EFFECTS OF SUSTAINABLE MARKETING ON BRAND EQUITY IN THE COSMETIC INDUSTRY IN AWKA, ANAMBRA STATE.

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Abstract
Marketers strive to increase brand equity with reference to their products and services in the market. However, it has been observed that low price does not work favourably for a company if it is infamous for non-sustainability. These assets can be grouped into four dimensions: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty. This work dwelt on sustainability marketing and brand equity in the cosmetic industry. It was based on consumers of cosmetics in Awka, the capital of Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria. The study adopted cross sectional survey and questionnaire was used to collect data from select consumers of cosmetics in Awka metropolis. The sample used was 107 respondents and was based on the number of cases of independent variables. Data collected were analysed with ordinary least squares (OLS) multiple linear regression analysis with the aid Microsoft Excel 2019. This study found that perceived sustainability, social identity of the brands and social transformations have significant positive relationship with brand equity. The implications of the findings were discussed.
Keywords: *Sustainable marketing, social transformations, perceived sustainability, social identity brands*

Introduction

With rapid globalization, digital revolution, developments in technology in all sectors, limited non-renewable resources, unfair distribution of costs and benefits of economic activities, increase of interest in profits and materialism, and living in VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) times (Strategy Company, 2017) (in Borak, 2019), unfortunately, organizations have become more tolerant of unethical behaviour. On the other hand, consumers demand trust, honesty, authenticity, simplicity, speed, healthy products, fairness, transparency, accountability, and social and environmental responsibilities from the organizations. If the image of the company/brand is stained, consumers are shifting to other alternatives which create social value, support relevant causes, and have a brand purpose. Large corporations have become powerful, and since they have the privilege of using many resources of the society for their advantage, they are expected to give certain things back voluntarily; contribute to the improvement of social environment; pay back for the social costs of doing business; and since they

possess the resources and skills, which individuals do not have, they will be able to solve the problems more effectively and efficiently. Borak (2019) stress that all these developments have changed the role of marketing which now requires more accountability than the past; adding that marketers should consider the short- and long-term impacts of their activities on consumers, communities, and environment. Marketing 4.0 by Kotler et al. (2017) is a combination of both traditional and digital marketing, keeping the core elements, but having a sustainability-oriented holistic marketing. For an enduring organization and society, sustainability, as a component of ethical business practice, must balance economic, social, and environmental interactions and deal with specific issues such as responsible investment, sustainable production, sustainable sourcing, sustainable consumption, environmental management, risk management, and sustainable business ethics (Borak, 2019).

Several authors have conducted studies on various areas in sustainability marketing and have employed various constructs in their studies. This study borrows largely from these studies in order to define and conceptualize the present study. For instance, Kang and Hur (2011) employed green trust, green effect and green brand equity among others in their study on antecedents of green brand equity, a sustainable development approach. In an attempt to find out whether corporate social responsibility contribute to strengthen brand equity, Bhattacharya (2017) employed corporate social responsibility (CSR), social identity of the brands, social transformation and customer brand engagement among others; while Chen et al. (2020) looked at perceived sustainability and customer engagement in the online shopping environment. Our study employed perceived sustainability, social identity of the brands, and social transformations to explore the influence of sustainability marketing on brand equity in the cosmetic industry in Awka, Southeast Nigeria. Ng (2010) argued the role of sustainability for a firm and noted that one of the important findings in the area was that consumers hold favourable responses towards companies showcasing sustainability in their functioning. Nkamnebe (2011) highlighted sustainable marketing and its adoption in emerging markets. While stressing that sustainability marketing is important for accessing the global market, Nkamnebe however, emphasized that it is difficult to be adopted by emerging markets due mainly to external influences dominance, poverty, and challenging institutions.

