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Consumer Trust and Ethical Marketing Claims in Alliance-Branded Products: A Study of Nigerian Fast-Moving Consumer Goods Manufacturing Companies

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ABSTRACT
This research is to investigate the impact of ethical marketing claims on consumer trust in alliance-branded products in Nigerian Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) manufacturing companies. The growing usage of alliance branding and ethical marketing is increasing the demand to examine if ethical claims really affect consumers' trust in alliance brands. The research was quantitative and cross-sectional surveys were used. This study used primary data obtained by way of structured questionnaires administered to consumers of alliance branded FMCG products in selected commercial cities in Nigeria applying the multistage sampling technique. A total of 274 valid responses were retrieved and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29 from the 385 questionnaires distributed. A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis at 5% level of significance. Results: The result showed no statistically significant relationship between ethical marketing claims and consumer trust ($R = 0.020$, $R^2 = 0.000$, $F = 0.106$, $p = 0.745$), signifying those ethical claims did not significantly affect consumers' trust in decisions alone. It is the Nigerian consumers who are now holding the view that they are looking for genuine, clear and verifiable ethical actions and not just about promotional ethical messages. It should be suggested for the FMCG companies to increase transparency through third-party certification, sustainability reporting based on evidence, adherence to regulations and ethical actions on a compliance to improve the credibility of alliance-branded product and to sustainable trust of consumer. The study adds to ethical marketing and alliance branding literature by showing that trust derived from credibility and observable ethical actions, rather than ethical claims, is a more powerful influencer of consumer trust in the context of emerging markets.
Keywords: *Brand Integrity, Claim Credibility, Consumer Trust, Ethical Marketing, Ethical Standards.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumer trust is regarded as the determinant of sustainable competitive advantage in the marketing era, acting as a psychological process that decreases perceived risk, enhances purchase decisions, and builds enduring relationship (Agu et al., 2024). In the case of alliance-branded products wherein two or more firms partner to co-develop, co-produce, or co-market the products under one or multiple brand names, trust is even more critical as consumers are required to judge the trustworthiness of two or more corporate entities at the same time (Jeya, 2026). When products also include ethical marketing claims or statements about environmental sustainability, fair labor or social responsibility, consumer trust depends both on the inherent credibility of the claims, and the perceived ability of the alliance partners to live up to the claims (Rosari, 2025). The rise of ethical marketing claims in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) markets echoes an evolution towards more purposeful consumption among consumers, yet this trend has also spurred much cynicism towards the sincerity of such claims, especially where corporate behaviors seem to contradict marketed values (Verrus et al., 2025; Braide et al., 2025). The ethical aspects of alliance-branded products marketing have been the subject of growing scholarly interest among firms as they realize collaborative branding strategies may increase the reach and the credibility of sustainability messages (Tanveer et al., 2021). Nevertheless, there is an ongoing dilemma within the literature: while alliances allow for the pooling of reputational capital and can increase the legitimacy of ethical claims, they simultaneously create an accountability diffusion effect that can make it difficult for consumers to know whom to hold accountable when ethical commitments are violated (Sobkowiak et al., 2025). This uncertainty is even more stark in cross-sector alliances, which need to bridge starkly different institutional logics (such as profit-maximizing manufacturers and mission-led not-for-profits) and competing ethical perspectives when communicating marketing messages together (Rohmanue & Jacobi, 2023). Recent research indicates that trust of consumers on alliance-branded ethical products significantly depends on the perceived coherence between partner identities, the visibility of alliance governance mechanisms, and the concreteness as opposed to abstractness of ethical claims (Rosari, 2025).

Nigeria offers an interesting yet neglected case through which to explore these processes. As Africa's largest country by population and its largest economy, Nigeria has a dynamic FMCG industry where competition is fierce and urbanization is fast while a burgeoning middle class is increasingly aware of environmental and social issues (Adekuajo et al., 2023). The industry giants are the multinationals, such as Nestlé Nigeria, Unilever Nigeria, and Procter & Gamble Nigeria who have developed wide-ranging alliances with local suppliers, distributors, and international sustainability certifiers to commercialize ethically aligned products (Andrew, 2023). At the same time, local manufacturers such as Dangote Sugar, Flour Mills of Nigeria, Chi Limited, have formed alliances to strengthen the credence of their ethical-marketing claims in home and export markets. These ethical alliance-branded products from fair-trade certified cocoa drinks to sustainably produced cooking oils and plastic-neutral packaged goods are becoming an increasingly important sector in the Nigerian FMCG arena, yet there is to date no empirical evidence regarding their success in engendering consumer trust.

