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BEYOND JUST BRANDING GIMMICK: POWER OF YOUTHS IN ECO-CERTIFICATION IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

Abstract. *Businesses do not operate in a vacuum. Activities of business have steadily increased pressure on the environment, leading to a growing demand for environmental sustainability and measures to address it. Eco-certification is seen as a strategic communication tool in green marketing strategy to build trust and credibility. This study provides evidence that eco-branding is more than just a branding gimmick. Using a sample of 120 students from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, Nigeria, who are the future of environmentalism. The study observed that communication and campaign about environmental practices are not totally rejected by Nigerians. This mirrors the importance of perceived behavioural control especially – the dimension of self-efficacy and could serve as a foundation for developing policies that challenge certain assumptions held by young people concerning ecological issues. It also shows that young people are highly aware of eco-branding and labelling though their perception is limited to their level of exposure hence they consider such products being organic products. In addition, respondents prefer voluntary labelling than mandatory option. Voluntary labelling it emphasis the strength of value and ethical-moral burden and commitment of the firm to the environment. These voluntary labels often come from trusted third-party institutions with high credibility. This study, therefore, identified that consumer's education is a gateway to achieving the intent of eco-labels and branding because consumer perception of certification is negative.as it is seen as a marketing gimmick which reflects credibility crisis about brands with massive investment to promote environmental performance. This study also provides evidence that what drives certification performance among consumers is their concern about the environment and awareness of benefit such concern have on sustainability. The role of marketing is to design a green communication strategy that improves corporate credibility. In going for eco-label policy, it is important to ensure the credibility of the certification as it reflects the credibility of the firm before the public.*

Keywords: brand credibility, eco-branding, eco-labelling, eco-certification, environment, youth.

Introduction. It is a truism that the world is in serious danger of environmental threat. Some of the more noticeable damage to the environment include climate change, the greenhouse effect as a result of deforestation among others. With growing awareness about these implications on economic, health and well-being, a growing number of companies are rethinking their strategy in the face of falling consumer credibility on business activities due to their contributions to such environmental threats. Public concern for environmental issues has steadily increased over the past three decades since the inception of Earth Day to preserve nature and biodiversity. There is in recent time a strong push among businesses to rethink about the environment; creating large economic/market potentials and sustainability. This has inadvertently created opportunities for classifying many companies as friends of the environment.

In this regard, firms see green thinking and production of eco-friendly products as a gateway to meeting environmental demands. Marketing role is, therefore, to act as a gearbox, making profitable connections between social, economic and the environment. This mirrors the growing concern that business has other values besides financial gain. In practice, however, it is not enough to produce good eco-product, price it attractively and distribute it through the right outlet. Firms need to communicate

effectively about their claims (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010) in order to create brand awareness and provide information to enable consumers to make an educated choice. In the green marketplace, there are many products with various claims and credibility questions. Green branding communication helps to educate consumers on these claims. This helps to improve credibility issues while advancing global business ecosystem in a healthy and sustainable manner.

In response to this, markets have witnessed the growing popularity of green marketing technique to attain corporate sustainability via modification in design, production, and consumption which aim to protect the environment (Sinha, 2014). The aim is to deepen and induce consumer product acceptance in response to increasing demand for safety and eco-friendly products. More specifically, to induce socially friendly behaviour and purchase intention (Tan and Yeap, 2012). This measures no doubt expose many firms as defective in their strategic decision. This is mainly due to the fact that many corporate players are developing green products as a defensive strategy against environmental degradation. Despite these efforts, the demands for those products have continued to face serious resistance among consumer (Kotler and Armstrong, 2007). For instance, there have been occasions where people fail to purchase green products irrespective of the public awareness of the products, it's availability and incentives due mainly to lack of trust and credibility in the process of scientific outcomes. This represents miss-opportunities to improve biodiversity and the ecosystem. How to change consumer attitude in green purchase has over the years been of interest to marketing practitioners. This is because consumer attitude change is an important knowledge poll for successful business operations (Kotler and Armstrong, 2009). Unfortunately, attitude is perhaps one of the most difficult to change. In most cases, many people do not practice what they say. Several evidences such as Solomon (2011), Cassington and Ibanez (2010) and Kotler and Keller (2008) show the existence of an attitude-behaviour gap. This is considered a great threat to the practice of green marketing in the industry (Kanen and Heinonen,2009).