Statement of the Problem

This study is on sustainability marketing and brand equity in the cosmetics industry. It will be based on select consumers of cosmetics in Awka, southeast Nigeria. Hence the problem of the study dwell on brand equity in the industry. Kotler et al. (2017) aver that in order to engage with customers consistently, marketers need to develop and create content that might contribute to their brand equity and improve their sales. Brand equity was defined as the brand assets (or liabilities) linked to a brand's name

and symbol that add to (or subtract from) a product or service (Aakar&Joachimsthaler, 2014). It was also observed that low price does not work favourably for a company if it is infamous for non-sustainability. These assets can be grouped into four dimensions: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty. Brand equity is strategic, an asset that can be the basis of competitive advantage and long-term profitability and thus needs to be monitored closely by the top management of an organization. The goal of brand leadership is to build brand equities rather than simply manage brand images and sustainability marketing is important in building brand equities.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore the effect of sustainability marketing on brand equity in the cosmetics industry. The specific objectives are to:

i. ascertain the impact of perceived sustainability on brand equity in the cosmetic industry;
ii. find out the effect of social identity of brands on the brand equity in the cosmetic industry; and
iii. to ascertain the effect of social transformations on brand equity in the cosmetics industry.

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated for the study.

i. what is the relationship between perceived sustainability and brand equity in the cosmetics industry?
ii. how would social identity of cosmetics brand impact brand equity in the cosmetics industry?
iii. what is the effect of social transformations on brand equity in the cosmetics industry?

Formulation of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated for the study and are stated in alternate forms only.

Ha1: There is a strong positive relationship between perceived sustainability and brand equity in the cosmetic industry.
Ha2: Social identity of brands would significantly and positively impact brand equity in the cosmetic industry.
Ha3: Social transformations would significantly and positively impact brand equity in the cosmetic industry.

Scope and Significance of the Study

Studies on sustainability marketing have been approached from two perspectives: company perspective and customer/consumer perspective. While company perspective focuses on sustainability marketing orientations of companies, the

consumers' perspective focuses on customers and how they perceive company's products and services to be. Hence the unit of analysis is always the customers. In this study, we adopt the customer perspective and cosmetic consumers will be the participants in this study. The study will not go into sustainability marketing orientations of companies. The significance of the study stem from the fact that sustainability marketing is a topical issue and this study will contribute to that debate and literature on sustainability. Evidences in the literature show that in the near future, only companies with sustainability orientation will thrive as customers show more positive responses and patronise only companies with sustainability intention.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review and Conceptual Framework

Sustainability comes naturally to the Earth, but not so naturally to humankind". Martin and Schouten (2014, p. 3) define it as Human Sustainability and describes it as per following: "being the opportunity for all people to maintain fulfilling, productive lives while preserving or replenishing the natural and economic systems that make their well-being possible". Societies have faced global scandals and currently are dealing with the problems related to business and social ethical issues such as trade secrets, unfair competition, unethical marketing practices, green marketing, and social responsibility. Societies are also confronted with sustainability issues such as unemployment, poverty, injustice, human rights, health care, malnutrition, mistreatment of vulnerable people, environmental issues, energy efficiency, education (Borak, 2019). Concern for and experience to cope up with these problems have changed the mind-set, especially in the marketing and business world, and generated public awareness and interest. In the past, ethics and sustainability issues were not crucial and/or were even perceived as constraints. However, they are now been integrated into the corporate strategy, providing challenges and opportunities leading to competitive advantage, enhancing corporate reputation, and balancing interests of "people, planet, and profits, prosperity, passion/purpose (Borak, 2019). The responsibilities of corporations have been described in three circles: execution of the economic function, awareness of social values and priorities, and newly emerging responsibilities (in Borak, 2019). In line with the Brundtland Report in 1987, the conceptual framework of sustainability was set. According to Borak (2019), the report had three dimensions: environmental protection, economic development, and social equity (fairness and social justice).

Nowadays, even with all existing technology that the humanity has, the world can face the shortage of the natural resources in few years. It was a concern twenty years ago and it is much more now. Sustainability is a mainstream issue in a world where the resources need to be preserved and this worry is evidenced by the growing interest shown in sustainable issues (Gordon, et al, 2011). Hawken (1993, p. 26) notes that: "because the corporations are the dominant institution on the planet, they

must squarely address the social and environmental problems that afflict humankind". Sustainability has become the word of the moment and increasingly present in different firms. The definitions of sustainability are many, and according Martin and Schouten (2012, p. 2), it is: "the ability of a system to maintain or renew itself perpetually. All of the Earth's natural systems function this way. Sustainability comes naturally to the Earth, but not so naturally to humankind". Marketing plays a key role to promote the development worldwide, increasing living standards around the world. In other words, Marketing serves as a resource to support and propagate the sustainable thinking (Fisk 2001).

