

MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

LCMB7035 - DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

THE INFLUENCE OF SUSTAINABLE SOURCING ON CONSUMER TRUST AND BRAND REPUTATION IN THE UK FAST-MOVING CONSUMER GOODS INDUSTRY

An Extended Literature Review

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1. Introduction

The UK fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is a strong setting for examining sustainability credibility. Lacy et al (2020) state that consumers frequently purchase foods, beverages, personal care and household goods, but the effect on the environment is spread globally through supply chains. Brand assessments are therefore based on product performance and indirect assertions regarding sourcing, packaging, emissions and supplier behavior. White et al. (2025) have claimed that sustainability marketing has become a system-, business- and consumer-level change, which puts more evidential pressure on companies converting complex practices into simple claims. This is commercially significant in the regulatory context. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA, 2021) stipulated that competition claims should be honest, understandable, supported and valid throughout the life cycle of the product. In its subsequent supply-chain instructions, it showed that companies are still responsible of the basis of claims despite suppliers carrying out the relevant activities (CMA, 2026). The result of misalignment between the procurement reality and promotion can thus lead to legal exposure, scepticism and reputational damage.

Available evidence is piecemeal. Koberg and Longoni (2019) established that multi-tier governance is central to sustainable supply-chain performance, but failed to clarify how and when consumers identify and reward it. Marketing studies link responsible corporate activity to trust, loyalty and reputation, although they often measure sustainability in general terms and do not isolate the consumer-facing role of sourcing evidence (Iglesias et al., 2020; Huo et al., 2022). Causal direction also remains uncertain because reputation may shape how consumers interpret claims. The study addresses this problem through a semi-systematic Extended Literature Review of consumer-facing UK FMCG categories. Sustainable sourcing will cover supplier selection, accountability, traceability and verification. International evidence will be included where mechanisms are transferable, but UK studies and regulation will be prioritised. The review will compare influence, mediation, boundary conditions and contradictory outcomes rather than estimate a new causal effect.

1.1 Research aim

To critically synthesise contemporary evidence on how sustainable sourcing influences consumer trust and brand reputation in the UK FMCG industry, and to develop an integrated framework explaining the mechanisms and conditions that shape this relationship.

1.2 Research objectives

- Critically examine sustainable sourcing as an FMCG governance practice involving supplier selection, accountability, traceability and verification.
- Evaluate evidence linking sustainable sourcing to consumer trust and brand reputation.
- Analyse credibility, authenticity and value congruence as explanatory mechanisms, alongside greenwashing and supplier misconduct as rival explanations.
- Identify methodological contradictions, sectoral limitations and UK-specific evidence gaps.
- Develop evidence-informed theoretical and managerial implications for UK FMCG organisations.

1.3 Research questions

- How does sustainable sourcing influence consumer trust and brand reputation in the UK FMCG industry?
- Which credibility mechanisms, boundary conditions and rival explanations strengthen, weaken or reverse the relationship between sustainable sourcing and consumer trust and brand reputation?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualising sustainable sourcing

Sustainable sourcing is an operational governance capacity based on supplier standards, monitoring, collaboration, traceability and verification at various supply-chain levels. Koberg and Longoni (2019) contended that focal-firm governance has to go beyond direct suppliers because upstream operations often create sustainability risk. Nonetheless, operational control does not automatically produce consumer credibility. Technical and dispersed supply-chain practices may be unobservable in the marketplace unless they are translated into interpretable and verifiable indications.

This proposal therefore treats sustainable sourcing as both a procurement practice and a consumer-facing credibility issue. The key analytical question is not only whether sourcing practices exist, but whether consumers can recognise, understand and trust the evidence behind those practices.

Table 1: Conceptual Architecture and Analytical Propositions

Source: Author

Construct	Analytical meaning	Expected pathway	Critical qualifier
Sustainable sourcing	Supplier governance, traceability, assurance and multi-tier accountability.	Reduces information asymmetry and provides evidence of operational substance.	Evidence may be invisible, too technical or weakly understood.
Consumer trust	Willingness to rely on the brand under uncertainty.	Translates credible sourcing evidence into confidence in competence, reliability and integrity.	Prior reputation may also shape trust, creating reverse influence.
Brand reputation	Cumulative stakeholder evaluation of the brand over time.	Consolidates repeated judgments into legitimacy, loyalty and resilience.	Reputation can amplify both favourable and adverse interpretations.
Negative signals	Greenwashing, inconsistency or supplier misconduct.	Creates scepticism, hypocrisy attributions and reputational contagion.	Capability reputation or corrective action may partly buffer damage.