Based on the above line of thought, it becomes important to note that although attitude and intentions are far apart, both are a precursor to actual purchase behaviour (Chen and chai, 2010). Purchase intention is one of the components of consumer cognitive behaviour and exists between two extremes which are consumer consideration in buying a brand and expectation to buy a brand (Laroche et al., 1996). To this effect, Darnall and Sides (2008) identified certification as one of the best ways to enhance consumer trust consideration and purchase decision, bearing in mind that they are given based on high ethical and in most cases environment consideration depending on its intention. Firms quest to contribute to the race against environmental and ethical threats, has led to the adoption of certification as a marketing strategy to build and gain credibility around its brand. It is an endorsement of some sort on a firm effort, which creates an ambitious commitment to other values which are higher than immediate financial gains. This approach creates the possibility of modifying consumer information through new and green realities, thereby leading to improve consumer perception. Eco-branding and labelling are mentioned in the context of brand certification and marketing strategies to create opportunities for green realities.

Eco-branding and eco-labelling are one of the new information gateways to mitigate the environmental impacts by the promotion of products that meet specific environmental standards. The potential for growth in market share of eco-branded products, makes eco-branding a compelling marketing strategy in today's business world, in response to increasing consciousness and advocacy groups and demands for sustainability across the business spectrum. In recent time, consumers are demanding for safety and sustainable products, therefore, when a product is independently endorsed, it enhances its value and competitive advantage over other products in the marketplace (Dahlstrom, 2010).

Eco-branding and labelling is a voluntary approach by corporate firms to declare their products environmentally friendly. It is a tool widely used by a number of companies around the world to support their overall green marketing strategy (Rahman and Hag, 2016). Evidence such as Dahlstrom (2010) shows that investment in eco-branded production has high potential benefits such as enhancement of

consumer buying decision and increase revenues which the product and firm generates. It is therefore important to mention that the entire value chain network of green initiative and strategies involves a lot of both tangible and intangible benefits which if missed could affect a firms' sustainability. This implies that eco-branding and labelling deliver the potential opportunity of adding value to an existing product, expanding the existing customer base and improving the competitive position of a firm (Dahlstrom, 2010). In a more pragmatic way, eco-branding is regenerative and could reinvigorate business growth to command high market share especially as consumers are demanding for value that align to their belief about the friendly environment (friends of the environment), recycling, re-use, low-energy etc. Looking at this, it is possible to identify certification or label as a means to seek the attention of consumers to provide them with the necessary information to reduce adverse impacts on the environment through right purchasing choices (Sinha, 2014). Thus, as a green marketing strategy, eco-branding and labelling, appeal to the consumers, by reminding them that their choice of product has a direct bearing on the environment. This improves consumer trust in activities of business, with the potential to cream the customer life value especially eco-friendly consumers. In Nigeria, the level of consumer trust in general products and services are debatable. The level of awareness and commitment to ecological and environmental issues reflects the 2016 environmental performance index ranking, where the country ranked 133rd out of the 180 countries surveyed for environmental performance. This is compounded by lack of legal and public policy on ecological issues. There is no applicable law and where available, is weak to mandate firms to communicate ecological issues on their brand. This results in a low level of awareness of eco-brand and labelling among students, hence they lack knowledge and understanding of the benefit of such to their safety. This implies that the medium of communication of green thinking is poor to drive socially responsible behaviour due to poor label examination culture among people. This is because the issue of degrading environmental conditions is not a front-burner in public discourse, leading to growing cynicism with which ecological products are perceived by consumers.

There are quite some problems associated with eco-branding and labelling in Nigeria, one of them is the growing cynicism with which ecological products are perceived by consumers which inhibit the efforts in moving green marketing to the next level, coupled with lack of trust which also serves as an impediment to stimulating purchase decision.

Based on the above line of reasoning this study examines the effect of eco-brand and labelling on the purchase intention of University students. The foundation of this study is the understanding of consumer concerns about ecological issues and how it affects their purchase intention. Furthermore, it examines consumer awareness, perception and attitude towards eco-label products. A further objective is to ascertain factors that motivate consumers to buy eco-label products. This is to help understand the drivers which endeared consumers to demand such product and in addition, improve the product strategic decision. Generally, the study tested the hypothesis that eco-label certification has no significant effect on buying intention.

Literature Review. In recent time, environmental concern has emerged as a key block in the business process. Among consumers, it has risen as a major concern because of some environmental burning issues such as climate change and pollution such as soot. More importantly, businesses have realized it opens numerous opportunity (Chen 2010).