The brand leadership model encourages the development of brand equity measures to supplement short-term sales and profit figures. Aakar and Joachimsthaler (2014) point out that these measures, commonly tracked over time, should reflect major brand equity dimensions such as awareness, loyalty, perceived quality, and associations. They maintain that identifying brand identity elements that differentiate and drive customer-brand relationships is a first step toward creating a set of brand equity measures. Social and Green Marketing are connected to Sustainable Marketing, as does Corporate Social Responsibility, and this one provides examples of the concern and the organized efforts from the companies and their business to deal with the topics of sustainability.

Maintaining the earth's ecosystems is not an option; it is a major issue today. Companies must demonstrate how they preserve the environment and the social responsibility to the community. The main focus is to understand the practice of Green Marketing, Social Marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility into a company and analyze its characteristics and effects on the consumers' behaviour that reflects on brand equity. This study employed perceived sustainability, social identity of brands and social transformations to evaluate the effect of sustainability marketing on brand equity among customers of cosmetic products in Awka, Anambra State. This is shown in the schema and conceptual framework (figure 1).

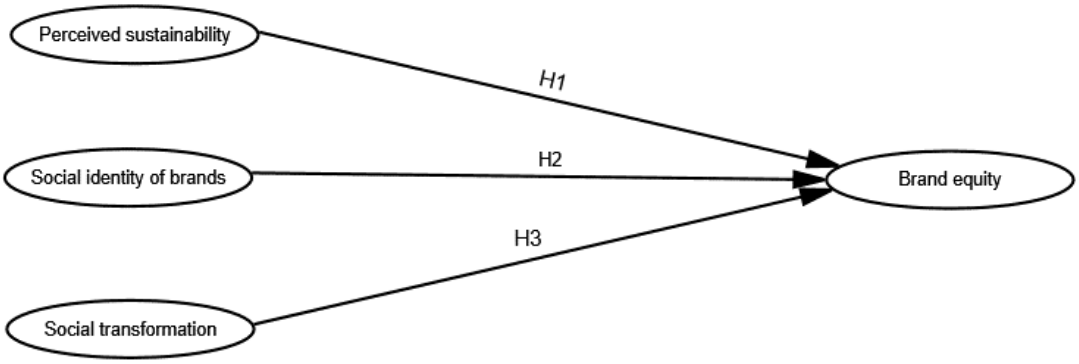

Figure 1: The Research Conceptual framework

From the figure 1, the three variables to the left are the independent variables while the brand equity to the right is the dependent variable.

Perceived Sustainability: Perceived sustainability combines product and service sustainability and is considered from the perspective of a customer concerns about whether products and services are based on materials that are considered environment-friendly materials (Leonidou et al., 2013). Hence, from the point of view of sustainability, Chen et al. (2020)defined perceived sustainability as a customer's perception of the environment related characters and performances of a product and/or service. As firms increasingly provide sustainable products and services in response to customers' environment concerns (Leonidou et al., 2013), numerous studies have discussed the effects of product/service sustainability on customer relationships. For instance, Chen et al. (2020), found positive effects of the perceived sustainability of products and services on customer satisfaction in the online shopping environment. The extents of the effects according to them are however, are different as the results show that product sustainability has a higher effect on satisfaction than online shopping service sustainability. The present study relied on perceived sustainability and brand equity in the cosmetic industry.

Social Identity of Brands: Social identity of the brands always has a strong effect on consumer brand selection (He et al. 2012); as it strengthens the consumer brand fit (Berné-Manero et al., 2016). Social identity of the brand relates to how a brand is visibly responsible towards the society that it always grabs attention of the potential buyers (Bhattacharya & Kaursar, 2016). According to Bhattachrya (2017) it happens because of the positive commitments of the corporate house towards the social development through systematic implementation of CSR initiatives. Bhattacharya (2017) found that CSR and social identity of the brand are positively associated; and those social transformations and social identity of the brand are positively linked. This present study utilized social identity of the brands as one of the independent variables to assess its impact on brand equity in the cosmetic industry.