Consumer trust and ethical marketing literatures have primarily investigated the single-brand context in developed countries, rather than the complexities of multiple-brand context such as alliance branding (Chandana, 2026). In a similar vein, studies on strategic alliances in emerging markets have concentrated on the operational and financial performance issues and ignored consumer-related legitimacy of alliances (Babu & Raamkhumar, 2025). The (sub-)disciplinary convergence of consumer trust development in response to ethical marketing statements of alliance branded FMCG products in Nigeria is yet to be explored empirically. In this regard, the present study investigates the manner in which Nigerian consumers judge the trustworthiness of ethical marketing statements in alliance branded FMCG products and considers the influence of partner credibility, claim specificity, and perceived corporate social responsibility on trust evaluations and purchase intentions, thus filling the aforementioned gap.

Statement of the Problem

Following heavy spending on ethical marketing communication, many fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies still face decreasing levels of trust from consumers amid concerns over misleading advertising, overblown sustainability claims, greenwashing, confusing product labeling, and a gap between what companies promise and how they actually operate (Risdwiyanto et al., 2026). These worries have intensified on a global scale as consumers are increasingly asking for proven and verifiable marketing information prior to making purchasing decisions. Studies by Verrus et al., (2025) have found that consumers are becoming more skeptical about taking ethical claims at face value and judging the trustworthiness of companies on transparency, consistency and accountability. As a result, the organizations that claim one or both of these complex attributes and fail to provide evidence will suffer a loss of reputation, a decrease in customer loyalty, and a diminished ability to effectively leverage alliance branding strategies (Akpan, 2023).

The problem is more severe in Nigeria because of ongoing fears of false advertising, fake products, insufficient product information, varying quality standards, and relatively lax enforcement of regulations concerning the ethics of marketing in certain areas of the consumer products industry (Abdulsalam et al., 2024). Despite the fact that regulatory bodies have increased their focus on truthful advertisements and consumer protection, consumers' trust of product claims may be undermined as a result of misleading advertising. The most recent empirical research by Abdulsalam and Tajudeen (2024) found that false advertising and mislabeling are now powerful influences on consumer purchasing and also undermine trust in such information shores of mis- and dis-information and increasingly used digital information to inform their purchase decisions ranging as affecting younger and better consumers.

In addition, though alliance branding can serve to increase the trustworthiness of the related organizations based on their reputation and complementary competencies, it may also complicate the consumer's evaluation process (Quamina & Singh, 2023). Besides the actual brands, consumers must make a judgment on the veracity of the alliance. Just as one partner in an alliance can be viewed as having less integrity or its ethical protestations appear to conflict with those of its partners, such negative credibility spillover can erode trust in the overall alliance-branded product. This is a tactical hurdle for Nigerian manufacturers of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) as they now rely more on joint branding arrangements to stay competitive in increasingly turbulent markets. However, Olaleye et al., (2025) empirical studies clarify how ethical marketing claims impact consumer trust in target products in the context of alliance branded products.

However, while recent Nigerian evidence has corroborated that the extent of brand trust has a significant mediating effect on branding outcomes and that ethical or sustainability claims have a positive impact on brand loyalty and the intent to purchase (Akpan et al, 2024; George & Odubo, 2026), these have not sufficiently explored if ethical marketing claims have a direct effect on consumer trust in alliance-branded products nor have they sought to isolate which specific dimensions of ethical marketing claims are most powerful in the context of alliance branding (Olaleye et al., 2025). This theoretical and contextual void which poses a roadblock for marketing managers, alliance partners, and policy-makers to develop evidence-based strategies that would improve consumer trust towards collaborative brands.