Several studies in recent time on green purchases, intention and eco-labelling such as Kotler and Armstrong (2010), D'Souza *et al.* (2006) and Kotler and Keller (2008) have established a positive and direct relationship between the key constructs. Today as firms continue to face increasing competition and rising cost, they are rethinking their strategies in line with current trends. Eco-brand provides firms with the leverage to meet both social, economic and environmental desires of today's world. Though many developed economies have advanced in policy and future direction of certification and traceability is

certain, the same is not true of many developing countries. Certification is still a subject of controversies due partly to perceived trust issues, perception and awareness (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010).

D'Souza *et al.* (2006) have developed a conceptualized model to investigate consumers" perception formation towards green product. There were seven independent variables involved in their study, namely, corporate perception, product perception, regulatory protection, product label, past experience, packaging, and ingredients. One of the independent variables; green corporate perception, was measured by using one single dimension with three measurement items. The authors further contended that consumers perception of the firm's corporate strategies towards environmental issues was expected to contribute to the formation of the overall perception of green products.

Okada and Mais (2010), further describe that green companies are contrasted with non-green companies in the extent to which they take proactive measures in environmental sustainability and position themselves based on environmental philosophy. As for the purpose of this study, the green corporate perception was conceptualized as a single dimension variable based on a study Accordingly, consumers" overall perception about the green product was negatively correlated with green purchase intention. The findings showed that the respondents had a general perception of corporate policies that did not support corporations that placed higher profitability in implementing green product strategies.

The major thrust of this study is the conceptualization of youth as the power of environmentalism and vehicle to build a positive perception of eco-certification. This is because it will be economic and social suicidal to consider the future of eco-certification without engaging the youth given the enormous influence they have on product and services.

Youth engagement and environmentalism through eco-certification: Although eco-branding and labelling are directed mainly at the general public, its efforts are best achieved when many people buy into the thinking. Unfortunately, it is an attempt at economic suicide to target all segment of the market. The concept of segmentation hinged on identification and targeting the most important and profitable segment. The global demographics show a prevalence of younger people especially Africans where the average age is less than 30 years. This represents the reality of Nigeria where youths constitute more than 52% of the Nigeria population. These young minds are the powerhouse of the 21st century, driving change in overall eco-system from science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) with greater impact on information and communication technology (ICT), social media, politics and economy. Interestingly, this group of young people are powerful representing hope and aspiration of the local economy. Through their engagement, they promote and encourage the local economy. In most cases, they serve as role models and opinion leaders with high social followership; closing gender gaps and building synergy against economic and social inequalities in many societies. In the political cycle, they are no longer referred to as leaders of tomorrow because their future is now. Therefore, they represent the future of environmentalism (Eastman and Liu,2012). It is doubtful if any market and policy could achieve success without young people hence in recent time, the greater attention is directed to them as change agents to change their environment.

Given their predominant presence in social media, many companies are using social media platforms and online communities to reach them and promote green thinking. The aim is to enhance a new communication paradigm, deepen penetration of green message and advance awareness of green consumption practices towards social and environmental concerns. This is precipitated on the trend that many young people spend their largest share of time on the internet both for social and economic value. Therefore, deepening understanding of environmental consciousness, change and intention to go green means opening them up to social, economic and environmental opportunities available (Peattie, 2010) to make an impact and accept realities to go green. For this study, students of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike (MOUAU) has been selected. This is because the university is a community of a greater number of young people from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. There is a high prevalence

of diversity in a university environment. Research about youth conducted in such an environment and location will no doubt achieve its intention. The choice of MOUAU is also due to the convenience and availability of respondents of interest in line with Creswell (2014). Being the only Federal Government higher institution in Abia State, it boasts of a studentship from every part of Nigeria. Thus, making her an attractive market to many products and services.

Theoretical review: Every day, people are confronted with situations that demand choice from arrays of alternatives. In order to make an informed decision, they require the right mixture of information. However, it is fast becoming difficult in getting the attention of an average Nigeria. This is because of convergence of economic, cultural, and political factors which have continued to hinder the ability of people to pay attention to a certain stimulus in the environment. For instance, the current economic realities in Nigeria have caused many to activate the practice of psychic economy – picking and choosing among stimuli to avoid being overloaded (Solomon, 2011) by volume of information competing for consumer share of ear. Whilst factors such as poverty and hunger are mostly obvious; the less obvious factor is attitudinal factors that influence people's perception and their ability to make rational choices. The precise evaluation of the situation centres on bounded rationality rather than absolute rationality (Simon, 1947). Bounded rationality is the idea that when an individual makes a decision, the level of information limits their rationality, the mental limitation of their minds and the time available to make such a decision. From the perspective of the rational choice model, rationality is absolute and excludes interference caused by the personal characteristics of the decision-maker, because every decision optimizes the relationship between goals and means (Antonio, 2000). In practice, absolute rationality is a difficult idea to implement because of conflict arising from managing goals and means; and other bundles of influences. This gap creates a loophole for bounded rationality to overshadow absoluteness. Logically, it becomes more appropriate to rather emphasize relative rationality based on the view of Tim (2009). The central idea is that rationality is simply that people respond to incentives (Friedman, 2008).

