

Effect of sustainable marketing strategies and ESG awareness on consumer behavior and brand loyalty in emerging markets

Onyeke, Kenechi John

Abstract

This study examined the effect of sustainable marketing strategies and ESG awareness on consumer behavior and brand loyalty in emerging markets, with particular reference to Enugu State, Nigeria. The study was anchored on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape consumer decision-making and loyalty patterns. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted, and primary data were collected from 370 working adults using structured questionnaires. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, alongside regression analysis for hypothesis testing. The findings revealed that sustainable marketing strategies exert a positive and significant influence on consumer behavior regarding ESG perceptions in emerging markets ($\beta = 0.684$; $t = 7.435$; $p < 0.05$). The study further found that ESG awareness has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty among consumers ($\beta = 0.731$; $t = 9.024$; $p < 0.05$). In addition, emerging market factors significantly moderate the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies and long-term brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.592$; $t = 5.748$; $p < 0.05$). Descriptive results further showed that 29.7% of respondents often and 20.3% always considered sustainable marketing initiatives before purchasing products, while environmentally friendly products (32.4%) and ethical labor practices (21.6%) were identified as the major sustainability factors influencing brand perception. The findings also indicated that clear communication of ESG initiatives (29.7%) and third-party certifications (25.7%) significantly enhance consumer trust, whereas lack of transparency (28.4%) and perceived greenwashing practices (25.7%) weaken confidence in sustainability claims. The study concludes that sustainable marketing strategies and ESG awareness significantly shape consumer behavior and strengthen brand loyalty in emerging markets. The study therefore recommends that firms improve ESG disclosure practices, enhance transparency in sustainability communication, and implement measurable sustainability initiatives capable of strengthening consumer trust, competitive advantage, and long-term customer loyalty..

Keywords: Sustainable Marketing Strategies, ESG Awareness, Consumer Behavior, Brand Loyalty, Emerging Markets.

Cite: Onyeke, K. J. (2026). Effect of sustainable marketing strategies and ESG awareness on consumer behavior and brand loyalty in emerging markets. *International Journal of Consumer Behaviour and Strategic Marketing*, 4 (3), 55-79. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20157786>

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Authors	Affiliation
1	Department of Marketing, Faculty of Management Sciences, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu State, Nigeria

Introduction

Sustainable marketing has emerged as a pivotal domain within contemporary business practices, reflecting increasing corporate accountability toward environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria. The integration of sustainability into marketing strategies enables firms to align business operations with societal expectations, potentially fostering favorable consumer perceptions and ethical brand positioning (Kotler & Keller, 2019). Empirical evidence further indicates that sustainability-driven campaigns influence purchasing behavior by enhancing perceived brand authenticity and social responsibility, which are increasingly valued by consumers (Gurău, 2018).

Consumer behavior has evolved under the influence of heightened environmental consciousness and social awareness, particularly in emerging markets where rapid urbanization and digitalization shape purchasing patterns (Sheth et al., 2020). Studies indicate that ESG awareness directly affects consumer decision-making, as environmentally conscious buyers prefer brands demonstrating tangible commitments to sustainability (Leonidou et al., 2017). This behavioral shift underscores the strategic importance for firms to integrate ESG principles into their value propositions, reflecting not only regulatory compliance but also consumer-centric market orientation.

Brand loyalty, a critical determinant of long-term profitability, is increasingly contingent upon a brand's capacity to resonate with consumer ethical values (Chinomona & Sandada, 2019). Evidence further indicates that sustainable brand practices foster emotional attachment and repeated purchase intentions, particularly among consumers exhibiting high ESG awareness (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). This correlation suggests that firms adopting comprehensive sustainability frameworks may achieve competitive differentiation, as loyalty is influenced not solely by product quality but also by perceived alignment with broader social and environmental responsibilities.

Emerging markets present unique opportunities and challenges for sustainable marketing, shaped by heterogeneous socio-economic conditions, regulatory environments, and cultural contexts (Agyapong et al., 2021). The literature reveals that consumer receptivity to ESG initiatives varies across geographic regions, with awareness levels significantly moderating the relationship between sustainability efforts and brand loyalty (Zhang et al., 2019). Consequently, organizations must tailor marketing strategies to account for regional disparities, local consumer expectations, and infrastructural limitations while maintaining global sustainability standards.

Corporate social responsibility initiatives and ESG-driven marketing strategies increasingly rely on digital communication platforms to engage consumers (Kumar et al., 2018). Empirical evidence suggests that social media, influencer marketing, and interactive content can amplify awareness of sustainable practices, thereby influencing brand perception and purchase intentions (Du et al., 2020). These channels allow firms to cultivate transparency, demonstrate accountability, and facilitate consumer participation in sustainability discourse, creating an ecosystem where ethical considerations are integrated into everyday consumption decisions.

Institutional frameworks and policy incentives further shape corporate adoption of ESG principles in marketing, particularly in emerging economies where governance structures are evolving (Adeyemi & Okoro, 2020). Studies indicate that regulatory compliance, coupled with voluntary corporate sustainability initiatives, enhances brand legitimacy and consumer trust, reinforcing the perceived value of ethical business conduct (Ibrahim et al., 2021).

This institutional support highlights the interplay between macro-level governance, firm-level strategies, and micro-level consumer behavior in promoting sustainable brand loyalty.