Thus, the issue that calls for this research is an understanding of the extent to which ethical marketing claims affect consumers' trust in alliance-brand products in the context of fast-moving consumer goods manufacturing companies in Nigeria. Filling this gap is critical for the formulation of marketing strategies that enhance transparency, bolster consumer confidence, lead to improved alliance brand performance, generate customer loyalty, and, ultimately, engender a sustainable competitive advantage in the Nigerian FMCG sector.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical Marketing Claims

Ethical marketing claims are explicit or implicit claims made by companies about the ethical qualities of their products or production processes, including those related to environmental, fair trade, and animal welfare issues, as well as product safety or corporate social responsibility. Such claims seek to reassure consumers that the products are made and sold according to recognized ethical principles and to minimize the information disparity between producers and consumers (Bhargava & Bedi, 2022). When it comes to alliance-branded products, ethical marketing claims are even more significant as consumers evaluate not just individual brands' trustworthiness, but also the reliability of the partnering firms.

Ethical marketing claims exist on multiple levels, from truthfulness and transparency to claim credibility, responsible advertising, ethical sourcing, and the fulfillment of regulatory requirements. Transparently communicating truth about a product allows consumers to be better informed about their purchasing decisions, and credible claims affirmed by independent certifiers and supported by evidence they can verify promote confidence among consumers. While true claims with positive impacts on consumers, also known as green marketing, can give a good image to the company, false or exaggerated claims such as greenwashing or deceptive marketing causes mistrust on consumers, ruins brand reputation and lowers purchase intention (Orazi & Chan, 2020; Toti, 2023).

In alliance branded products, ethical marketing claims serve as a strategic signal, conveying quality of the product, the integrity of the organization and the shared ethical values commitment among alliance members. Unethical behaviour or false claims from one partner may taint consumers' perception of the entire alliance as a result of the intertwined reputations of partnering firms. Therefore, ethical communication transparency, and consistency are imperative to maintain consumer trust (Bhargava & Bedi, 2022).

In the Nigerian fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, a more informed consumer, access to product knowledge via digital means and increased competition have rendered ethical marketing claims as a pivotal factor for consumer trust (Braide et al., 2026). Research findings suggest that honest advertising, responsible product marketing, communication on sustainability and good business ethics positively affect consumer confidence, the loyalty towards the brand and the purchasing decision, when consumers attribute such statements with the necessary level of credibility and when they actually have the ability to check the truth behind such claims (Ajayi & Salaudeen, 2023; George & Odubo, 2026). As such, ethical marketing claims have transformed from being simply a sales tool to becoming strategic instruments for regaining consumer trust and maintaining competitive advantage in co-branded FMCG products.

Claim Credibility

Claim credibility denotes the perception that a firm's marketing claims are truthful, accurate, verifiable, and reliable by the consumers. In the domain of ethical marketing claims, claim credibility is an important driver of consumers' trust as it reduces uncertainty about a firm's claims of product quality, environmental friendliness, social responsibility, or ethical sourcing and reassures them that such claims are genuinely presented and not disguised as misrepresentations (Verma et al., 2023). Transparent, consistent, evidence-based communication and third-party verification are the hallmarks of believable claims, inflated or misleading claims contribute to consumer skepticism and erosion of trust (Román et al., 2023).

In alliance-brand products where two or more brand communicates ethical values jointly, it is even more critical for the claim to be credible as consumers assess the message as well as the reputation and consistency of all the partners in the alliance. A high level of claim credibility boosts trust in the alliance, contributes to felt authenticity, and leads to positive purchase intentions and continued patronage. While, any partner making contradictory or unproven ethical claims can tarnish the credibility of the entire alliance and reduce consumer trust (through perceived greenwashing or ethical opportunism (Pooja & Upadhyaya, 2024). So, companies that get into alliance branding with ethical marketing claims should arm those claims with proof, certifications, and transparent disclosures to maintain consumer trust.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical standards are those that an organization is expected to conform to within the boundaries of legal and professional requirements, which ultimately dictate truthfulness and transparency in marketing communications. When it comes to claims about the marketing being ethical, compliance with these principles means that marketing messages are truthful, can be substantiated, aren't deceptive and comply with laws protecting consumers and industry standards. This compliance also reduces the likeliness of overly exaggerated claims and perceptions of greenwashing or ethical opportunism, which in turn helps foster consumer trust in brand integrity (Geetha et al., 2024).