Table 1 differentiates operational evidence, expected consumer pathways and critical qualifiers. Signalling theory proposes that information asymmetry may be mitigated by signals that are costly and verifiable (Spence, 1973), although the value of such signals depends on consumer credibility beliefs. The review will therefore examine both sourcing content and how it is made consumer knowledge.

2.2 Consumer trust, brand reputation and the credibility mechanism

The most plausible proximal process between sustainable sourcing and reputation is consumer trust. Wu et al. (2021) outlined that trust in food systems is based on assurances and trust in actors, and Iglesias et al. (2020) showed that trust in responsible activity can be developed through engagement. Mediation was reported by Huo et al. (2022) through brand trust and loyalty. Nonetheless, the evidence, mostly cross-sectional, cannot rule out reverse influence because prior reputation may shape how sourcing claims are interpreted. Brand reputation is more cumulative than trust: trust deals with dependency in uncertainty, while reputation brings together repeated stakeholder assessments. Golob et al. (2022) highlighted value fit, stakeholder sensitivity and collaboration. Sourcing initiatives must therefore be coherent with brand positioning and explainable evidence.

Integrated analytical framework

A focused explanation of how sustainable sourcing practices become consumer-level reputational outcomes

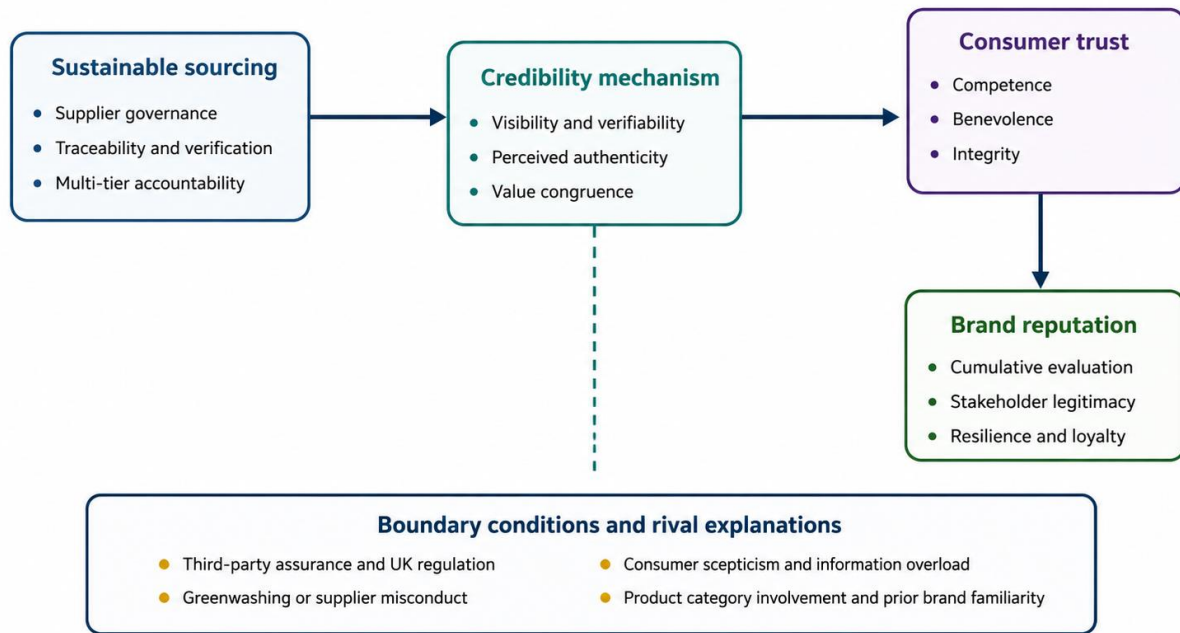


Figure 1: Integrated Analytical Framework

Source: Author-Developed from the Reviewed Concepts

Figure 1 considers credibility as a process and not a presumed attribute of sustainability claims. The visibility, verifiability, authenticity and value congruence explains why practices similar could yield different results. Nuujah, Pahl and Thompson (2024) discovered that UK consumers differ significantly in their ratings of the environmental packaging attributes with disclosure constructively enhancing trust only when the consumers can interpret a claim and relate it to a credible result.