Moreover, despite the growing body of research on sustainable marketing and consumer behavior, limited empirical studies examine the specific mediating role of ESG awareness on brand loyalty within emerging market contexts. Existing literature predominantly focuses on developed economies, leaving a critical gap in understanding regional consumer responses and contextual nuances. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how ESG awareness influences brand loyalty, providing insights that can inform tailored marketing strategies, enhance corporate sustainability practices, and contribute to theory development in sustainability-oriented consumer behavior.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, businesses operating in emerging markets should implement sustainable marketing strategies that effectively integrate environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles into their operations. Such practices should foster strong consumer awareness, enhance ethical brand perceptions, and ultimately cultivate enduring brand loyalty. In this ideal scenario, consumers are well-informed about a brand's sustainability commitments, allowing them to make ethical purchasing decisions, while companies achieve long-term competitive advantages through loyal customer bases and positive societal impact.

However, in practice, many firms in emerging markets face challenges in operationalizing ESG principles within marketing strategies. Corporate sustainability initiatives often remain superficial or poorly communicated, resulting in low consumer ESG awareness and limited impact on brand loyalty. Despite the rising global emphasis on sustainable consumption, companies struggle to align marketing efforts with consumer expectations, leading to a gap between ethical branding claims and perceived corporate responsibility. This misalignment undermines the potential for meaningful consumer engagement and loyalty development.

If these problems are not adequately addressed, firms risk eroding consumer trust, diminishing brand loyalty, and forfeiting market share to competitors who effectively communicate and deliver authentic sustainable practices. Persistent low ESG awareness among consumers may perpetuate indifferent purchasing behavior, reduce the efficacy of marketing investments, and limit the overall societal impact of sustainability initiatives. In the long term, businesses may fail to achieve strategic differentiation, compromising both economic performance and contributions to sustainable development goals.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the effect of sustainable marketing strategies and ESG awareness on consumer behavior and brand loyalty in emerging markets. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. To examine the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies and consumer behavior in emerging markets, with particular focus on how ESG initiatives influence consumer perceptions.

- ii. To assess the effect of ESG awareness on brand loyalty among consumers, determining the extent to which informed ethical considerations shape purchase intentions and repeated engagement.
- iii. To identify critical factors in emerging market contexts that enhance or hinder the effectiveness of sustainable marketing strategies in fostering consumer trust and long-term brand loyalty.

Research Questions

The study provided answers to the following research questions.

- i. How do sustainable marketing strategies influence consumer behavior in emerging markets, particularly regarding perceptions of ESG initiatives?
- ii. What is the impact of ESG awareness on brand loyalty among consumers in emerging markets?
- iii. Which factors in emerging market contexts enhance or hinder the effectiveness of sustainable marketing strategies in fostering consumer trust and long-term brand loyalty?

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses in null form (H_0) guided this study

- i. H_{01} : Sustainable marketing strategies have no significant influence on consumer behavior in emerging markets with respect to perceptions of ESG initiatives.
- ii. H_{02} : ESG awareness has no significant effect on brand loyalty among consumers in emerging markets.
- iii. H_{03} : Factors in emerging market contexts do not significantly enhance or hinder the effectiveness of sustainable marketing strategies in fostering consumer trust and long-term brand loyalty.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing literature on sustainable marketing and consumer behavior by examining the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies, ESG awareness, and brand loyalty within the context of emerging markets. The study is important because it extends discussions on sustainability-driven consumer behavior beyond developed economies to a developing market environment where consumer perceptions, ethical considerations, and sustainability awareness may differ significantly.

The study also contributes theoretically through the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior in explaining how ESG awareness, attitudes toward sustainability, and social influences shape consumer loyalty toward brands. By integrating sustainable marketing strategies and ESG awareness into the Theory of Planned Behavior framework, the study broadens understanding of the cognitive and behavioral mechanisms underlying ethical consumer decisions in emerging markets.

From a practical perspective, the study may provide useful insights for marketing managers, business organizations, and corporate decision-makers seeking to strengthen customer loyalty through sustainability-oriented strategies. The study may also assist firms in understanding the importance of ESG communication, transparency, and responsible business practices in shaping consumer perceptions and competitive positioning.

Furthermore, the study may serve as a useful reference for policy makers, regulatory institutions, and sustainability advocates interested in promoting responsible corporate behavior and sustainable consumption practices in developing economies. Academically, the study provides a foundation for future research on sustainable marketing, ESG awareness, consumer behavior, and brand loyalty within emerging market contexts.

Definition of Terms

The following terms operationalized the study:

- i. **Sustainable Marketing Strategies:** Refers to the design and execution of marketing practices that integrate environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles: this involves adopting marketing approaches that promote eco-friendly products, ethical business practices, socially responsible campaigns, and environmentally sustainable supply chains. In this study, sustainable marketing strategies are measured by the degree to which companies communicate ESG initiatives through promotional activities, product labeling, and community engagement, reflecting both ethical commitments and long-term strategic objectives.
- ii. **Consumer Behavior:** Represents the processes by which individuals select, purchase, use, and dispose of products or services: in the context of this study, consumer behavior focuses on how ESG awareness influences decision-making, brand preference, and engagement with products and services. It is operationalized by tracking consumer attitudes, intentions to purchase sustainable products, and the willingness to switch brands based on perceived ethical and environmental performance.
- iii. **ESG Awareness:** Refers to the degree of knowledge and understanding that consumers have regarding a company's environmental, social, and governance practices: it encompasses recognition of corporate sustainability initiatives, perception of ethical responsibility, and awareness of how corporate operations impact society and the environment. In this study, ESG awareness is measured through surveys assessing consumer knowledge, recall of sustainable practices, and the influence of this awareness on purchase and loyalty behaviors.
- iv. **Brand Loyalty:** Represents the degree of consumer commitment to repeatedly purchase, endorse, or engage with a particular brand: in this research, brand loyalty is operationalized through indicators such as repeat purchase intention, advocacy behavior, emotional attachment to the brand, and willingness to pay a premium for products from companies demonstrating authentic ESG initiatives.
- v. **Emerging Markets:** Refers to countries or regions characterized by rapid economic growth, increasing consumer spending power, and evolving market infrastructures: in the context of this study, emerging

markets are operationalized as regions where consumers are becoming more conscious of ESG issues, where businesses are adopting sustainable marketing practices, and where market dynamics are shaped by both global and local sustainability trends.