Therefore, this study hinges on the under this theory of bounded rationality to draw emphasis on the gap existing between the perception of goals and means. In the present context, there may be a marriage of convenience between means and goals. Certain elements act as pillars and enablers. One of such elements considered is information incentive, which eco-branding provides. This incentive is important in forming and changing the perception of consumers of products and services. It is also a single but powerful tool in changing these social, economic and environmental factors.

Unlike in time past when environmental concerns were mainly firms alone; consumers are today demanding greater accountability and transparency in environmental issues. This is perhaps due to the availability of information which empowers consumers perception of ecological products. Today, the environmental issue is a key block in consumer purchase decision due to human activities that drive global warming, climate change and other environmental issues. Therefore, firms are seeking for opportunities to enhance the value of information as a vehicle to engage consumers, build trust and credibility on their brand through their commitment to sustainability (Chen, 2010).

Central to the idea of bounded rationality is the notion of information which fuel perception and by extension attitude and behavioural intention of the prospect. For instance, there have been occasions where many people failed to purchase environmentally sound products despite wide awareness, availability and incentives. This explains the view in behavioural economics studies, that pro-environmental attitudes rarely translate into actual green consumption behaviour (Kim and Choi, 2005). Information to dismantle perception is mentioned in the context of this gap.

Again, in consumer studies, there is a litany of theories that are mentioned in the context of attitude-behaviour connections, but Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen, (1991) is more frequently mentioned due to its predictive nature of behavioural intention over theories such as Theory of Reasoned Action (TORA). It is perhaps important to emphasize that these theories are not complete without

criticisms, as it is still a subject of debate whether or not attitude predict the behavior of people. The central idea, however, is that behaviour is the outcome of the fight between behavioural intention and attitude. Given that attitudes are a complex phenomenon, marketing researchers use multi-attribute attitude models to understand behaviour (Solomon, 2011). TPB is one of the multi-attribute attitude models and an extension of the extended Fishbein model. An important element of this theory is the inclusion of perceived behavioural control. Other elements are attitude toward behaviour and subjective norms, which work together to mould behavioural intentions and behaviour. The perceived behavioural control is the degree to which a person believes that he/she controls any given behaviour. The two dimensions are self-efficacy (confidence in personal ability) and controllability (outside uncontrollable factors). The understanding inherent in this theory is the importance of belief and information about the attributes to control and/or reflect the relative priority of an attribute to predicting behaviour. Belief serves as an enabler upon which the pillars of components rest. Therefore, if we can identify these specific beliefs and combine them, it will be easy to predict the attitude of consumers. As a result of this, this current study has tried to identify various stimulus as drivers for eco-branding that encourages socially responsible behaviour. In doing this, the study is aware of control or impact of government informational policy and vehicle as to the outside uncontrollable factor that could engender compliance with eco-branding practices. This is possible to the extent to which belief of people is modified with the right information to accept the changes to socio-cultural, economic and environmental values. From this point, it becomes easy to predict the outcome with relative success.

One of the major limitations of this theory is that it ignores the personal needs and emotions of individuals before engaging in certain actions. This, however, serves as an impetus for this study. For instance, what else could be more pressing for the world today than how to preserve the world ecosystem and biodiversity? What will be the value of wealth and other things without living a safe and healthy life? This need overshadows other considerations regardless of expressed attitude. Although in a certain situation and depending on location and economic circumstance, people rarely attach value to important things. This scenario best describes the Nigeria situation. However, Africa and indeed Nigeria cannot continue to fold its hand because of the huge severity of climate variability because of poor attitude of consumers; adaptation capacities and measures by both government and individual (Nwafor, 2007; Jagtap, 2007).

The strength of this study lies in the fact that young people are the engine of the future. It is possible to halve the impact of consumption and production on the environment through conscious and responsible behaviour, given their demographic advantage and technological innovation that has over time been found to be in the hand of this group.

