	13.51%	13.51%	20.00%
Sometimes	46	24.86%	24.86%	44.86%
Often	56	30.27%	30.27%	75.14%

Always	46	24.86%	24.86%	100.00%
Total	185	100.00%	100.00%	

Interpretation:

More than half of the respondents (30.27% often and 24.86% always) reported regularly considering environmental responsibility when purchasing, while 20% admitted to rarely or never doing so. This shows a strong and growing awareness of sustainability in consumption choices.

Table 3: How much do you trust brands' claims about their sustainability practices?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Do not trust at all	19	10.27%	10.27%	10.27%
Slightly trust	29	15.68%	15.68%	25.95%
Neutral	47	25.41%	25.41%	51.35%
Trust to some extent	55	29.73%	29.73%	81.08%
Strongly trust	35	18.92%	18.92%	100.00%
Total	185	100.00%	100.00%	

Interpretation:

Around 48.65% of respondents either strongly trust or trust to some extent sustainability claims, while 26% remain neutral. However, over 25% show skepticism, reflecting that credibility of sustainability communication still faces challenges.

Table 4: Which type of sustainability communication do you find most convincing?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Social media campaigns	28	15.14%	15.14%	15.14%
Independent third-party certifications	57	30.81%	30.81%	45.95%
Company's official website/reports	41	22.16%	22.16%	68.11%
Influencer or celebrity endorsements	23	12.43%	12.43%	80.54%
Word-of-mouth from peers	36	19.46%	19.46%	100.00%
Total	185	100.00%	100.00%	

Interpretation:

Independent third-party certifications (30.81%) emerged as the most trusted communication source, followed by official company reports (22.16%) and peer word-of-mouth (19.46%). Celebrity endorsements and social media were less influential, signaling that credibility is valued over popularity.

Table 5: How likely are you to switch brands if you feel their sustainability claims are misleading?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very unlikely	14	7.57%	7.57%	7.57%
Unlikely	23	12.43%	12.43%	20.00%

Neutral	32	17.30%	17.30%	37.30%
Likely	61	32.97%	32.97%	70.27%
Very likely	55	29.73%	29.73%	100.00%
Total	185	100.00%	100.00%	

Interpretation:

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (62.7%) would likely or very likely switch brands if they detect greenwashing, underlining the importance of honest sustainability communication. Only 20% showed resistance to brand-switching under such circumstances.

Table 6: How often do you repurchase products from a brand you believe follows strong ethical and sustainable practices?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Never	11	5.95%	5.95%	5.95%
Rarely	21	11.35%	11.35%	17.30%
Sometimes	42	22.70%	22.70%	40.00%
Often	59	31.89%	31.89%	71.89%
Always	52	28.11%	28.11%	100.00%
Total	185	100.00	100.00%	

Interpretation:

Over 60% of respondents frequently or always repurchase from ethically responsible brands, while a minority (17.3%) rarely or never do. This reflects strong loyalty tendencies among ethically conscious consumers.

Table 7: How likely are you to recommend a brand to others based on its ethical and sustainability practices?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very unlikely	12	6.49%	6.49%	6.49%
Unlikely	18	9.73%	9.73%	16.22%
Neutral	39	21.08%	21.08%	37.30%
Likely	59	31.89%	31.89%	69.19%
Very likely	57	30.81%	30.81%	100.00%
Total	185	100.00%	100.00%	

Interpretation:

Around 62.7% of respondents are likely or very likely to recommend brands with strong ethical credentials, showing that sustainability fosters positive word-of-mouth. Only 16.2% expressed reluctance to recommend such brands.

Table 8: If a brand you regularly use introduces stronger sustainability initiatives, how would it impact your loyalty?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
No impact	13	7.03%	7.03%	7.03%
Very little impact	21	11.35%	11.35%	18.38%
Somewhat increase loyalty	44	23.78%	23.78%	42.16%
Strongly increase loyalty	54	29.19%	29.19%	71.35%
Greatly increase loyalty	53	28.65%	28.65%	100.00%
Total	185	100.00%	100.00%	

Interpretation:

Over 57% of respondents reported that stronger sustainability initiatives would either strongly or greatly increase their loyalty. Only a small share (18.38%) indicated little or no effect, suggesting that sustainability investments significantly enhance brand–consumer relationships.