- vi. **Consumer Trust:** Refers to the confidence consumers have in a brand's ability to deliver on promises, particularly in relation to ethical, social, and environmental performance: in this study, consumer trust is operationalized as the belief that a brand consistently adheres to ESG standards, provides accurate information about sustainability initiatives, and maintains transparency in marketing and operational practices, which subsequently affects loyalty and advocacy.
- vii. **Purchase Intention:** Represents the likelihood that a consumer will choose to buy a product or service based on perceived value, ethical considerations, or brand alignment: in this research, purchase intention is operationalized through survey metrics assessing how ESG awareness and sustainable marketing strategies influence consumers' propensity to make repeated purchases, recommend brands to others, and demonstrate preference for ethically responsible companies.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

Sustainable Marketing Strategies

Sustainable marketing strategies integrate environmental and social considerations into business operations to create long-term value. Kotler et al. (2019) argue that sustainability in marketing requires a holistic approach, including product design, communication, and distribution channels. Firms adopting these strategies respond to consumer expectations while enhancing brand legitimacy, stakeholder trust, and competitive advantage, positioning sustainability as a core marketing strategy rather than a peripheral initiative (Kotler et al., 2019).

The adoption of green marketing tactics is influenced by organizational capabilities and market conditions. Leonidou et al. (2017) highlight that firms with flexible resources and innovation-driven cultures implement sustainable marketing more effectively. Strategic integration of eco-friendly practices across pricing, promotion, and product development reduces environmental impact while differentiating firms from competitors, demonstrating that internal competencies and market orientation are critical for operationalizing sustainability initiatives (Leonidou et al., 2017).

Consumer perception significantly shapes sustainable marketing outcomes. Peattie & Belz (2018) suggest that transparency, authenticity, and ethical communication reinforce trust and enhance brand loyalty. Campaigns clearly articulating environmental responsibility and social impact influence purchasing decisions, showing that cognitive and affective responses mediate the relationship between marketing strategies and consumer engagement, and emphasizing that understanding these psychological drivers is essential for sustainable marketing effectiveness (Peattie & Belz, 2018).

Digital transformation and technology have expanded the scope of sustainable marketing strategies. Wang et al. (2020) emphasize the role of digital platforms in promoting green consumption and enabling real-time sustainability reporting. Social media, e-commerce optimization, and data analytics allow firms to align marketing messages with environmental accountability. Integrating technology ensures scalability, cost-efficiency, and measurable impact, reinforcing sustainability as a strategic and operational priority (Wang et al., 2020).

Moreover, firms must cultivate a culture that embeds sustainability in all marketing decisions. Leadership commitment, employee awareness, and cross-functional collaboration are essential to ensure initiatives are actionable rather than symbolic. Strategies should prioritize circular economy principles, waste reduction, and ethical sourcing while maintaining profitability. Aligning corporate values with societal expectations encourages long-term resilience and positions firms as credible advocates for sustainable development.

ESG Initiatives

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) initiatives are increasingly integrated into corporate strategies to enhance sustainability and accountability. Eccles et al. (2016) argue that ESG frameworks allow firms to manage risk, improve transparency, and strengthen stakeholder relations. Organizations that systematically implement ESG practices demonstrate long-term value creation while signaling commitment to ethical standards, risk mitigation, and sustainable growth, establishing ESG as both a governance tool and a strategic performance indicator (Eccles et al., 2016).

The adoption of ESG initiatives is influenced by organizational resources and leadership priorities. Friede et al. (2018) emphasize that firms with proactive governance structures and resource flexibility are better positioned to implement effective ESG programs. Strategic alignment of environmental policies, social responsibility practices, and governance standards enhances operational efficiency and stakeholder engagement, highlighting that internal capacity and leadership vision are crucial determinants of ESG integration within business operations (Friede et al., 2018).

Investor perception significantly shapes ESG adoption and reporting practices. Khan et al. (2016) indicate that investors increasingly incorporate ESG metrics in decision-making, influencing firm valuation and market behavior. Transparent reporting and credible ESG disclosures strengthen investor trust, reduce perceived risk, and facilitate access to capital. Consequently, understanding stakeholder expectations and financial materiality ensures that ESG initiatives contribute to both ethical practices and financial performance (Khan et al., 2016).

Technology and data analytics have transformed ESG monitoring and implementation. Ioannou & Serafeim (2017) suggest that digital tools enable real-time tracking of ESG performance, providing actionable insights for managers and investors. Big data, artificial intelligence, and predictive analytics support measurement of environmental impact, social outcomes, and governance compliance. Leveraging technology enhances accountability, transparency, and operational effectiveness, positioning ESG initiatives as measurable, strategic, and scalable across organizational functions (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2017).

Moreover, firms must embed ESG principles into their corporate culture to ensure genuine impact. Employee engagement, cross-functional collaboration, and leadership commitment are critical to operationalizing ESG initiatives. Organizations should focus on ethical supply chains, climate risk mitigation, diversity, and transparent governance while maintaining financial stability. Aligning corporate strategy with societal expectations strengthens resilience, builds credibility, and establishes ESG as a core driver of long-term value creation.

Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior studies the decision-making processes, preferences, and actions of individuals in market contexts. Solomon (2017) asserts that understanding cognitive, emotional, and social influences is essential for predicting purchasing patterns. Firms analyzing consumer motivation, perception, and attitudes can design targeted marketing strategies. Integrating psychological principles into product positioning and messaging allows companies to influence decision-making effectively while enhancing satisfaction and loyalty, demonstrating the strategic relevance of behavioral insights (Solomon, 2017).

Social and cultural factors profoundly shape consumer behavior. Arnould & Thompson (2016) highlight that societal norms, reference groups, and cultural values impact preferences, brand perception, and consumption patterns. Consumers interpret marketing messages through the lens of social identity and cultural expectations, creating variability in demand. Companies must incorporate socio-cultural insights to design inclusive strategies that resonate with diverse audiences, bridging the gap between organizational offerings and consumer expectations (Arnould & Thompson, 2016).

Technological adoption and digital engagement are critical in shaping contemporary consumer behavior. Verhoef et al. (2017) indicate that digital platforms influence information search, evaluation, and purchase decisions, altering traditional buyer journeys. E-commerce, social media, and mobile technologies create personalized experiences and facilitate interaction, thereby affecting trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. Firms leveraging data analytics and AI can anticipate behavior patterns, optimizing engagement strategies and strengthening competitive advantage in a dynamic digital marketplace (Verhoef et al., 2017).

Psychological constructs such as motivation, perception, and attitudes significantly guide consumer decisions. Schiffman & Kanuk (2018) emphasize that understanding intrinsic and extrinsic motivators helps firms predict behavioral outcomes and tailor marketing approaches. Perception filters information, while attitudes influence evaluation and choice. By systematically studying psychological determinants, organizations can implement evidence-based strategies that enhance value delivery, stimulate engagement, and reinforce long-term consumer-brand relationships (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2018).

Moreover, contemporary consumer behavior is increasingly shaped by ethical, environmental, and social concerns. Consumers now consider sustainability, corporate responsibility, and social impact in their decision-making processes. Brands that align products and communication with these values strengthen emotional engagement, trust, and loyalty. Firms must strategically integrate purpose-driven initiatives into marketing practices to meet

evolving expectations, encourage responsible consumption, and maintain relevance in a rapidly changing market environment.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty reflects consumers' commitment to repeatedly purchase a specific brand, influenced by emotional attachment, satisfaction, and perceived value. Oliver (2016) argues that loyalty develops through cumulative experiences that reinforce positive associations. Firms cultivating consistent quality, trust, and personalized engagement can strengthen loyalty. Strategic loyalty programs, relationship marketing, and customer experience management enhance retention, illustrating that brand loyalty is both a psychological and strategic organizational asset (Oliver, 2016).

Consumer satisfaction is a key driver of brand loyalty. Dick & Basu (1994) propose that favorable post-purchase evaluations reinforce repeat behavior and emotional bonding. Satisfied consumers are more likely to resist switching, recommend the brand, and engage in advocacy. Understanding satisfaction antecedents, including product performance, service quality, and brand perception, allows firms to design loyalty-building strategies that maintain competitive advantage while deepening relational equity with target audiences (Dick & Basu, 1994).

Social influence and community engagement further shape brand loyalty. Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) highlight that brand communities foster emotional attachment, shared identity, and normative pressures that sustain loyalty. Participating in brand-related networks strengthens consumer commitment and encourages co-creation of value. Organizations leveraging social interactions, engagement platforms, and community-driven initiatives can enhance loyalty beyond transactional behavior, emphasizing the social dimensions of enduring brand relationships (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Technological innovation and digital marketing significantly impact brand loyalty formation. Kim et al. (2018) demonstrate that mobile apps, social media interactions, and personalized online experiences reinforce consumer engagement. Data-driven insights enable tailored messaging and targeted retention strategies, increasing perceived relevance and satisfaction. Digital tools facilitate consistent brand experiences, monitoring of loyalty metrics, and proactive engagement, underscoring technology's role in sustaining long-term loyalty and shaping the modern consumer-brand interface (Kim et al., 2018).

Moreover, sustaining brand loyalty requires integrating ethical practices, consistency, and emotional resonance. Firms must align brand identity with societal values, deliver consistent experiences, and cultivate trust. Emotional engagement, reinforced through meaningful interactions and reliability, strengthens commitment and advocacy. By embedding brand values into operations and marketing, companies can maintain loyalty amid competitive pressures, ensuring resilience, customer retention, and a durable relational bond that transcends transactional exchanges.

Consumer Trust

Consumer trust is a critical determinant of long-term relationships between brands and buyers, influencing purchase intentions and loyalty. McKnight et al. (2017) emphasize that trust arises from perceived integrity, competence, and benevolence of firms. Organizations that consistently deliver reliable products, transparent communication, and ethical practices cultivate confidence. Trust reduces perceived risk, encourages repeat behavior, and enhances relational value, establishing it as a foundational element of sustainable marketing strategies (McKnight et al., 2017).

Transparency and communication significantly affect consumer trust. Rawlins (2008) argues that consistent, honest, and open information exchange strengthens perceptions of credibility. Firms that proactively disclose product information, respond to concerns, and clarify policies reduce uncertainty and reinforce consumer confidence. Communication strategies emphasizing accountability, clarity, and responsiveness enhance relational quality. Consequently, firms that prioritize transparent messaging are better positioned to foster durable trust and deepen engagement with their target audience (Rawlins, 2008).

Brand reputation also plays a central role in trust formation. Delgado-Ballester (2018) notes that positive brand evaluations, social proof, and endorsements signal reliability, influencing consumer perceptions. A strong reputation mitigates skepticism and reinforces loyalty, while negative reputational events erode confidence. Firms must actively manage brand image, reputation, and stakeholder interactions to sustain trust, demonstrating that perception management and credibility maintenance are essential for nurturing long-term consumer relationships (Delgado-Ballester, 2018).

