

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Heralding Sustainable Marketing Communication Practices among Business Organizations in Nigeria: The Imperative of Sustainability Advertising

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Received: 29 May 2024 Accepted: 10 June 2024 Published: 26 June 2024

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## Abstract

Sustainability, in broad and general term, entails the quest for the current members of the society to address their needs with precaution not to jeopardize the possibility of the coming generations to meet their needs as well. In the business world, sustainability has to do with business organizations conducting their businesses in such ways that significantly promote positive impact and reduce negative impact of such business operations on the people and the environment. Sustainable marketing communication is, no doubt, very fundamental in this regard. Sustainable marketing communication focuses on the promotion of products, services, and practices that are socially and environmentally responsible to the consumers. Accordingly, it was argued that one of the ways for business organizations in Nigeria to ensure effective sustainable marketing communication is through engagement in sustainability advertising which is also referred to as eco-friendly advertising, green marketing, or climate-conscious advertising. It was further argued that using digital / online platforms, renewable energy sources and recycled materials are core sustainability advertising practices which business organizations in Nigeria can maximise to improve public acceptance. Some of the benefits of sustainability advertising practices are cost effectiveness, positive organization's reputation as well as customer loyalty. It was suggested that while engaging in sustainability advertising, business organizations must refrain from Greenwashing which is the practice of deceptive advertising and in this context, making the consumers to believe that a product, service or an organization is more sustainable than it is. This can significantly affect the image of an organization negatively and ultimately reduce costumers' patronage.

## 1. Introduction

For business organisations that are determined to succeed, building a special, trusting relationship with consumers is a key task. Active communication in order to demonstrate to consumers the benefits of mutual cooperation forms a positive image and desire to cooperate with the company in the future. One of the objectives of a sustainable economy is to build sustainable infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and innovation. The external environment has a direct impact on

the sustainable development of companies that form the structure of a sustainable economy (Izakova, Kapustina, Makovkina & Elkina, 2021).

The wish of every responsible individual, business and society, is to ensure that the actions taken today do not impede the success of future actions. It is only when such individual, business organization or society thinks in such considerate direction that the future is said to be significantly guaranteed or secured for the coming generations. This is applicable to the marketing engagements of business organizations or

**Citation:** Dr. Okechukwu Chukwuma, *Heralding Sustainable Marketing Communication Practices among Business Organizations in Nigeria: The Imperative of Sustainability Advertising*. Journal of Advertising and Public Relations 2024;4(1): 24-29

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companies. The world is currently ravaged by climate change orchestrated by dangerous pollutions and other man-made misfortunes. This puts companies in a position of rethinking their operations in such a way that they will be environmentally and socially friendly and as such engage in sustainable marketing communication.

But what then is sustainability? Sustainability, in broad and general term, entails the quest for the current members of the society to address their needs with precaution so as not to jeopardize the possibility of the coming generations to meet their needs as well. In the business world, sustainability has to do with business organizations conducting their businesses in such ways that significantly promote positive impact and reduce negative impact of such business operations on the people and the environment.

Sustainability seeks to prevent the depletion of natural or physical resources, so that they will remain available for the long term. Sustainability is often broken into three main parts namely economic, environment and social. Accordingly, sustainable policies emphasize the future effect of any given policy or business practice on humans, ecosystems and the wider economy. As concerns about anthropogenic climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution have become more widespread, many business organisations in various nations of the world have started embracing sustainable practices and policies, primarily through the implementation of sustainable business practices and increased investments in green technology (Mollenkamp, 2023). Sustainability practices in marketing communication by business organisations cannot be overemphasized. Business organisations must take conscious steps to ensure their marketing communication activities are in compliance with the demands of sustainability if such business organisations aim to increase patronage and continue to remain relevant in the business world. This is because consumers / customers of such business organization may discontinue patronage if they discover that the actions of the business organizations are likely to affect them socially as well as their environment. Accordingly, Dickson (2023) notes that business organizations are consciously implementing sustainability marketing communication because it safeguards the future and this makes the public to perceive the concerned business organisations as responsible and therefore worthy of patronage.

Consumers are willing to buy more from companies that share their values and principles. Increasingly and rapidly, consumer values are shifting towards sustainable development. This rapid shift in values has created the need for marketing communications to become anchored on appropriate sustainable marketing principles. So, it follows that appropriate sustainability marketing creates higher and longer value-based relationships with consumers (Bernyte, 2018).

