

Research Proposal

Research Title: Examining How Sainsbury's Green Marketing Strategies Influence Consumer Perception and Enhance Brand Positioning

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1. Introduction/Background/Research problem

The concept of green marketing has emerged as a critical strategic focus of retailers around the world, especially with the growing need by consumers to have ethical and environmentally friendly business behaviours. By matching the marketing operations to the sustainability goals, companies can both promote the stewardship of the ecological factors and strengthen the brand perception and consumer loyalty (Alnasser and Alhijris, 2025).

The retail sector in the United Kingdom has experienced a strong move in sustainability communication and responsible sourcing, both of which are now key drivers of purchasing behaviour and trust (Rahman and Nguyen-Viet, 2023). To become a company with a corporate sustainability strategy, Sainsbury has introduced various environmental initiatives such as emission reduction, increased packaging recyclability, and sustainability of its supply chains as part and parcel of its corporate sustainability strategy (Corporate Sainsburys, 2025).

However, the issue of consumer scepticism prevails, especially when it comes to possible greenwashing and the validity of the sustainability claims (Thakkar, 2021). As a result, it is of immense urgency to evaluate whether the actions of Sainsbury have a substantive impact on consumer impressions and strengthen the positioning of the brand or whether there are still systematic gaps between sustainability communication and consumer response in the competitive UK retail environment (Gosling, 2024).

2. Research aim, objectives, questions

Research aim: The study aims to analyse the influences of green marketing strategies on customer perceptions and contributions to the enhancement of brand positioning in the UK retail sector by analysing a case study of Sainsbury's.

Research Objectives:

- To explore key green marketing initiatives adopted by Sainsbury's.
- To analyse the influences of these initiatives in shaping consumer perceptions and buying patterns.

- To understand the extent to which the initiatives strengthen the brand reputation and competitive positioning of Sainsbury's.
- To evaluate the measures of strategic improvements to optimise sustainable marketing communication of Sainsbury's.

Research Questions:

- What are the key green marketing initiatives adopted by Sainsbury's?
- What are the influences of these initiatives in shaping consumer perceptions and buying patterns?
- How do the initiatives strengthen the brand reputation and competitive positioning of Sainsbury's?
- What are the measures of strategic improvements to optimise sustainable marketing communication of Sainsbury's?

3. Preliminary Literature Search

The initial literature defines the strategic position of green marketing in the development of corporate image and in enabling a competitive advantage (Alnasser and Alhijris, 2025). Recent studies highlight the outstanding role of authenticity in sustainability communication in order to prevent consumer distrust and claims of greenwashing (Rahman and Nguyen 2023). It has been empirically shown that green marketing programs, corporate social responsibility policies, and brand values are all relevant in increasing consumer buying intention (Larasati and Purwono, 2021).

The paths of green marketing research are connected with increased attention to sustainable consumption and reputation development in the retail industry (Geng and Maimaituerxun, 2022). The sustainability reports in the industry-specific analysis of Sainsbury highlight the efforts to ensure implication of carbon reduction, ethical sourcing, and packaging improvement (Corporate Sainsburys, 2025).

Research focused on the UK retailers supports the fact that sustainability policies reinforce brand image and competitiveness in the market (Li *et al.*, 2023). However, organisational responsibility and open communication cannot be done without maintaining consumer trust in ethical behaviour (Gosling, 2024). These insights illuminate the analysis of Sainsbury's strategies and the reactions of stakeholders.

In addition to the general discussion of sustainability, there are two theoretical frameworks to give the strong conceptual context of the green marketing of Sainsbury; the ***Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)*** and ***Stakeholder Theory***. TPB assumes that people behave based on behavioural intentions that are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms and the perceived behavioural control. With respect to green marketing, TPB implies that the pro-environmental purchasing behavior of consumers is determined not only by their environmental attitudes but also by the perceived social pressure and responsibility to make sustainable purchases. Dhanraj and Lavanya, (2022) stated that by communicating about genuine sustainability initiatives, like decreasing the use of plastic packaging or promoting ethical sourcing, Sainsbury can affect these three determinants in a positive way and create purchase intention and loyalty. Nevertheless, current results show that the intention-behaviour gap of consumers towards environmental concerns is high, but the awareness of environmental issues is on the increase, which can serve as an area that companies should work on to enhance the perceived behavioural control by providing clearer and verifiable statements regarding sustainability.