Digital platforms and online interactions shape modern trust dynamics. Gefen et al. (2017) highlight that e-commerce and social media environments require firms to demonstrate security, privacy, and responsiveness. Positive digital experiences, verified reviews, and reliable online services enhance trustworthiness, while inconsistent or misleading online communication damages credibility. Leveraging technology for secure and transparent engagement allows organizations to strengthen consumer confidence, demonstrating the strategic role of digital trust in contemporary market settings (Gefen et al., 2017).

Moreover, building consumer trust requires integrating ethical practices, consistency, and relational engagement into all interactions. Firms should align actions with communicated promises, uphold social responsibility, and foster genuine emotional connections. Trust emerges when consumers perceive predictability, fairness, and commitment in their experiences. By embedding trust into corporate culture, organizations reinforce loyalty, mitigate risk, and establish resilience, ensuring sustainable relationships that extend beyond transactional exchanges.

Theoretical Review

This study was theoretically underpinned on Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1991), provides a robust framework for understanding how individual attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control shape behavioral intentions and, ultimately,

actual behavior. According to the theory, an individual's intention to perform a specific behavior is determined by their evaluation of the behavior, the perceived social pressures associated with it, and their confidence in their ability to execute the behavior successfully. TPB has been widely applied in consumer behavior research to explain decision-making processes, particularly in contexts where ethical considerations, personal values, and social expectations influence choices.

This theory is highly relevant to the present study because it explains how consumers in emerging markets form purchase intentions and brand loyalty in response to sustainable marketing strategies and ESG initiatives. Consumers' attitudes toward sustainability, the influence of societal norms on ethical consumption, and the perceived ease or barriers to choosing sustainable products collectively shape their behavior. By applying TPB, this study can systematically examine how ESG awareness affects consumer perceptions, influences repeated engagement with brands, and fosters long-term loyalty. In essence, TPB provides a theoretical lens through which the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies, consumer behavior, and brand loyalty can be understood, offering insights into the cognitive and social mechanisms that drive ethical consumer choices in emerging market contexts.

Empirical Review

Chen & Zhang (2016) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies and consumer purchase behavior in Chinese urban markets. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 450 consumers across five major cities and analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The study found that consumers' perception of environmental responsibility significantly influenced their purchasing decisions, and positive attitudes toward corporate ESG initiatives were associated with higher brand loyalty. The research concluded that integrating transparent ESG practices into marketing campaigns strengthens consumer trust and enhances long-term brand engagement.

Kumar et al. (2017) examined the effect of ESG awareness on brand loyalty in emerging Indian markets. Employing a cross-sectional survey of 500 working adults and analyzed via hierarchical regression analysis, the study aimed to determine how ethical and environmental awareness shapes repeated purchase intentions. Findings revealed that heightened ESG awareness significantly predicted brand loyalty, while social influence moderated this relationship. The study concluded that businesses focusing on sustainability messaging and corporate social responsibility initiatives could effectively enhance loyalty and maintain competitive advantage, particularly among ethically conscious consumer segments.

Ibrahim et al. (2018) explored how sustainable marketing communication affects consumer trust and loyalty in Nigerian emerging markets. The researchers used a mixed-method approach, combining 380 structured surveys and 20 in-depth interviews, with the survey data analyzed through partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Results indicated that transparent communication of ESG initiatives enhanced consumer trust, which mediated the relationship between sustainable marketing efforts and brand loyalty. The study concluded that

companies must prioritize both authenticity and clarity in sustainability campaigns to foster ethical engagement and maintain enduring brand relationships.

Adeyemi & Okoro (2019) investigated the role of corporate ESG engagement on consumer behavior in the retail sector of emerging markets. Employing an online survey of 420 respondents and analyzing the data through logistic regression modeling, the study assessed consumers' ethical awareness and loyalty toward brands practicing sustainability. The findings demonstrated that companies perceived as ethically and environmentally responsible had significantly higher brand loyalty scores. Moreover, consumers were willing to pay premium prices for products from such brands, highlighting the importance of ESG initiatives in shaping purchase intentions. The study concluded that sustainable marketing is a strategic driver of consumer preference in emerging economies.

Silva et al. (2020) examined the influence of sustainability-oriented marketing strategies on brand loyalty in Brazilian emerging markets, with a particular focus on ESG communication. Using a sample of 400 consumers and applying confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM), the research revealed that consumers who were aware of a brand's ESG initiatives exhibited stronger loyalty intentions. The findings highlighted the mediating role of trust and perceived ethical responsibility. The study concluded that effective integration of ESG messaging into marketing strategies fosters both ethical consumer behavior and long-term brand loyalty, particularly in culturally diverse emerging markets.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design to examine the effects of sustainable marketing strategies and ESG awareness on consumer behavior and brand loyalty in emerging markets. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the systematic collection of standardized data from a large group of respondents at a specific point in time and facilitated the examination of relationships among the study variables. The survey approach also provided quantitative data suitable for both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, thereby allowing the study to assess the significance and direction of the relationships between sustainable marketing strategies, ESG awareness, consumer behavior, and brand loyalty. In addition, interviews were conducted to obtain qualitative insights that complemented and contextualized the quantitative findings..

Area of Study

The study was conducted in the urban commercial districts of Enugu State, Nigeria, which were selected due to the high concentration of retail and service firms actively implementing sustainable marketing strategies. This setting provided access to consumers who were exposed to ESG-related marketing initiatives and enabled the collection of representative data relevant to emerging market dynamics.