Social Transformations: Sustainability marketing is ecological and social problems, both in general and in relation to products and services. Numerous brands are putting their effort to be associated with the consumer and the society at large through social transformations (Bhattachrya, 2017). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become one of the major platforms to relate and communicate with the prospective buyer by highlighting the greatness of the brand's social commitments, value additions and its honest contributions is social transformations (Bhattachrya, 2017). Brand social linkages show how the brand is generating social trust, social support and how the society is generating positive stories about the brand (Bhattachrya, 2017). The research that reveals these problems is usually concerned with investigating ecological and social problems at local, national and international

levels (Belz & Peattie, 2013). Consumer brand engagement can be viewed as how brand is becoming the topic for discussion within the society in terms of UGC (user generated content) at social media, word of mouth, and how the brand is able to generate social currency with the consumer community and emotional connect with the brand. Brand social linkage and consumer engagement jointly support the brand for enhanced brand equity through brand love, respect, and recall (Bhattachrya, 2017). It was established that social transformations strongly associate with social identity of the brand, that is how the brand is positioned in the society (Bhattachrya, 2017). Our study employed social transformations as one of the independent variables to explore its effect on brand equity in the cosmetic industry.

Empirical Review

Lucic (2020) explored how sustainable marketing orientation (SMO) should be properly implemented in an organization built on the theoretical model of market-oriented sustainability. The author collected data from 112 respondents that resulted the item purification and exploratory factor analysis, which confirmed three dimensions of SMO: strategic integration, societal engagement and ethical capabilities. The main study consisted of 174 respondents and confirmed the measurement instrument, which contains three subscales proposed by the theoretical model, each containing six, five and four items, respectively, with high degrees of proven reliability and validity. The paper confirmed and further explored the framework of multidimensional SMO; the measurement tool captured the actual implementation of the construct in practice, allowing it to be investigated across industries.

In a study on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and whether it strengthens brand equity Bhattachrya (2017) argue that CSR is one of the most vital components in the modern, competitive and complex business arena, contributing highly towards economic, social and environmental sustainability. The research was based on a sample of 386 respondents based on stratified sampling. Structural equation modelling and path analysis was used for data analysis the research contributed to literature in the domain of CSR and branding. The findings of the study show how CSR significantly contributes towards social transformations along with building of the social identity of the brands by generating brand social linkages and consumer brand engagement for higher brand equity.

Pooja et al. (2022) study point to the fact that consumers worldwide are becoming conscious of sustainability and that this has challenged marketers to cater to their needs, hence the shift towards sustainability marketing. The study reviewed research articles under the ambit of sustainability marketing, published from 2001 to 2022 using Harzing Publish or Perish software. The study shows that the environmental dimension is studied more than any other dimension. In addition, the findings also

represent a theoretical framework, wherein it traced the evolution of the sustainability concept, including some most researched aspects, and countries that have contributed the most to the study to area sustainability.

From the above, we see that diverse studies have employed diverse constructs to study the multi-faceted area of sustainability among diverse product categories. Not much have been conducted in the area of sustainability marketing in the cosmetic industry in Nigeria generally and in Awka, South-east Nigeria in particular.

Methodology

Quantitative research methodology was adopted in this study and this involves collecting data with structured questionnaire and analysing quantitatively. The study also adopted survey research design and this type of survey adopted is the cross-sectional survey research since data was collected at a period within the first quarter of 2023. The data was collected from customers of cosmetics products in Awka metropolis and the questionnaire was majorly distributed at event centres and notable shops that deal on cosmetics. The aim of this is to have fairly good representation of the cosmetics consumers. Quota sampling method was used which also meant that different segments of the cosmetics market in Awka were represented in the sample. The study was based on three predictor variables: perceived sustainability, social identity of the brand, and social transformations as well as brand equity which is the dependent variable. Three core predictor variables were measured with a number of items each using five-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. All the items were measured with five-point Likert scale. Four socio-demographics: gender, age, education and occupation were included in the study. The population of the study includes all users of cosmetics products and is infinite. The sample size was determined using the ***Rule of Thumb*** which relates to the number of cases, that is the number of IVs (see: Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). This study has three independent variables (IVs) hence the sample size is: $\boldsymbol{n = 104 + m}$**,** where 104 is a constant and **m** is the number IVs. The sample size is 104 + 3, which is 107 respondents. The copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents on intercept basis; that is stopping a respondent and seeking for assistance in responding to the questionnaire. Where the person says no, another person is approached and so on. Discriminant validity was checked using inter-item cross correlation while reliability was checked using Cronbach alpha statistics. The data collected were analysed with multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis which is a parametric regression and this was done with the aid of Microsoft Excel 2019 version.