This is supplemented by Stakeholder Theory that says that in order to gain long-term legitimacy, business institutions should fulfill the needs of a variety of stakeholder groups such as consumers, suppliers, employees, and the society. Green marketing is therefore not a consumer-oriented approach, but a multi-stakeholder engagement process, which links the brand values and broader societal expectations. This means that sustainability efforts like emissions reduction and sourcing locally need to be transparent and developed in a joint effort with the stakeholders to ensure trust and block the idea of going green. According to Kumar and Singh, (2022), companies that make use of stakeholder-based communication systems attain greater credibility and strength when they are under scrutiny.

Empirical studies also confirm that authenticity and transparency are fundamental aspects of a successful green marketing. Savale *et al.* (2023) have discovered that believable eco-labels and quantifiable sustainability objectives augment actual corporate integrity, which directly affects brand equity. Conversely, a focus on symbolic gestures that does not reflect operational sustainability causes an avalanche of scepticism among customers. In the case of Sainsbury, it puts on record the necessity of quantifiable signs of impact- reporting on the reduction of carbon that was quantified or auditing of suppliers- to ensure the maintenance of a credible brand story.

An even larger shift in recent research has been the introduction of the phenomenon of digital sustainability communication, when green messages and discussion with consumers are heard through the internet. Alnasser and Alhijris, (2025) stated that the use of social media may reinforce consumer confidence by providing interactive content or reveal discrepancies between the message and the action. Even though Sainsbury uses several digital sustainability campaigns, there is a paucity of scholarly analysis of how these have been accepted by the consumers and this poses a gap in the literature, in regard to consumer perceptions of the authenticity of digital green marketing in UK retail.

Also, Rahman and Nguyen-Viet, (2023) opined that although the relationship between green marketing and brand equity has been widely researched, comparatively less research is critically examining how these strategies mediate the competitive positioning in terms of sustainable consumer trust and behavioural continuity. It is usually based on the overall attitudes instead of long-term relations outcomes, including loyalty, advocacy, and word-of-mouth reputation. It is in this behavioural and relational context that the study would help fill the conceptual gap by analysing the initiatives of Sainsbury.

A second critical gap is brought about by the paucity of cross-comparison of the sustainability claims by UK-based supermarket chains. Available research usually approaches green marketing as a general approach, overlooking the peculiarities of communications in companies. Since Sainsbury has devoted much of its funds to the “Plan for Better” framework, there has been no empirical analysis on whether such undertakings truly improve its brand differentiation or it is only following industry standards. The importance of bridging this gap has been welcomed by the

literature that proposes the need to explore the concept of authentic differentiation as a source of competitive sustainability advantage.

This is because TPB and Stakeholder Theory can be integrated in this study to provide a multidimensional insight: TPB can be used to understand consumer-side behavioural processes, whereas Stakeholder Theory can be used to understand the accountability aspect of the organisation. The combination of the two forms a hypothesized gap between micro-level consumer perception and the macro-level corporate strategy. An example is when the Sainsbury green activities are effective in their positive contribution to the attitude and subjective norm (TPB) as well as the actual fulfillment of the stakeholders' expectation, the brand will enjoy a holistic sustainability compatibility that will support the brand positioning.

Additionally, the scholarly literature is demanding hybrid approaches that integrate the consumer psychology and corporate governance frameworks to describe sustainable brand performance. This study responds to that challenge by combining the behavioural intention theories and the stakeholder accountability theories to analyse the actual strategic effect of the green marketing at Sainsbury.

To conclude, the initial literature indicates that there is a wide body of theoretical and empirical investigation research on the role of green marketing on consumer attitudes and corporate reputation. Nevertheless, it also reveals unexplained issues of behavioural consistency, authenticity of communication, and firm-specific competitive differentiation. It is on the basis of the TPB and Stakeholder Theory that this study seeks to fill these gaps by considering the case of Sainsbury, in order to provide both academic and managerial information on how the concept of green marketing can serve to sustain strong brand presence and environmental accountability.