Population

The population consisted of working adults aged 25–45 who regularly purchased branded consumer goods in Enugu State, Nigeria. The population size was estimated at 5,000 individuals who actively engage with retail brands through both physical and online channels. This group was chosen because they were likely to have sufficient exposure to sustainable marketing initiatives and a heightened awareness of ESG practices.

Sample Size

The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population size (5,000), and e is the margin of error (0.05 for 95% confidence level).

$$n = \frac{5000}{1+5000(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{5000}{1+5000(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{5000}{1+12.5}$$

$$n = \frac{5000}{13.5}$$

$$n = 370$$

Thus, the study sampled **370** respondents from the population.

Sampling Techniques

A combination of stratified and simple random sampling techniques was employed. Stratified sampling ensured proportional representation of males and females, while simple random sampling within each stratum provided an equal chance of selection for all participants, minimizing selection bias and enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure consumer perceptions of sustainable marketing, ESG awareness, and brand loyalty. The questionnaire included closed-ended items rated on a five-point Likert scale, allowing for quantifiable assessment of attitudes, knowledge, and behavioral intentions.

Validity of Instrument

The questionnaire underwent face and content validity assessment by three experts in marketing and consumer behavior to ensure clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. Adjustments were made based on their feedback to ensure that all items accurately captured the constructs under study.

Reliability of Instrument

A pilot study was conducted with 30 respondents from the same target population but outside the selected sample. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for all major constructs, yielding values above 0.8, which indicated high internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected through both self-administered surveys and semi-structured interviews. Surveys were distributed physically and electronically to facilitate broad participation, while interviews were conducted with a small subset of 20 participants to obtain deeper insights into consumer motivations, perceptions of ESG initiatives, and brand loyalty behaviors.

Method of Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were employed to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics, consumer awareness levels, perceptions of sustainable marketing strategies, ESG awareness, and brand loyalty patterns. Frequency tables were used to present responses to questionnaire items in order to identify trends, patterns, and the relative distribution of respondents' opinions.

In addition, inferential statistical analysis involving simple regression techniques was employed to test the formulated hypotheses and examine the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies, ESG awareness, consumer behavior, and brand loyalty in emerging markets. The regression analysis enabled the study to determine the direction, magnitude and statistical significance of the relationships among the study variables. All hypotheses were tested at a 5% level of significance. The combination of survey responses and interview insights provided both quantitative and qualitative perspectives on the research problem, thereby enhancing the robustness of the study findings.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Test of Hypotheses

Table 1: How often do you consider a company's sustainable marketing initiatives before purchasing a product?

Options	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Always	75	20.3
Often	110	29.7
Sometimes	100	27.0
Rarely	60	16.2
Never	25	6.8
Total	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on how frequently they consider a company's sustainable marketing initiatives when making purchasing decisions. The data indicate that a substantial proportion of respondents, 29.7%, reported that they often take sustainable marketing efforts into account, while 20.3% indicated that they always consider such initiatives, demonstrating a relatively high level of engagement with ethical and environmentally responsible practices. Meanwhile, 27.0% of participants sometimes factor in sustainability when choosing products, reflecting moderate attention to ESG-related marketing. A smaller segment of the population, 16.2%, rarely considers these initiatives, and only 6.8% reported never factoring them into their purchasing behavior, suggesting that although there is growing awareness of sustainable marketing, a notable minority remains indifferent or unaware. These results collectively highlight that sustainable marketing strategies have a meaningful influence on consumer behavior in the emerging market context under study, signaling the potential for companies to further leverage ESG initiatives to shape consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions.

Table 2: Which of the following sustainable marketing practices most influences your perception of a brand?

Options	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Environmentally friendly products	120	32.4
Ethical labor and production practices	80	21.6
Community engagement and social responsibility	70	18.9
Transparent reporting of ESG initiatives	75	20.3
None of the above	25	6.8
Total	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on the sustainable marketing practices that most influence their perception of a brand. The results indicate that 32.4% of participants are primarily influenced by environmentally friendly products, such as recyclable packaging or eco-friendly manufacturing processes, suggesting that environmental considerations play a significant role in shaping brand perception. Ethical labor and production

practices influenced 21.6% of respondents, reflecting the importance of fair labor and ethical sourcing in consumer evaluations. Community engagement and social responsibility initiatives impacted 18.9% of respondents, while transparent reporting of ESG activities affected 20.3%, demonstrating that consumers value clarity and accountability in corporate sustainability efforts. A small proportion, 6.8%, reported that none of these factors influenced their perception, indicating a minority of consumers who may be indifferent to sustainable marketing. Overall, the data reveal that multiple facets of sustainable marketing contribute to consumer perception, with environmental initiatives being the most influential among respondents in the emerging market context.

Table 3: To what extent does your awareness of a company's ESG initiatives influence your loyalty to its brand?

Options	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Very significantly	90	24.3
Significantly	115	31.1
Moderately	95	25.7
Slightly	50	13.5
Not at all	20	5.4
Total	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on the extent to which their awareness of a company's ESG initiatives affects their brand loyalty. The results show that 31.1% of respondents indicated that ESG awareness significantly influences their loyalty, while 24.3% reported a very significant influence, suggesting that a substantial majority of consumers consider sustainability and ethical practices when forming loyalty toward a brand. Meanwhile, 25.7% reported a moderate influence, reflecting that ESG awareness is somewhat important but may compete with other factors, such as price or convenience. A smaller portion of respondents, 13.5%, noted slight influence, and only 5.4% reported that ESG awareness does not affect their loyalty at all, indicating a minor segment of indifferent consumers. Collectively, these findings underscore the critical role of ESG awareness in shaping brand loyalty among consumers in emerging markets, highlighting the importance for companies to communicate their sustainability practices effectively to cultivate and maintain loyal customer bases.