2.3 Greenwashing, boundary conditions and the research gap

The best rival explanation is greenwashing, which transforms the sustainability communication into the evidence of inconsistency (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020), and a grey zone between the responsible communication and misleading (Gatti, Seele and Rademacher, 2019). Szabo and Webster (2021) revealed harm to the environmental and product assessment, and Persakis et al. (2025) outlined that greenwashing destroys trust and brand perception and transparency. There is the FMCG networks which need responsibility particularly. Vicarious greenwashing was adopted by Pizzetti, Gatti and Seele (2021), to discuss how supplier behaviour pollutes focal-firm claims. Ioannou, Kassinis and Papagiannakis (2023) discovered that negative reactions can be conditioned by capability reputation.

However, strong brands can also experience a bigger penalty of expectation-violation penalty and hence reputation is an outcome, a boundary condition and a potential antecedent.

Table 2: Critical tensions to be resolved through the review

Source: Author

Analytical tension	Why the literature is divided	Review response
Operational substance vs consumer visibility	Supply-chain studies prioritise governance; consumer studies observe perceptions.	Compare whether evidence translation, rather than practice alone, explains trust.
Traceability vs information overload	More disclosure may reassure, confuse or trigger scepticism.	Assess specificity, verifiability, format and consumer knowledge as moderators.
Brand reputation as outcome vs antecedent	Some claims reward strong brands, but reputation may also cause order without temporal evidence.	Code causal assumptions and compare alternative causal sequences.
Transparency benefit vs scepticism	More disclosure may reassure, confuse or trigger suspicion.	Assess how claim format and prior familiarity shape consumer responses.
Firm conduct vs supplier contagion	Consumers may attribute upstream supplier misconduct to the focal brand.	Examine traceability, control and corrective action as attribution conditions.

The gap does not lie in the lack of sustainability research but in the weak integration of operational and consumer explanations in UK FMCG. Supply-chain studies tend to stop before consumer interpretation, while marketing studies often aggregate sustainability into general perceptions and under-specify observability. This fragmentation will be the subject of the review, where evidence is weighted and contradictory cases are explicitly documented.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and review logic

The dissertation will use a semi-systematic Extended Literature Review. According to Snyder (2019), reviews turn into research methods when the transparent identification, appraisal, and synthesis are introduced in place of the descriptive background reading. An interdisciplinary question would be too narrow to be tackled in a fully systematic review of effectiveness whereas an unstructured narrative review would not be auditable. The selected design thus provides a compromise between conceptual breadth and a protocol predetermined.