Methodology and research methods. The survey design was employed in this study, carried out in the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), Abia State, Nigeria. The University is one of the three specialized Universities of Agriculture in Nigeria established in 1992. The choice of MOUAU is both for convenience and strategic reasons. It is a Federal University with students from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This gives the study the needed diverse opinions to make an informed conclusion. This is also a public institution where it is possible to find youths from varying backgrounds. Importantly, a good percentage of students in MOUAU are young people who are the major target of the study. This makes the choice of the university very apt for this study.

Furthermore, MOUAU is located near other sisters Federal and State institutions such as National Root Crop Research Institute (NRCRI) and National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and Abia State University, Uturu (Umuahia Campus) respectively. This, therefore, makes this location very important and strategic for this study.

Given the large population of MOUAU student and to ensure that all students have an equal chance of selection, the study adopted a multi-stage and convenient sampling technique in the selection of

respondents. The first stage involved a purposive selection of three (3) Colleges from the (5) Colleges in MOUAU. The second stage involved a random selection of three (3) departments, one from each of the three Colleges, while the third stage involved the selection of forty (40) students from different levels comprising 20 students for each gender. This aggregates the total sample size for this study at 120. A pilot study carried out was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.836 was realized indicating high internal consistency of the test instrument.

Analytically, the various objectives were realized with descriptive statistics such as mean and frequencies and correlation analysis.

Results. The results of this study are presented in this section. Table 1 seeks to know the self-identification of the respondent's concern about the environment. This is based on the understanding that consumers are products of self-identification – as such, they relate with brand/products that blend with their lifestyle (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). Consumer concerns about the environment will reflect on his behavioural tendencies to eco-branding and labelling.

Table 1. Consumers self-identification and concern about environmental activities

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Very concerned	18	15
Concerned	73	61.8
Undecided	10	16
Not concern at all	19	16
Total	120	100

Source: a compilation from field data.

According to Mohammad et al., (2016), a consumer with environmental consciousness is seen as an ecologist who had grasped his/her self-efficacy against environmental pollution and has a sense of responsibility with respect to future generations and the whole humanity in his/her use of resources. It, therefore, becomes easy to disaggregate between consumers on their behavioural tendencies to ecological concern. The question on self-identification is made in an effort to identify people confidence in their personal ability and commitment to live socially responsible behaviour.

This study is however not unmindful of the gap that exists between what people want and their actions. This study by the response on Table 1 shows that communication and campaign about environmental practices are not totally rejected especially in a country such as Nigeria. This mirrors the importance of perceived behavioural control especially – the dimension of self-efficacy and could serve as a foundation for developing policies that challenge certain assumptions held by young people concerning ecological issues. Based on this result, we could infer that a consumer who is very concerned about the environment will have a positive attitude towards environmentally friendly initiatives of organizations with consequences to brand commitment.

The analysis of Table 2 addresses the issue of consumer awareness of eco-branding and labelling. From the point of consumer psychology, information is important in forming and changing behaviour. In fact, perception and/or belief is fueled by the information available or provided to the decision-maker, which in most cases can be substantially different from the objective reality (Robbins, 2008; Agbonifoh et al., 2007).

Table 2. Consumer awareness of eco-branding and labelling

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Aware	77	64
Not aware	43	36
Total	120	100

Source: a compilation from field data.

In order to establish young people aware of eco-branding and labelling, which reflects the depth of sensitization and knowledge of green practices. Table 2 shows high awareness of eco-practices. This result lends credence to the result of Table 1 with high regard for environmental initiatives. The major challenge of marketing is to deepen information machinery to inform, persuade and influence attitude.

The table shows that 64% of respondents reported being aware of eco-friendly labelled products. The high response rate is an indication of progress in awareness of sustainable products that are friendly to the environment. The finding is consistent with D'Souza et al. (2006) who observed that awareness and consumer past experiences with sustainable products influence positively their green purchase intention, but not its marketing mix elements such as green product and product labels. Though this study shows a positive outcome but over time, the challenge of marketing has been to move the consumer from level of awareness to the purchase of green products. Jauhari (2007) observed this in his study on consumers' attitude towards green practices of hotels and found that consumers are aware of green practices but they are not willing to pay more for the same.

The result of Table 3 shows that the majority of consumers hold a negative perception of eco-label and branding.