As already argued, business originations are striving to ensure sustainable marketing communication as part of the overall efforts to herald sustainability in their business operations. Sustainable marketing communication, among others, focuses on the promotion of products, services, and practices that are socially and environmentally responsible to the consumers. And one of the ways to effectively practice sustainable marketing communication is through sustainability advertising and this is already increasingly accepted and practiced in many business organisations globally. Sustainable advertising, also known as eco-friendly advertising, green marketing, or climate-conscious advertising is gaining momentum as companies strive to align their promotional efforts with socially responsible practices. Sustainable advertising goes beyond the traditional focus on product features and benefits. It involves promoting products or services in a way that minimizes negative environmental and social impacts. This approach emphasizes transparency, ethical sourcing, responsible manufacturing and creating a holistic narrative that resonates with environmentally conscious consumers (Chaitra, 2024). The results from a global study conducted in 2018 show that 81% of consumers think that businesses should take actions including sustainability advertising that aid to improve environmental sustainability, which is an increasing trend. The same research also provides findings which state that 73% of consumers would certainly change their purchase patterns in order to reduce their environmental footprint (Eklund, Jernberg, & Roman, 2020). This further shows the imperative of sustainability advertising to business organizations in Nigeria.

## 2. Methodology

This paper is mainly a review of various literature on sustainability marketing and advertising with particular focus on sustainability advertising as a contributing factor to sustainable marketing communication. And

on the basis of the outcome of such review, a case was made for the effective adoption of sustainability advertising practices by business organizations in Nigeria, so as to herald sustainable marketing communication in the country. The implication is that secondary data were mainly used to support the arguments on the subject of discussion.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the SHIFT Model developed by the trio of Katherine White, Rashid Habib and David Hardisty in 2019. The model is an attempt to encourage the consumers to shift toward ecologically sustainable behavior. The SHIFT model claims that people are more likely to maintain positive sustainable behavior when companies consider how the SHIFT elements of Social influence, Habit formation, Individual self, Feelings and cognition, and Tangibility, can be better harnessed (White, Habib & Hardisty, 2019). The model provides specific guidance for effective design and implementation of viable sustainable marketing communication by business organisations including adopting eco-friendly communication delivery system. Tomsa, Romon-ti-Maniu, and Scridon, (2021) further assert that the decision-making process of environmentally minded consumers is strongly correlated with the intention to adopt politically ethical behavior. That is a plausible reason why green advertising at the macro level tries to motivate consumers to help save the planet by preserving nature, reducing global warming, and even saving ourselves in the process.

The model is relevant to this discussion because it stresses on company's engagements in sustainability focused communication for the actualization of sustainable marketing communication. It focuses on business organization's packaging of eco-friendly messages to motivate the consumers to shift to environmentally friendly products and services. The implication of the model's assertion is that the adoption of this kind of message delivery system by business organisations in Nigeria could significantly contribute to sustainable marketing communication in the country.

### 4. Results / Discussion

As previously stated, one of the contributors to sustainable marketing communication is sustainability advertising. Below are some of the ways to ensure sustainable marketing communication through sustainability advertising;

#### 4.1 Choice of Advertising Materials

To achieve sustainability advertising for sustainable marketing communication, business organizations in Nigeria should be mindful of the kind of materials they use for their advertising engagements. This implies that companies must select advertising materials that will be of minimal or no effect to the environment. Accordingly, Chaitra (2024) notes that sustainable advertising begins with conscious material choices. Opting for recycled or responsibly sourced materials for promotional materials such as banners, brochures and packaging reduces the environmental footprint associated with traditional advertising. And this adds to the overall sustainable marketing communication engagements of an organization. Issa (2021) found in his study that sustainability advertising specifically selecting ecofriendly advertising materials is a fundamental practice for sustainable marketing communication among business organizations in Malaysia. Similarly, Lyimo (2020) found that business organizations in Tanzania are beginning to embrace sustainability advertising through the use of environmental friendly materials in the packaging and presentation of advertisements which ultimately promotes sustainable marketing communication.

#### 4.2 Use of Online / Digital Platforms

The utilization of online space and digital platforms by business organizations for advertising is a potent pathway to ensuring sustainability advertising and ultimately lead to sustainable marketing communication. Mkpoche (2022) found in a study of the use of online platforms for advertising by companies in Bamenda, Cameroon, is significantly promoting sustainability advertising in particular and sustainable marketing communication in general. Chaitra (2024) asserts that using the digital space for the purpose of advertising does not only reduce the need for physical material, it also helps to provide business organizations with more effective and eco-friendly avenues of reaching their target audience. Online advertisements, social media campaigns and email marketing are excellent avenues for sustainable promotion. Gyang (2019) also found in a study that the digital and online platforms are helping business organizations to adequately engage in sustainability advertising leading to sustainable marketing communication in the Ghana.

#### 4.3 Use of Renewable Energy Sources

Business organizations are now seriously promoting sustainable marketing communication through



sustainability advertising by making sure that the production and dissemination of advertising materials are energy-efficient. By utilizing renewable energy sources for the production and dissemination of advertising, organization are contributing to the reduction of carbon footprint linked with promotional activities (Chaitra, 2024). Accordingly, Mwita (2023) found that energy efficient powered advertising are becoming the mainstay among businesses in Nairobi, Kenya, and this is improving sustainable marketing communication in among business organizations in the country. Similarly, Nagadya (2021) found that prominent business outfits in Kampala have recognized the dangers of climate change and are embracing energy efficient advertising production and dissemination strategies for sustainable marketing communication.