In the case of alliance-branded products, ethical commitment is especially relevant, as the trustworthiness of one alliance partner shapes the whole alliance evaluation by the consumer. And consumers believe that all the brands involved in the partnership should share the same ethical stance when it applies to product quality, environmental concerns, labour practice, and corporate governance. Noncompliance of one partner with certain unethical standards can harm the image and reliability of the entire alliance (Wang & Dai, 2026). Hence, companies must back up positively claim about ethical marketing with substantiated proof, third-party certifications, transparent disclosures, and ongoing adherence to regulations to advocate for consumer trust and sustainable brand relationships (Wei et al., 2024). In addition, it is verified that scrupulous accord to ethics bolsters perceived brand morality, mitigates reputational threat of damage and sustainable consumer trust in alliance-branded products.

Consumer Trust

Consumer trust is a willingness of consumers to depend on a brand based on the assumption that the brand can be trusted and has the ability to perform certain functions consistently in the foreseeable future with benevolence, integrity and competence (Khamitov, 2024). It is multi-faceted and includes belief in the reliability, benevolence and competence of a firm, that mitigates perceived risk and uncertainty in the purchasing decision (Liu & Wang, 2023). More specifically, in the case of alliance-branded products, consumer trust is crucial, since consumers are assessing the reputation, ethics and performance of two or more partnering brands at the same time. Ethical marketing statements, for example claims related with sustainability, fair trade, product safety or social responsibility, are relevant signals that may impact consumers' or alliance's perceived credibility and product quality (Geetha et al., 2024).

Based on signaling theory, the trust increased when the information asymmetry between the firm and the consumer was decreased in the area of ethical signals (Negash & Akhbar, 2024). Over time, whenever alliance partners communicate consistently truthful and verifiable ethical claims, consumers are more prone to view the alliance as genuine, which in turn reinforces purchase intentions, brand loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth (Riva et al., 2024). In contrast, claims that are overstated or misleading about being ethical may lead to a general mistrust and question the credibility of all partner in the alliance, more so in this age where consumers are able to easily debunk corporate claims by simply accessing digital platforms (Beck et al., 2024).

In addition, the findings of the recent research suggest that perceived brand ethicality serves as a strong predictor of consumer trust via emotional attachment and long-term relationship commitment (Jamero, 2026). In alliance-branded products, consumers extend their trust from one good partner to the next; yet, this is trust that must be continually earned through the veracity and integrity of the ethical marketing claims. Hence, it is crucial for the firms participating in strategic brand alliances to be transparent, accountable, and committed to ethical principles to maintain consumer trust and competitive advantage. In the end, consumer trust acts as a strategic resource mediating the effect of claims on ethical marketing on positive consumer-based outcome of the products carrying alliance brands.

Brand Integrity

According to Soriano (2022), brand integrity is the degree to which a brand is consistent in living its values and delivering what it promises in an ethical manner at every point of contact with the consumer. It has a meaning of truthfulness, transparency, answerability, and uniformity in fulfilling marketing promises and product performances. In joint venture-branded goods, brand integrity is especially vital since purchasers assess not simply the credibility of each member brand within the partnership, but the moral coherence of the partnership as a whole (Quamina & Singh, 2023). When alliance partners make truthful, substantiable, and harmonious claims of ethical marketing, perceived credibility among consumers is enhanced leading to increased trust and decreased perceived risk.

On the other hand, the mismatch between ethical statements and practices leads to the perception that brands are hypocritical, and this erodes consumer trust and relation potential (Barrera & Beltrán, 2023). Moreover, recent findings also imply that perceived brand ethicality activates brand trust, purchase intention and loyalty, suggesting that honesty is a core antecedent of favourable consumer responses (Geetha et al., 2024). Authentic and transparent brand practices have also been cited to enhance consumer trust and demonstrate that ethical statements are truly representative of company values and not just a form of opportunistic marketing (Campagna et al., 2023). Thus, upholding brand integrity is critical for alliance-branded products, as it enables credibility of ethical marketing claims and the maintenance of consumer trust across co-branded relationships.