Table 3. Perception of consumers about eco-label and brands in Abia state

Variables/statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Consumers are not well educated about eco-label	15.8	12.5	0.8	45.8	25	2.5167
Consumers are willing to pay a premium for a product that is ecologically friendly	17.5	22.5	45.0	12.5	2.5	1.6000
My product decisions are based on eco-label	15.8	18.3	49.2	15.0	1.7	1.6833
Eco-labels are marketing gimmicks	14.2	25.0	46.7	11.7	2.5	1.6833
Comprises of green products are friends of the environment	9.2	24.2	40.0	22.5	4.2	1.8833
Such products are majorly organic in nature	15.8	25.0	56.7	2.5	2.3	11.4583
Products with eco-label are safe and sustainable	7.5	16.7	44.2	26.7	5.0	2.0500
I buy only product with eco-label	10.8	22.5	39.2	20.0	7.5	1.9083
Green advertisements are always trust worthy	9.2	16.7	44.2	25.0	5.0	2.0000
I consider what is printed on eco-labeled to be accurate	10.0	19.2	41.7	24.2	5.0	1.9500
The information on eco-labelling is usually easy to understand	16.7	19.2	45.8	15.8	2.5	1.6833
Companies who practice eco-labeling are friends of the environment	5.8	20.0	41.7	27.5	5.0	2.0583

Source: compilation from field data.

Cut-off score = > 2.5 = accept (positive perception); < 2.5 = not accepted (negative perception).

Based on the benchmark cut-off of 2.5 or more, the result shows that consumers are not well educated about eco-label and brands as such they do not know the benefit of eco-labelling and brands. The role of education in advancing understanding and change in social behaviour cannot be overemphasis. According to Oteh et al., (2017), education is a conduit through which firms and government enrich consumer experience of their service/ operations and/or policies. Therefore, this result could be considered as an advice to firms to enhance communication mechanism to educate and influence behaviour towards eco-label and brand. Another dimension is a belief by consumers that products with eco-label are organic in nature. This highlights the increasing awareness and attention towards products that are sustainable, safe and nutritious. Other factors posted a mean value of less than 2.5. At the centre of this result is consumer lack of understanding of the benefits of eco-label due to lack of education. This limits the ability of consumers to trust brands as it is not consistent with their traits. This study is consistent with the opinion

of Rahbar and Wahid (2011) who examined the influence of green marketing tools like ecolabel, eco-brand and environmental advertisements on consumer purchase behaviour. They observe that it is trust in the eco brand and eco-label that positively influence the behaviour of consumers towards ecofriendly products. Until consumers believe that eco-label and eco-brand are more than just marketing buzzwords, it will be difficult to get them to trust such brands and pay a premium on them.

The result of Table 3 implies that consumer perception of eco-brand and eco-label is poor and negative. This is perhaps one of the challenges of marketing to deepen overwhelming penetration and acceptance of such products as sustainable and safe. This result is also important in positioning, targeting and segmenting the market since all consumers are not environmentally concerned and active friends of the environment. Table 4 examines consumer preference for labelling policies. There are many types of eco-labelling in use. We can distinguish them between voluntary and mandatory. The level of credibility of issuing institutions most times determines consumer acceptance. According to Dahlstrom (2010), the credibility of these labels is a testimony of the overall credibility of the firm. Therefore, Table 4 identifies two eco-labelling policies – voluntary and mandatory labelling. Majority of the respondents agreed with voluntary labelling of eco-products because of its emphasis strength of value and ethical-moral burden and commitment of the firm to the environment. These voluntary labels often come from trusted third-party institutions with high credibility. This view is consistent with Jansson et al. (2010), who conducted research on green consumer behaviour and found that willingness to adopt eco-innovations such as eco-labelling are determined by values, norms, and beliefs of consumers and by extension those of the firm.

Table 4. Consumer preference of eco-labeling policy

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Voluntary labelling	93	77.5
Mandatory labelling	27	22.5
Total	120	100

Source: compilations from field data.

Although the mandatory labelling did not enjoy an overwhelming majority of positive acceptance, it relies on the institutional theory of the firm, which seeks to ensure a balance of benefits for both consumers, government and the firm. Institutions are created to oversee the common good of all. This is perhaps the reason for the proponents of strong institutions.