Table 3: Proposed review protocol*Source: Author*

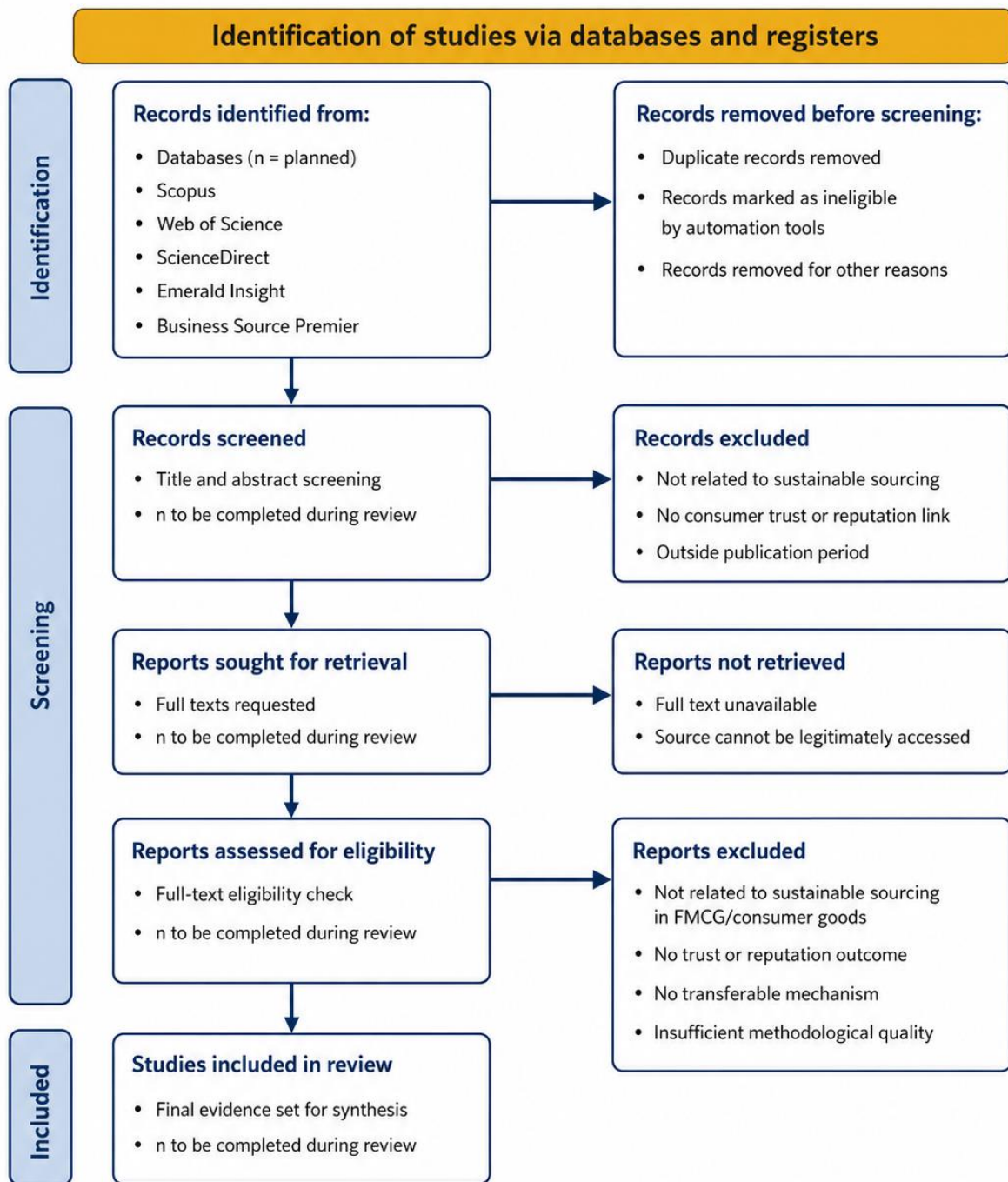
Protocol element	Planned specification
Review design	Secondary, semi-systematic Extended Literature Review with thematic narrative synthesis.
Primary databases	Scopus, Web of Science, Business Source Premier, ScienceDirect and Emerald Insight.
Supplementary searching	Google Scholar for citation chaining and retrieval checks; backward and forward citation searching.
Coverage	2018–2026, with pre-2018 exceptions restricted to foundational theory.
Geographical logic	Two search streams: UK-specific evidence and transferable international FMCG/consumer-goods evidence.
Screening	Deduplication, title/abstract review, full-text eligibility and reason-coded exclusions.
Appraisal	Conceptual clarity, design fit, sample adequacy, measurement validity, analytical transparency and contextual relevance.
Synthesis	Deductive and inductive thematic coding, narrative integration, evidence weighting and contradiction logging.

The protocol will be finalised before searching and changes will be version-controlled. Paul and Criado (2020) highlighted that reviews ought to detail how their evidence base was assembled. Scope decisions, screening, appraisal and synthesis will be therefore separated such that subsequent conceptual refinement will not be able to retrospectively change rules on eligibility.

3.2 Search strategy and source identification

Scopus, Web of Science, Business Source Premier, ScienceDirect and Emerald Insight will be searched, and Google Scholar will be limited to chaining and retrieving citations. The terms will combine sustainable sourcing, supply-chain transparency, green claims, consumer trust, brand reputation and product categories related to FMCG. Search strings using Boolean operators, phrase searching and truncation will be adjusted for each database and logged in a search log.

A two-stream geographical approach will ensure that UK terms do not exclude useful evidence. Stream A will identify UK-specific studies; Stream B will access international consumer-goods studies with transferable mechanisms. During extraction, geography, product category and regulatory context will then be coded. This overcomes the conflict between focusing on UK evidence and allowing international studies that are thematically relevant.



Note. Databases will be searched from 2018 to the present. Additional records may be identified through backward and forward citation chaining.

Source. Adapted from Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., et al. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement.