4. Research Methodology

This research will be mixed-methods research that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The main goal of the mixed-method design is to give a holistic picture of the effects of the Sainsbury green marketing policies on consumer perception that will be studied based on the secondary and primary sources of data. Pragmatism as the research philosophy will be based on practical resolutions as well as a balance between the qualitative and quantitative data

(Cheong *et al.*, 2023). The research design will be a combination of explanatory mixed methods, in which quantitative data from secondary sources is followed by qualitative data from interviews to obtain information about the perception and behavior of consumers in relation to the green marketing strategies used by Sainsbury.

The methodology of this study will be based on the Research Onion framework, which guarantees the structural approach. The last layer is the research philosophy; this will be the interpretivism, which will focus on the perception of the consumer. The second level will be on the approach to the research, which will be inductive where the themes and patterns will be discovered through the data (Wimalaratne and Kulatunga, 2022). The third layer is the research strategy which will be a qualitative case study of the green marketing initiatives by Sainsbury. The secondary data layer involves the collection of secondary data in the forms of sustainability reports and academic sources. The last layer is the data analysis that will be performed by the application of thematic analysis and abductive coding to reveal important insights.

The current research will follow a qualitative design with an interpretivist epistemology that will allow exploring consumer perceptions and socially constructed meanings regarding the green marketing practices of Sainsbury's in more depth. Interpretivism allows investigating subjective attitudes without quantitative generalisations, thus describing the complexity of sustainability behaviour (Cheong *et al.*, 2023). It adopts an inductive analytic path and allows the themes to be generated as the result of secondary evidence, but not to test some hypotheses that have been set, which is necessary as the sustainability engagement is evolving (Geng and Maimaituerxun, 2022). The sources of data include solely secondary repositories, such as Sainsbury's sustainability reports, company web publications, peer-reviewed journals, and well-known databases in the industry (Corporate Sainsburys, 2025), which guarantees a high level of reliability and a good fit. To highlight patterns on consumer perception, green brand positioning, and the authenticity of environmental claims, thematic analysis with support of abductive coding is applied to increase the validity of theme development (Vila-Henninger *et al.*, 2024).

The research is expected to cover a wide spectrum of opinions, encompassing those of the leaders in the industry, environmental and consumer groups by attending to secondary data sources only. It will enable the study to understand not only the perceptions customers have towards the green

marketing of Sainsbury, but also the contexts in which it can be discussed in the wider social contexts of sustainability and environmental responsibility (Taherdoost, 2022).

Since the study takes a qualitative approach, it will also examine the narrative aspect of the green marketing by Sainsbury. This involves knowing how the language applied in sustainability reports, advert and other communications to the population give meaning to consumers. These communications will be studied in terms of a critical analysis, both revealing explicit and implicit messages that deal with the value of environmental values, corporate social responsibility, and ethical consumption (Ganesha and Aithal, 2022).

Moreover, the study shall take into account the weaknesses of the secondary data especially the threat of a biased or incomplete analysis of the consumer reactions. To counteract this, an aspect of Triangulation will be used to compare results between the various secondary sources hence providing a deeper insight into the effectiveness of green marketing strategies used by Sainsbury. The two methods will be integrated, through the use of thematic analysis, and focus on the narrative aspects of the issue, so that the research will provide a more in-depth insight into the effect of green marketing on consumer behavior and brand perception.

A simple random sampling strategy will be used. The interviews will be useful in the view of consumer perceptions of Sainsbury green marketing initiatives and actual impact of these initiatives on consumer behavior. The sample size will include 10-12 participants, who will be the consumers and regular shoppers at Sainsbury and are aware of the sustainability efforts at the company (Ganesha and Aithal, 2022)

The semi-structured interviews will be administered where the respondents will be questioned on their existence of awareness regarding Sainsbury green marketing efforts, whether they trust the sustainability claims made by the company, and whether they have these as a basis of their purchasing. Analysis of the primary data will be dependent on the thematic analysis with the help of transcribing the interviews (Taherdoost, 2022). This will entail coding the interview transcripts to determine the major themes and patterns in the responses of the consumers. The results will be contrasted to the secondary data to identify the inconsistency, or discrepancies between consumer perceptions and the sustainability statement of the company. Such comparison will also contribute to the triangulation of the data and the increased reliability of the findings.