One of the major roles of institutions is that they engage in creating activities that ensure conformity to rules and regulations. This study considers the institutional theory of the firm apt for government mandatory policy of eco-labelling to underscore the role institutions could play in advancing conversation for conformity to ecological consciousness among firms for the common good of the society. According to Hirsch (1975), Institutional theory examines how external pressures influence the activities of a business or organization to be socially responsible. This is achieved mostly through either coercive, normative, and mimetic principles and drivers (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Ordinarily, business organizations will pay less attention to issues that increase their cost in the short-run. Therefore, this theory leverage external pressure to address green concerns for the overall welfare of society. This theory is linked to the societal marketing philosophy which advances conversation that firms benefit from its to day activities in the long run in such area as social legitimacy and economic efficiency.

The formal rules of environmental institutions relate to environmental legislation, regulations, performances standards and various formal administrative guidelines that organizations can achieve through the adoption of eco-practices.

To further advance understanding of the relevance of mandatory eco-labelling, this study seeks from consumer their perception to requirement for mandatory eco-labelling. Their response is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Perception of consumers about mandatory eco-labelling policy

Variables/statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Required only if more than 50% of the brand ingredient are produced with sustainable ingredient	80.8	5.8	10.8	1.7	0.8	0.3585
Required only if more than 25% of the brand ingredient are produced with sustainable ingredient	84.0	4.2	10.2	1.7	0.5	0.3750
Required only if more than 10% of the brand ingredient are produced with sustainable ingredient	80.0	18.3	1.7	0.8	2.5	0.4167
Required only if more than 5% of the brand ingredient are produced with sustainable ingredient	88.0	0.8	10.3	0.8	1.7	0.4167
Required only if they contain in any trace of ingredient considered to be sustainable	82.0	5.0	12.2	0.8	0.8	0.3667

Cut-off score = > 2.5 = accept (positive perception); < 2.5 = not accepted (negative perception).
Source: compilation from field data.

The result of Table 5 highlights the overall negative perception that is associated with green products and by extension biotechnology generally. This result is critical and reflects the understanding of consumer behavior and attitude towards eco-products. Generally, many consumers are not open to eco-products, more due to the fact that information regarding risk of these products are still subject of debate among policy makers and civil society organizations leading to several controversies (Caswell and Joseph, 2007). This perception affects product choice and consumer willingness to accept certain information from firms. Cognitive factors such as belief, risk, perception, knowledge and trust in government emerged as critical elements in explaining differences in consumer mindset for products associate with eco-brands (McCluskey, 2015). Therefore, based on the benchmark of 2.5 an above, none of the statements appeared to convince consumer to accept mandatory eco-labelling policy. This result lends credence to the result of Table 4 with an overwhelming acceptance of voluntary eco-labelling over mandatory labelling. Table 6 shows drivers that propel consumers to demand for eco-label products. The most striking factor is concern for the environment. A consumer with an environmental conscious mindset will encourage environmental responsibility which involves buying eco-friendly products (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010; Dahlstrom, 2010). Other important factors include better quality products, concern for health, price and income. This result implies that consumers will be more inclined to consider these factors in making choice of eco-products. Therefore, these factors could serve as integral elements in designing eco-branding strategy to create and build demand for eco-products

Table 6. Factors that motivates consumers to buy eco-label product

Variables	Mean	Rank
Price	5.2083	4th
Income	5.0917	5th
Concern for health	5.4359	3rd
Concern for the environment	5.5583	1st
To use better quality products	5.5000	2nd
Information given on products label is trustworthy	4.7563	6th
My culture/religion also affects my intention to buy green products	4.3158	7th
I buy the products because of my friends ask me to do so	3.7156	8th

Source: compilation from field data.

There are no doubts certain economic factors will continue to serve as impetus to demand for goods and services. In the opinion of Kotler and Keller (2007), consumers are price sensitive. The link between

income, price and demand is not in doubt. Several evidences put forward by Kotler and Armstrong (2010) have identified this link to be positive. As such they influence demand for goods and services in many economies especially in many developing economies at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In Nigeria, most purchases are still done based on personal factors such as economic considerations. Without invalidating the outcome of this current study, Chen and Chang (2012), observed that green purchase intentions among consumers can be modeled four factors which include: perceived value, perceived risk, trust and green purchase intention. In addition, it observed that consumers who perceive green products with better quality in terms of value and less risk will have positive purchase intention towards green products. Effect of eco-label certification on buying intention. Table 7 examines the relationship between eco-label certification and buying intention. This is because it helps to understand the level of information which influence the results of purchase of green products. Generally, eco-label reflects adherence to certain standards associated to safety which help consumers make informed decision about their purchases.

$H0_1$: eco-label certification has no significant effect on the buying intention.