Figure 2: Proposed PRISMA 2020 study-selection process (adapted from Page et al., 2021)

Figure 2 operationalises the proposed identification, screening, retrieval, eligibility and inclusion processes. Since the search is not finalized yet, numbers are not estimated but are allocated to

the dissertation. Database and date deduplicating and logged search results will be exported. Records that are included in the citation chain will be evaluated by the same criteria of eligibility in order to maintain transparency and avoid selection bias.

3.3 Eligibility criteria and screening

Selection will follow the PRISMA 2020 sequence shown in Figure 2. Page et al. (2021) emphasised transparent search and exclusion reporting; therefore, the dissertation will record database yields, duplicates removed, records screened, reports retrieved, full-text exclusions with reasons and the final evidence set.

Table 4: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Source: Author

Dimension	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles; high-quality academic books or chapters where conceptually necessary; authoritative UK regulatory guidance.	Opinion pieces, promotional material, unsupported web commentary and conference abstracts without a full paper.
Date	2018-2026; earlier sources only for foundational theory.	Pre-2018 empirical studies where adequate contemporary evidence exists.
Topic relevance	Direct treatment of sustainable sourcing, supply-chain transparency, green claims, consumer trust or brand reputation.	Studies concerned only with operational efficiency or environmental performance without consumer or reputational relevance.
Sector/context	UK FMCG and consumer-goods studies; international evidence with clearly transferable mechanisms.	Highly specialised business-to-business or industrial contexts lacking a defensible connection to FMCG consumer evaluation.
Methodological adequacy	Transparent research design, sufficient evidence and interpretable constructs or outcomes.	Insufficient methods, untraceable claims, duplicate reports or studies lacking usable findings.
Language/access	English-language full texts available through legitimate academic or open-access routes.	Non-English items without reliable translation and sources whose full text cannot be assessed.

Title and abstract screening will use broad criteria to avoid premature exclusion. Full-text assessment will then determine contribution to the research questions and contextual comparability. Borderline decisions will be documented in an exclusion log, allowing the discussion to distinguish absence of evidence from evidence of no relationship.

3.4 Quality appraisal and data extraction

Eligible studies will be appraised for conceptual clarity, design fit, sample adequacy, measurement validity, analytical transparency and contextual relevance. Journal rankings will inform, but not replace, study-level evaluation. Quantitative studies will be checked for common-method bias and causal overstatement; qualitative studies for sampling and analytical transparency; and reviews for search reproducibility and appraisal quality. A structured extraction matrix will record geography, sector, theory, construct definitions, method, sample, relationships, mediators, moderators, limitations and relevance to each research question. It will isolate the empirical results of the research, as well as the interpretation of the results by the authors, so that synthesis captures evidence, not a rhetorical view with no basis in design.

3.5 Thematic synthesis and research integrity

Thematic analysis will include both deductive and inductive coding. Deductive codes will reflect sourcing substance, visibility, verification, authenticity, trust, reputation, greenwashing and supplier attribution; inductive codes will capture unanticipated mechanisms. Narrative synthesis will compare the direction and consistency of relationships, while evidence weighting will prevent weak cross-sectional associations from being treated as equivalent to longitudinal, experimental or triangulated findings. No participants or personal data are involved. Research integrity responsibilities concern accurate attribution, faithful representation, transparent treatment of contradictory evidence and secure storage of the search log, extraction matrix and drafts. AI support will not determine inclusion, generate unverified references or replace source reading.

4. Expected Findings

The review is expected to indicate that sustainable sourcing can strengthen consumer trust and brand reputation, but only through credible and interpretable evidence. Traceability, third-party assurance and consistency across the product life cycle are likely to operate as positive signals because they reduce information asymmetry (Koberg and Longoni, 2019; CMA, 2026). However, the effect is unlikely to be uniform. Nuojuua, Pahl and Thompson (2024) demonstrated heterogeneous UK consumer responses to packaging attributes, suggesting that consumer knowledge and claim format will condition whether operational practices become meaningful to consumers. The framework should therefore distinguish evidence quality from message volume, because additional disclosure is not necessarily persuasive when consumers lack the knowledge, time or motivation to evaluate technical information.