Results and Discussions

The sample size for this study is 107respondents out of which 96 respondents representing approximately 89.72% of responses were returned as duly filled and usable. The response rate is quite for a study of this nature and was informed by the

method of distribution adopted by the researcher, which is the intercept method. Four socio-demographic variables were used in the study: gender, education and occupation. On gender, 69(71.9%) are males while 27(28.1%) are females. The results also show that 55(57.5%) of the respondents are within 20-30 years age bracket; 29(30.6%) fall within 31-40 years age bracket; 7(7.0%) are within 41-50 years age bracket while the only 5(4.8%) are above 51 years. On education, 9(9.0%) have basic education, 14(14.6%) have ND/NCE, 46(48.3%) are holders of HND and BSc, while 27(28.1%) are holders of postgraduate qualifications. The implication of this is that the respondents are reasonably educated to appreciate the import of the study and gave valid information. Lastly on occupation, 68(70.8%) of the respondents are civil/public servants, 23(23.6%) are private firm's employees while 5(5.6%) are self-employed. Our respondents are balanced among the various employment categories. The implications of these are that our respondents comprise majorly young and middle age who are internet and social media savvy; and that majority of the respondents have reasonable education to understand the import of the study. The next thing is that we look at the discriminant validity of the constructs using correlation matrix, that is inter item correlation.

Discriminant validity analysis

	PS	*SIoB*	*ST*	*BE*
Perceived sustainability	1			
Social identity of the brands	0.588253	1		
Social transformations	0.342663	0.57913385	1	
Brand equity	0.556134	0.38243975	0.492945	1

The correlation matrix or inter-item correlations above was employed to check for collinearity and discriminant validity. High correlation of 0.7 and above between a DV and IV is good but high correlations between IVs of 0.7 and above show signs of collinearity (see: Pallant, 2016). The correlations between IVs as shown are below the 0.7 threshold hence there is no problem of collinearity in our constructs. This is also an indication that our variables/constructs have discriminant validity and therefore merit further analysis. The next thing we look at is the reliability analysis.

Reliability Analysis with Cronbach Alpha

Constructs	**Number of Items**	**Cronbach Alpha**
Perceived sustainability	6	0.825
Social identity of the brands	4	0.778
Social transformations	4	0.814
Brand equity	5	0.901

Cronbach alpha statistics/correlation was employed to check internal reliability and consistency between the construct items. As shown in the above, all the three IVs and the DV have Cronbach alpha well above the 0.6 threshold value of 0.6 and this is an indication that our items and their constructs have internal consistency reliability and therefore merit further analysis. No item or construct need to be eliminated in further analysis. The next is the MRA analysis and hypotheses validation.

SUMMARY OUTPUT

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.71254421
R Square	0.50771925
Adjusted R Square	0.48455310
Standard Error	0.52532542
Observations	96

ANOVA

	Df	*SS*	*MS*	*F*	*Significance F*
Regression	4	24.19282237	6.048206	23.46312	1.8738E-12
Residual	91	23.45717763	0.257775		
Total	95	47.64			

The first output/information from MRA is Model Summary and from this we see that Multiple R that is coefficient of multiple correlations is 0.713 which is high. The coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.5077 while the Adjusted R Square is 0.4846. This means that between 48.5% to 50.8% of variations in brand equity are accounted for by the three independent variables. ANOVA as part of regression output provides the statistical test for the overall model fit in terms of the F ratio (Hair et al. 2010). This is equivalent to the null hypothesis that all correlations between dependent variable (DV) and independent variables (IVs) are zero. For this analysis our F ratio is 23.463 which is significant at .000 hence the null hypothesis that Multiple R between IVs and DV are zero is rejected. Based on this we proceed to interpret the coefficients and use them to validate the hypotheses.