Table 7. Effect of eco-label on buying intention

		Buying intention	Eco-label
Buying intention	Pearson Correlation	1	-.074
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.420
	N	120	120
Eco-label	Pearson Correlation	-.074	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.420	
	N	120	120

Source: compilation from field data.

The result of Table 7 shows a correlation coefficient of -0.074 and p-value of 0.420. This implies a strong, significant but negative relationship between eco-label certification and consumer buying intention. This is evidenced by the correlation value of -.074. A further examination of the result reveals that the relationship is statistically significant, as the value of the significant (2-tailed) 0.420 is higher than the acceptable significant value of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, hence we conclude there is no significant relationship between buying intention and eco-label certification. The negative relationship could be attributed to lack of awareness of green products to consumers and by extension poor concern about the environment. The aim of certification label is to help minimize asymmetry of information between producers and consumers by providing a platform for communication (McEachern, 2008). Therefore, we can adduce that a successful label captures the attention of the consumer and provides a useful information summary so that simplifies product search. Further analysis revealed that many consumers do not understand signs and symbols associated with eco-label certification. A highly recognized labels were those frequently seen and those with text explaining the meaning of the label, which helps consumers make product choices.

Conclusions. The role of green branding communication is both functional and strategic. This is because branding is more than just a name attached to enhance information flow. Eco-certification which is a green branding strategy establishes credibility in the eyes of consumers. The concomitant realization is that credibility can be developed in a number of ways and eco-label is one vital platform because it reflects adherence to standards associated with environmental performance. Chen and Chai (2010), identifies that though attitude and intentions are far apart, both are precursor to actual purchase behaviour. Moving youth to embracing eco-certification requires consumer education. Research result provides evidence that education is a gateway to achieving the intent of eco-labels and branding. Changing consumer perception about eco-certification must start with educating youths about environmental performance and its impact on their well-being. The role of marketing is therefore to design a green communication strategy that remove

asymmetry of information and improve corporate credibility. The authors recommend for improve awareness of green concerns and products by designing consistent messages and policies that reflects dangers of lack of environmental concerns. Self-identification is the foundation for certification performance. In future, the issue of policy and governance structure as it affects eco-certification should be investigated given that it affects the future ecosystem of business and public thrust.

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Товарний брендинг: вплив молоді на еко-сертифікацію продукції в Штаті Абіа, Нігерія

Діяльність підприємств супроводжується зростанням негативного впливу на навколишнє природнє середовище, що обумовлює нагальність екологізації їх діяльності та випуску екологічнобезпечної продукції. Ця стаття узагальнює аргументи та контраргументи в межах наукової дискусії з питання ефективності впровадження зеленого маркетингу екологічно відповідальними підприємствами для досягнення поставлених цілей. Визначено, що інструменти зеленого маркетингу дозволяють підприємствам впливати на цільову аудиторію формуючи екологічну свідомість споживачів їхньої продукції. Основною метою проведеного дослідження є вивчення потреб споживачів в Нігерії щодо екологічних товарів та послуг, а також їх вплив на забезпечення екологічного способу життя, встановлення факторів, які спонукають споживачів купувати товари з екологічним маркуванням. Основною гіпотезою дослідженні є відсутність статистично значимого впливу екологічного маркування товарів в Нігерії на споживчий попит еко продуктів. Об'єктом дослідження обрано вибірку зі 120 студентів Сільськогосподарського університету імені Майкла Окпари (Нігерія), оскільки саме вони є рушієм майбутньої реалізації екологічного способу життя в Нігерії. Авторами встановлено, що зелений маркетинг є новою господарською практикою в Нігерії, а молоде покоління має уявлення про екологічну марку та маркування, яке в той же час обмежене рівнем поінформованості процесів екологічного маркування та сертифікації. У процесі дослідження з'ясовано, що респонденти віддають перевагу добровільному маркуванню, ніж обов'язковому варіанту, оскільки даний тип маркування акцентує увагу споживачів на дотриманні компаніями принципів та цінностей збереження навколишнього природного середовища. У статті представлено результати емпіричного аналізу, які засвідчили, що сприйняття споживачами сертифікації є статистично не значимим. Ключову увагу в роботі приділено необхідності запровадження освіти споживачів з питань екологічної безпеки та сталого розвитку країни, яке сприятиме підвищенню споживчого попиту на еко-товари та розуміння необхідності майбутніх підприємців впровадження маркетингових зелених стратегій.

Ключові слова: надійність бренду, еко-брендинг, еко-маркування, еко-сертифікація, навколишнє середовище, молодь.