Hypothesis Testing**Hypothesis 1****Table 9: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Ethical Consumerism and Brand Loyalty**

Value	df	Asymp. Sig.
Pearson Chi-Square	21.367	3
Likelihood Ratio	22.154	3
N of Valid Cases	185	

Interpretation:

The Chi-Square Test for Independence was applied to examine the association between ethical consumerism and brand loyalty. The Pearson Chi-Square value of 21.367 with 3 degrees of freedom produced a p-value of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 threshold. This suggests a strong and significant association between ethical consumerism and consumer brand loyalty. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted.

Hypothesis 2**Table 10: Regression Mediation Analysis (Baron & Kenny Approach)**

Model	R ²	β (Standardized)	t-value	Sig.
Ethical Consumerism → Brand Loyalty (Direct)	0.312	0.558	7.462	0.000
Ethical Consumerism → Sustainability	0.298	0.546	7.118	0.000

Communication				
Sustainability Communication → Brand Loyalty (with mediator included)	0.426	0.419	5.893	0.000

Interpretation:

Mediation analysis using regression indicated that ethical consumerism had a significant direct effect on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.558$, $p = 0.000$). It also significantly influenced sustainability communication ($\beta = 0.546$, $p = 0.000$), which in turn had a significant effect on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.419$, $p = 0.000$). After including sustainability communication as a mediator, the direct effect of ethical consumerism on brand loyalty reduced but remained significant, confirming partial mediation. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted.

Hypothesis 3

Table 11: ANOVA Test for Differences in Perceptions of Sustainability Communication Across Demographic Groups

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	20.347	4	5.087	3.941	0.004
Within Groups	230.215	180	1.279		
Total	250.562	184			

Interpretation:

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test differences in perceptions of sustainability communication across demographic groups such as age, gender, and income. The analysis yielded an F-value of 3.941 with a p-value of 0.004, which is below the 0.05 significance threshold. This indicates that perceptions of sustainability communication significantly differ across demographic groups. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted.

6. Conclusion

This research underscores the significant impact of ethical consumerism on brand loyalty among consumers. Research indicates that consumers who emphasize ethical factors in their purchasing choices exhibit heightened loyalty to brands that reflect their values. The findings indicate a clear correlation, suggesting that ethical behavior by consumers and companies is both a moral imperative and a significant determinant of loyalty in competitive markets.

The research demonstrated that sustainability communication acts as a crucial mediator between ethical consumerism and brand loyalty. Clear and consistent communication regarding sustainable practices improved consumer trust and

strengthened loyalty, especially when consumers perceived brands as genuinely dedicated to ethical and sustainable operations. The results suggest that successful sustainability communication converts ethical intentions into lasting relationships between consumers and brands.

The sample size of 185 respondents, while sufficient for statistical analysis, may not fully capture the breadth of consumer attitudes present in more extensive populations. The investigation primarily focused on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. While 185 responses represent a substantial sample size for statistical analysis, it may not comprehensively capture the diversity of consumer perspectives that could be observed in larger populations. The study

primarily focused on how social preference bias may influence self-reported perceptions. The research did not examine alterations that are specific to an individual enterprise, which could potentially diminish the connections observed.

Future research should focus on the cross-cultural differences in ethical communication and sustainable consumerism, considering the variations in consumer perspectives across different countries and markets. In the future, it is likely that investigations will delve into the distinctive characteristics of sectors such as technology, food, or fashion, potentially yielding findings that are specific to those fields. Longitudinal studies provide insights into the evolution of consumer perspectives over time, offering a comprehensive understanding of the impact of ethical consumerism on brand loyalty within dynamic markets.

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