	Coefficients	*Standard Error*	*t Stat*	*P-value*	*Lower 95%*	*Upper 95%*
Intercept	-9.556E-05	0.423272236	-0.00023	0.99982	-0.8416742	0.841483
Perceived sustainability	0.25300372	0.09482286	2.668172	0.009132	0.06447047	0.441537
Social identity of the brands	0.45668282	0.141275345	3.232573	0.001747	0.17578958	0.7375761
Social Transformations	0.13113607	0.055447977	2.365029	0.013486	0.03245712	0.3161816

Perceived sustainability (β = 0.253; t-value = 2.668; p-value = 0.009), the p-value is well below the 0.05 margin of error and the 95 per cent confidence interval has no zero in-between hence Hypothesis One is validated and accepted. Social identity of the brands (β = 0.457; t-value = 3.233; p-value = 0.002), the p-value is well below the 0.05 margin of error and the 95 per cent confidence interval has no zero in-between hence, Hypothesis Two is fully validated and accepted. Social transformations (β = 0.131; t-value = 2.365; p-value = 0.013), the p-value is well below the 0.05 margin of error and the 95 per cent confidence interval has no zero in-between hence, Hypothesis Three is fully validated and accepted.

Discussion

This study found that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived sustainability and brand equity thus contributing to the increasingly discourse that firms provide sustainable products and services in response to customers' environment concerns. Leonidou et al.(2013), maintain that numerous studies have discussed the effects of product/service sustainability on customer relationships. For instance, Chen et al. (2020), found positive effects of the perceived sustainability of products and services on customer satisfaction in the online shopping environment. Our finding shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between social identity of the brands and brand equity. This finding is in line with Bhattachrya and Kaursar (2016) social identity of the brand relates to how a brand is visibly responsible towards the society that it always grabs attention of the potential buyers. Our study established that there is a significant and positive relationship between social transformations and brand equity among the cosmetics consumers/customers in Awka metropolis. It was established that social transformations strongly associate with social identity of the brand, that is how the brand is positioned in the society. Brand social linkage and consumer engagement jointly support the brand for enhanced brand equity through brand love, respect, and recall (Bhattachrya, 2017). Pooja et al. (2022) study point to the fact that consumers worldwide are becoming conscious of sustainability. This has compelled marketers to cater to their needs, and thereby shift towards sustainability marketing. However, Nkamnebe (2011) argued that sustainable marketing and its adoption in emerging markets is difficult to be adopted by emerging markets due mainly to external influences dominance, poverty, and challenging institutions. This calls for government actions towards addressing these issues hampering sustainability.

Conclusions and Implications

This study is on sustainability marketing and brand equity in the cosmetics industry. It was based on select consumers of cosmetics in Awka metropolis, Southeast Nigeria. Hence the issue is on brand equity in the industry. Brand equity refers to the brand assets (or liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that add to (or subtract from) a product or service. This study found that there is a significant

positive relationship between perceived sustainability and brand equity. This study found that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived sustainability and brand equity. Our study established that there is a significant and positive relationship between social transformations and brand equity among the cosmetics consumers/customers in Awka metropolis. Social transformations strongly associates with social identity of the brand, that is how the brand is positioned in the society. So, for cosmetics marketers, positioning their brands in society is a good way to enhance brand image equity. Brand social linkage and consumer engagement jointly support the brand for enhanced brand equity through brand love, respect, and recall (Bhattachrya, 2017). Consumers generally are becoming conscious of sustainability and this has compelled marketers to cater to their needs, and thereby shifting towards sustainability marketing. It was also observed that low price does not work favourably for a company if it is infamous for non-sustainability. These assets can be grouped into four dimensions: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty. Brand equity is strategic, an asset that can be the basis of competitive advantage and long-term profitability and thus needs to be monitored closely by the top management of an organization. The goal of brand leadership is to build brand equities rather than simply manage brand images and sustainability marketing is important in building brand equities.

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