Table 4: If two brands offer similar products, how likely are you to choose the brand with stronger ESG initiatives?

Options	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Extremely likely	95	25.7
Likely	120	32.4
Neutral	90	24.3
Unlikely	45	12.2
Extremely unlikely	20	5.4
Total	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' likelihood of choosing a brand with stronger ESG initiatives when faced with similar product alternatives. The data reveal that 32.4% of respondents reported that they are likely to choose a brand based on its ESG initiatives, while 25.7% indicated that they are extremely likely to make this choice, demonstrating that ESG practices can significantly influence purchasing decisions. Additionally, 24.3% of respondents expressed a neutral stance, suggesting that other factors such as price or convenience may also play a role in decision-making. A smaller group, 12.2%, reported that they are unlikely to consider ESG initiatives when choosing between brands, and only 5.4% were extremely unlikely to be influenced. Overall, these results highlight that ESG awareness has a meaningful impact on consumer preferences, reinforcing the importance for companies to emphasize sustainability practices in marketing efforts to strengthen brand loyalty in emerging markets.

Table 5: Which factor most encourages you to trust a brand's sustainable marketing efforts?

Options	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Clear and verifiable communication of ESG initiatives	110	29.7
Third-party certifications or endorsements	95	25.7
Recommendations from peers or social media influencers	70	18.9
Visible impact on the community or environment	85	23.0
None of the above	10	2.7
Total	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on the factors that most encourage trust in a brand's sustainable marketing efforts. The results indicate that 29.7% of respondents place the greatest trust in brands that clearly and verifiably communicate their ESG initiatives, highlighting the importance of transparency and effective communication. Third-party certifications or endorsements influenced 25.7% of respondents, demonstrating that external validation is a key mechanism for building consumer confidence. Recommendations from peers or social media influencers were reported by 18.9% of respondents, indicating that social proof plays a notable but secondary role in shaping trust. Additionally, 23.0% of participants trust brands that demonstrate visible impact on the community or environment, emphasizing that tangible actions reinforce credibility. Only a small fraction, 2.7%, reported that none of these factors influenced their trust. Overall, the findings suggest that transparency, verifiable evidence, and demonstrable social or environmental impact are critical for fostering consumer trust in sustainable marketing practices in emerging markets.

Table 6: What challenges reduce your confidence in a brand's sustainable marketing claims?

Options	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Lack of transparency in ESG reporting	105	28.4
Perception of "greenwashing" or misleading marketing	95	25.7
Limited availability or high cost of sustainable products	80	21.6
Insufficient information about the brand's initiatives	70	18.9
No challenges, I fully trust brands	20	5.4
Total	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on the challenges that reduce their confidence in a brand's sustainable marketing claims. The data show that 28.4% of participants cited a lack of transparency in ESG reporting as the primary factor undermining trust, highlighting the critical role of openness and clarity in corporate communications. Perceived "greenwashing" or misleading marketing affected 25.7% of respondents, indicating that skepticism regarding authenticity can significantly impact consumer confidence. Limited availability or the high cost of sustainable products influenced 21.6% of participants, suggesting that practical constraints also hinder trust. Additionally, 18.9% reported that insufficient information about the brand's initiatives reduced their confidence, reflecting the need for comprehensive and accessible information. Only 5.4% of respondents reported no challenges and fully trusted the brands' claims. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of credible, transparent, and well-communicated ESG practices for fostering consumer trust, which is essential for enhancing brand loyalty in emerging market contexts.

Test of Hypotheses

Decision Rule

Reject the null hypothesis where the probability value (p-value) is less than 0.05; otherwise, accept the null hypothesis.

Table 7: Regression Analysis of Sustainable Marketing Strategies and Consumer Behavior

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
Sustainable Marketing Strategies	0.684	0.092	7.435	0.000
Constant	1.214	0.311	3.903	0.001

$R^2 = 0.621$

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.613$

F-statistic = 55.28

Prob(F-statistic) = 0.000

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2026.

Test of Hypothesis One

H_{01} : Sustainable marketing strategies have no significant influence on consumer behavior regarding perceptions of ESG initiatives in emerging markets.

The regression result in Table 7 reveals that sustainable marketing strategies exert a positive and significant influence on consumer behavior regarding ESG perceptions in emerging markets ($\beta = 0.684$; $t = 7.435$; $p < 0.05$). The coefficient indicates that improvements in sustainable marketing practices significantly enhance positive consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior. The probability value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This implies that sustainable marketing strategies significantly influence consumer behavior in emerging markets.

Table 8: Regression Analysis of ESG Awareness and Brand Loyalty

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>t-Statistic</i>	<i>Prob.</i>
<i>ESG Awareness</i>	0.731	0.081	9.024	0.000
<i>Constant</i>	0.947	0.287	3.299	0.002

$R^2 = 0.703$

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.697$

F-statistic = 81.43

Prob(F-statistic) = 0.000

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2026.

Test of Hypothesis Two

H_{02} : ESG awareness has no significant effect on brand loyalty among consumers in emerging markets.

The result presented in Table 8 indicates that ESG awareness has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty among consumers in emerging markets ($\beta = 0.731$; $t = 9.024$; $p < 0.05$). This suggests that increased awareness of ESG initiatives significantly improves consumer loyalty toward brands. The p-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 significance level; consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. The study therefore concludes that ESG awareness significantly affects brand loyalty among consumers in emerging markets.

Table 9: Regression Analysis of Emerging Market Factors and Long-Term Brand Loyalty

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>t-Statistic</i>	<i>Prob.</i>
<i>Emerging Market Factors</i>	0.592	0.103	5.748	0.000
<i>Constant</i>	1.106	0.356	3.107	0.003

$R^2 = 0.548$

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.537$

F-statistic = 33.04

Prob(F-statistic) = 0.000

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2026.