Consumer trust is expected to emerge as an important mediator rather than a guaranteed outcome. Responsible conduct may strengthen beliefs in competence, benevolence and integrity, which can accumulate into favourable reputation (Iglesias et al., 2020; Huo et al., 2022). However, it is also possible that reverse influence applies: the reputation can make the initial credibility higher, and the cost of inconsistency higher at the same time. The review is thus likely to disallow such a linear assumption and should endorse more contingent, partly recursive relationship. Asymmetric reputational damage is likely to be generated by greenwashing and supplier misconducts.

False or poorly supported statements can provoke the assertion of scepticism and hypocrisy, and the upstream violation can taint the focal brand due to vicarious responsibility (Pizzetti, Gatti and Seele, 2021; Persakis et al., 2025). The probable managerial meaning is that procurement evidence, is to be treated as reputational infrastructure: claims are to be made in conformity with practice that has been demonstrated to be correct and of a kind that can be supported by governance processes that can spot inconsistency in suppliers.

5. Limitations

The review cannot establish new causal effects because it depends on published evidence, much of which may be cross-sectional and self-reported. Definitions of sustainable sourcing, green trust and green reputation may also differ across studies, making direct comparison difficult. UK-specific research might not be adequate for every relationship and international evidence might not apply completely due to regulation, consumer expectations and product types. Multi-database searching, two streams of geographical search, explicit construct mapping, study quality appraisal and negative-case analysis will be used to mitigate these limitations. Interpretive bias will be reduced through a versioned codebook, extraction matrix and contradiction log. The ultimate framework will be provided as an evidence-based explanation that should be subsequently empirically tested, not as a globally validated causal framework.

6. Timeframe

The dissertation will be done in a period of twelve weeks. Overlapping of activities is done in such a way that screening and early extraction are used to inform a targeted citation chaining without altering the locked eligibility rules. A timeframe before final integration will be allocated to receive feedback provided by the supervisor and another quality-assurance will be allocated to reference auditing, consistency checks and preparation of submission.

Dissertation Timeline Gantt Chart

Task Name	Start	End	% Completion	Status	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W10	W11	W13	W14
1. Proposal (COMPLETED)			100%	Completed													
Research Topic Identification	W1	W1															
Research Questions & Objectives	W1	W1															
Literature Gap & Rationale	W1	W2															
Research Methodology (Proposed)	W2	W2															
Expected Findings & Contributions	W2	W2															
References & Formatting	W2	W2															
Proposal Finalisation & Submission	W2	W2															
2. Dissertation (YET TO START)			0%	Yet to Start													
Planning Meeting & Detailed Roadmap	W3	W3															
Comprehensive Literature Search	W3	W4															
Screening, Eligibility & Selection	W4	W5															
Quality Appraisal & Data Extraction	W5	W6															
Thematic Coding & Analysis	W6	W8															
Results Synthesis & Interpretation	W8	W9															
Framework Development	W9	W10															
Writing – Drafting Chapters	W10	W12															
Revision & Incorporating Feedback	W12	W13															
Editing, Formatting & Reference Audit	W13	W13															
Final Review & Submission	W14	W14															

Notes:

- The proposal is completed (100%).
- Dissertation activities will commence from Week 3.
- Timeline is indicative and may be adjusted based on progress and feedback.

Figure 3: Twelve-week dissertation delivery plan (source: author-developed)

The timeline places the evidence base first and then embarks on the bulk of drafting and has the last two weeks of revision instead of additional searching. Any latency of database access will be absorbed in the redundancy between searching and screening and continuity in the protocol and search log will be ensured should changes be necessary.

7. Conclusion

The present proposal defines a concise and workable Extended Literature Review of the role of sustainable sourcing in consumer trust and brand reputation in the UK FMCG sector. Its analytical added value is in isolating the substance of operational sourcing and clarifying how it can become reputationally consequential through credibility, authenticity and value congruence. It further considers greenwashing, supplier misconduct and reverse causality as the primary rival explanations rather than peripheral constraints. Transparency will be ensured by a semi-systematic design, PRISMA-style reporting, clear eligibility criteria, study-level quality appraisal, and thematic narrative synthesis to support an interdisciplinary evidence base. The resulting framework is anticipated to make theoretical and practical contributions by integrating supply-chain and branding viewpoints and facilitating alignment between supplier governance and consumer communication across UK FMCG organisations.

The paper thus deals with an opportune managerial issue without overemphasising what can be causally proved by an Extended Literature Review.

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