5. Research Limitations

There are various limitations that can affect the conclusion of this study. The use of secondary data is also a major limitation since it might not necessarily capture real-time consumer perceptions and emotions. As this study will rely on the available reports and published materials, this study might not reflect the direct and immediate response of consumers towards the green marketing efforts of Sainsbury. The other weakness is that there is possible bias in the secondary data sources (Gosling, 2024). As an example, the sustainability reports and corporate communications of Sainsbury might be a biased and excessively positive depiction of the green marketing initiative. This would present a partiality to the evaluation of the validity and efficiency of its policies. Moreover, the research can be affected by interpretation bias and it is particularly relevant to qualitative data analysis. Whereas thematic analysis is a viable approach of identifying trends in the data, how the trends are interpreted can differ according to the views of the researcher (Jones, 2023). Besides, the research is limited by the accessibility and timeliness of data. Given that the study will be based on publicly available secondary data, it is possible that a recent shift in marketing or sustainability activities of Sainsbury will not be represented in the analysis. Lastly, time constraints will reduce the depth of the analysis particularly in delving into the various aspects of consumer perception and competitive advantage in detail.

Risks

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Strategy
Dependence on secondary data may limit capturing real-time consumer emotions and perceptions.	Medium	Medium	Supplement with recent studies and triangulate multiple academic and industry sources

Company sustainability reports may present biased or overly positive information	High	High	Cross-verify claims with external academic research and third-party sustainability benchmarks
Interpretation bias during thematic analysis	Medium	Medium	Use systematic coding frameworks and ensure themes are compared across multiple sources.
Limited availability of the latest consumer insight data for Sainsbury's	Medium	Medium	Prioritise recent research publications, sustainability reviews, and industry reports
Time constraint for data screening and analysis	Low	Medium	Follow the planned timeline and structured research stages to maintain workflow efficiency.

6. Expected Outcomes

The anticipated findings of this study are multidimensional. Firstly, the research will find and examine the most important green marketing strategies used by Sainsbury and the way these strategies impact consumer perceptions. It is believed that the study will help to understand whether the sustainability activities of Sainsbury are perceived as genuine by the consumers or there is a threat of greenwashing (Ahmed *et al.*, 2022). The study will also examine the way Sainsbury green marketing practices influence the consumer behavior, in this case, the buying behaviors, and how they help the company to build its brand image in the competitive UK retail market. The research will also assess whether these green marketing activities have enhanced the consumer trust and brand loyalty. By evaluating the Sainsbury sustainability communication

efficacy, the study will give a recommendation on improving its green marketing policies. These proposals will be to maximize consumer interactions so that the marketing activities of Sainsbury could be better oriented to consumer expectations and sustainability objectives. Lastly, this study will add value to Sainsbury and other retailers that are aiming at improving their green marketing efforts.

7. Timeline

The study will be conducted in determined stages through a cross-sectional timeline. The first few weeks will be spent on tightening the research focus as well as doing a literature review. The next middle stage activities will include the systematic secondary data collection of company reports and academic databases. A thematic analysis and coding will then be implemented to reveal the fundamental patterns. The last weeks will involve synthesis, drafting, proofreading and formal submission. This systematic development assists in preventing the lack of methodological rigour and contributes to the compatibility with the overall purpose of the research.

Task	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
<i>Topic refinement & planning</i>						
<i>Literature review</i>						
<i>Data collection</i>						
<i>Thematic analysis</i>						

<i>Writing & review</i>						
<i>Final edits & submission</i>						

7. Conclusion

This research paper is a critical analysis of the impact of Sainsbury's green marketing on the perceptions and brand positioning of the UK retail market. It will utilise qualitative secondary data and thematic analysis to determine whether the sustainability actions undertaken by Sainsbury induce substantive consumer trust and a competitive advantage in addressing the issues of credibility and communication.

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