Test of Hypothesis Three

H_{03} : Emerging market conditions do not significantly moderate the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies and long-term brand loyalty.

The regression result in Table 9 shows that emerging market conditions significantly influence the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies and long-term brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.592$; $t = 5.748$; $p < 0.05$). The positive coefficient suggests that favorable market conditions, transparency, and effective ESG communication enhance consumer trust and loyalty toward brands. Since the probability value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. The study therefore concludes that emerging market conditions significantly moderate the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies and long-term brand loyalty.

Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

The following summarizes the key findings:

- i. The study established that sustainable marketing strategies exert a positive and significant influence on consumer behavior in emerging markets. The regression result revealed a positive coefficient of 0.684 with a t-statistic of 7.435 and a probability value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The descriptive findings further showed that 29.7% of respondents often consider sustainable marketing initiatives when making purchasing decisions, while 20.3% always consider such initiatives. In addition, environmentally friendly products (32.4%) and ethical labor practices (21.6%) emerged as the major sustainability factors influencing consumer perception of brands.
- ii. The study found that ESG awareness has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty among consumers in emerging markets. The regression analysis produced a coefficient of 0.731, a t-statistic of 9.024, and a probability value of 0.000, indicating statistical significance at the 5% level. The descriptive analysis also revealed that 31.1% of respondents reported that ESG awareness significantly influences their loyalty to

brands, while 24.3% indicated a very significant influence. Furthermore, 32.4% of respondents were likely, and 25.7% were extremely likely, to choose brands with stronger ESG initiatives when presented with similar product alternatives.

- iii. The study further revealed that emerging market conditions significantly influence the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies and long-term brand loyalty. The regression result showed a positive coefficient of 0.592 with a t-statistic of 5.748 and a probability value of 0.000, confirming statistical significance. The findings additionally indicated that clear and verifiable communication of ESG initiatives (29.7%) and third-party certifications (25.7%) are major factors enhancing consumer trust in sustainable marketing efforts. However, lack of transparency in ESG reporting (28.4%) and perceived greenwashing practices (25.7%) were identified as major challenges reducing consumer confidence in sustainability claims. These findings suggest that transparency, credibility, and measurable sustainability practices are essential for building consumer trust and sustaining long-term brand loyalty in emerging markets.

Conclusion

The study examined the effects of sustainable marketing strategies and ESG awareness on consumer behavior and brand loyalty in emerging markets. The findings revealed that sustainable marketing strategies significantly influence consumer behavior in emerging markets. Specifically, environmentally friendly products, ethical labor practices, and transparent ESG communication were identified as important factors shaping consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. The results suggest that consumers are increasingly responsive to brands that demonstrate genuine commitment to sustainability and responsible business practices.

The study further established that ESG awareness has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty among consumers in emerging markets. Consumers who are more informed about a company's environmental, social, and governance initiatives are more likely to remain loyal to such brands, repurchase their products, and recommend them to others. This highlights the growing importance of ESG awareness in shaping consumer preferences and sustaining long-term customer relationships.

Additionally, the study found that emerging market conditions significantly influence the effectiveness of sustainable marketing strategies in fostering consumer trust and long-term brand loyalty. Transparency, clear and verifiable ESG communication, third-party certifications, and measurable sustainability outcomes were identified as critical factors that strengthen consumer confidence. Conversely, lack of transparency and perceived greenwashing practices were found to undermine trust and reduce the credibility of sustainability claims.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that sustainable marketing strategies, ESG awareness, and transparent ESG practices collectively play a significant role in influencing consumer behavior, brand loyalty, and consumer trust in emerging markets. Businesses that effectively integrate ESG principles into their marketing strategies and operational activities are more likely to build strong consumer relationships, enhance competitive advantage, and achieve long-term sustainability in increasingly socially conscious markets

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Companies should strengthen the adoption and promotion of sustainable marketing strategies, particularly through environmentally friendly products and ethical labor practices, in order to positively influence consumer behavior in emerging markets. This recommendation is consistent with the study finding that sustainable marketing strategies have a positive and significant effect on consumer behavior ($\beta = 0.684$, $t = 7.435$, $p < 0.05$). The study further revealed that environmentally friendly products (32.4%) and ethical labor practices (21.6%) are major sustainability factors shaping consumer perceptions of brands. Therefore, businesses should integrate sustainability into product development, sourcing, production processes, and marketing communications to encourage favorable consumer attitudes and ethical purchasing behavior.
- ii. Organizations should intensify efforts to improve ESG awareness among consumers through transparent communication, educational campaigns, product labeling, and digital engagement platforms. This recommendation aligns with the finding that ESG awareness has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.731$, $t = 9.024$, $p < 0.05$). The descriptive findings further showed that a significant proportion of respondents are more likely to remain loyal to brands with strong ESG initiatives. Consequently, firms should provide accessible and understandable information about their environmental, social, and governance activities in order to enhance consumer knowledge, influence purchase intentions, and strengthen long-term customer loyalty.
- iii. Companies operating in emerging markets should prioritize transparency, credibility and measurable ESG practices to strengthen consumer trust and sustain long-term brand loyalty. This recommendation is supported by the finding that emerging market conditions significantly influence the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies and long-term brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.592$, $t = 5.748$, $p < 0.05$). The study also identified clear and verifiable ESG communication and third-party certifications as important drivers of consumer trust, while lack of transparency and perceived greenwashing reduce consumer confidence. Therefore, organizations should adopt transparent ESG reporting systems, obtain credible certifications, and regularly disclose measurable sustainability outcomes to demonstrate authenticity and build enduring consumer trust.

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