#### **4.4 Promoting Sustainable Customer Awareness and Behaviour**

Sustainable marketing communication requires that messages of business organizations are aimed at encouraging sustainable awareness and behaviour among the target audience. Sustainability advertising significantly performs this function by raising customer awareness of environmental threats and persuading them to take environmentally friendly decisions and actions. Grove (2024) notes that sustainability advertising incorporate messages that promote sustainable behaviours into marketing campaigns. For example, encourage consumers to recycle, conserve energy and water, reduce waste, and make environmentally conscious purchasing decisions. Dowd (2023) asserts that sustainable advertising can help in raising public awareness on sustainability through campaigns that promote responsible consumption, encourage recycling and waste reduction, or provide information about environmental or social justice causes A study by Yang (2022) revealed that sustainability advertising contributes to sustainable marketing communication by raising awareness and encouraging sustainability practices among telecommunication network subscribers in Pretoria.

#### **4.5 Focus on Ecofriendly Products**

Sustainable marketing communication deals with products and services that are environmentally friendly. This implies that for Sustainability advertising to support sustainable marketing communication, it must focus on promoting only ecofriendly products and services. Corroborating this argument, Grove

(2024) states that sustainability advertising should highlight the environmental benefits of products or services in marketing campaigns. It should also emphasize environmentally friendly features such as energy efficiency, recyclability, biodegradability and sustainable sourcing. The result of this is that it facilitate easy acceptance of the message by the ever growing environmentally conscious consumers. Kelvin (2021) found in his study that promoting ecofriendly products significantly helps in making sustainability advertising successful.

### **5. Advantages of Sustainability Advertising**

#### **5.1 Protection of the environment**

Sustainability advertising encourages the protection of the environment because of the eco-friendly productions and dissemination approach. Justine (2021) found that sustainability advertising has significant impact on the preservation of the Botswanan environment because organizations adopt environmental friendly advertising strategies to publicize and persuade the customers for patronage without causing damage to the environment.

#### **5.2 Promotes Favourable Perception**

Sustainability advertising helps to build positive image for an organization. This is because it makes the organization to be seen by its publics as an environmental friendly organization. Chaitra, (2024) notes that adopting sustainable advertising practices helps build a positive brand image. This is because consumers are increasingly conscious of the environmental and social impact of their purchasing decisions and a commitment to sustainability can differentiate a brand in a crowded market. Also, Mwande (2020) found that sustainability advertising leads to positive organizational image among businesses in Nairobi, Kenya.

#### **5.3 Cost effectiveness**

Business organizations engaged in sustainability advertising enjoy the benefit of cost effectiveness. It reduces the cost of producing an advertisement. This implies that advertising expenditure of an organization is reduced when compared to the amount of money that would be spent in physical advertising. For instance, the utilization of social media platforms for advertising will be far less expensive and less stressful but very effective than placing bill boards at different locations. This is supported by studies (such as Kella, 2020; Kah, 2020; Gyang, 2019).

## 5.4 Brand Loyalty

Sustainability advertising promotes customer loyalty. This implies that the customers tend to continue to patronize a business organization if it is seen that such organization is socially and environmental conscious. It motivates the customers to consistently patronize the product, service or organization. Studies by scholars (Kane, 2022; Sharefa, 2020; Kasanga, 2018) all support to the argument that sustainability advertising can contribute to brand loyalty.

## 5.5 Promotes Message Appeal

Sustainability advertising messages tends to easily appeal to the target audience because of the notion among the people that such production has no damaging effect on the environment. It is on this premise that people tend to easily connect with the messages linked to sustainability advertising. Such production is seen by the target audience as non or less harmful to the environment and as such, they feel safe to receive and connect with the messages. Researchers (Musa, 2021; Crown 2020; Hassan 2020; Elton 2018) all found that sustainability advertising facilitates message appeal.

## 6. Conclusion

Sustainable advertising is not just a trend, it is a strategic imperative for businesses aiming to thrive in a socially and environmentally conscious marketplace. By integrating eco-friendly advertising practices into their operations, business organizations can significantly contribute to a healthier planet, build a positive brand image and command the loyalty of an increasing number of environmentally conscious consumers. As we continue to navigate an evolving business landscape in Nigeria, sustainability advertising emerges as a beacon of sustainable marketing communication in the country (Chaitra, 2024).

Advertisers in Nigeria should have sustainability on their radar because consumers are becoming more environmentally and socially conscious. As already argued, conscious consumers are more likely to seek for brands that share their values, and remain loyal to those brands over time. By combining action with honest messaging as an advertiser, you can better connect to this growing group of consumers. As more brands recognize the severity of climate change and adopt sustainability practices in advertising around the world, we can see that it is not only the right thing to do in Nigeria

but also the necessary thing to do to strengthen sustainable marketing communication so as to maintain a competitive advantage (Garza, 2022).

While engaging in sustainability advertising, business organizations must refrain from Greenwashing which is the practice of deceptive advertising and in this context, making the consumers to believe that a product, service or an organization is much more sustainable than it claims. This can significantly affect the image of an organization negatively and reduce costumers' patronage.

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