Brand Credibility

Brand credibility as conceptualized by Low et al., (2025) is the belief of consumers that a brand is competent and has good intentions when making a promise. It is based on perceptions of expertise, trustworthiness, and reliability, which in turn is an important antecedent of consumer trust. In the case of alliance-branded products, however, brand credibility is not only the individual brands' but the partner's credibility of the strategic alliance itself. Consumers assess those allied brands' ability to deliver the quality, ethical conduct, and value behind the marketing claims they make. Ethical marketing statements that can be made transparent and verified, that are consistent with the actions of the organization will increase the credibility of the brand and decrease the information asymmetry and perceived risk (Sansome et al., 2024).

In the same way, aligned authentic purpose-driven communication builds the trustworthiness of the brand, but misinforming or overstated ethical statements result in loss of trust and inferior alliance performance (Walter et al., 2024). Recent research also indicates that brand credibility acts as a mediator in the relationship between corporate social responsibility actions and favorable consumer outcomes, such as brand preference and trust (Bashir et al., 2024). Thus, for the alliance-branded goods, a credible ethical marketing assertion is necessary to maintain consumer trust, to enhance relationship quality, and to maintain a long-term competitive advantage in the area of collaborative branding.

Underpinning Theory

Signaling Theory

Signaling Theory was initially proposed by Michael Spence (1973) in order to analyze how agents with better information send credible signals to the uninformed agents to reduce information asymmetry. In marketing, the theory suggests that consumers are often under-informed about the true quality of a product, its underlying ethical standards, or the way it has been produced. Therefore, they use signals that are visible such as brand name, certifications, guarantees, company reputation, packaging, ethical claims and strategic alliances to deduce the product features that are not visible (Shahid et al., 2024).

In the case of co-branded products, Signaling Theory also offers clear insight into how collaboration between two or more reputable brands creates signals of quality and trust. Alliance branding decreases consumers' uncertainty because the image of one partner has a reinforcing effect on image of the other partner (Baier et al., 2022). When collaborative partners promote ethical marketing claims, including environmental sustainability, fair sourcing, product safety, social responsibility, and quality assurance, these claims are perceived as more credible by consumers when they are accompanied by trusted and verifiable signals. Examples of such signals are third-party certifications, transparent reporting, systems of traceability, and alignment in corporate conduct (Khan et al., 2022).

The theory is especially applicable to consumer trust which is formed when consumers perceive that firms are true to their word. Integrity signals of ethical marketing claims are authentic and credible rather than marketing rhetoric. Evidence suggests that transparency and details of ethical claims increase consumers' trust substantially, while ambiguous or exaggerated claims or claims being disconfirmed by other information may lead to skepticism and decrease purchase intent (Khan et al., 2022; Mollenkopf et al., 2022).

In general, Signaling Theory appears to be a suitable theoretical framework for this research as it accounts for how ethical marketing claims are a form of credibility signals that shape consumer trust in the alliance-branded product. In the highly competitive FMCG sector in Nigeria, the success of alliance branding is not solely dependent on communicating ethical claims but by acting on those claims through transparent, verifiable and consistent organisational practices that

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builds enduring consumer trust.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey research design using a quantitative research approach. The cross-sectional survey design is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect data from a large number of consumers at a single point in time to examine the influence of ethical marketing claims on consumer trust in alliance-branded products manufactured by Nigerian Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) companies. The design is suitable for establishing relationships among variables without manipulating the study environment and has been widely employed in marketing, branding, and consumer behavior studies.

Primary source of data was used through the structured questionnaire as the responses was measured using a 5-point Likert Scale. The validity of the instrument was both face validated and content validated. Experts in Marketing, Consumer Behaviour and Measurement and Evaluation reviewed the instrument for face validity with respect to its clarity and appropriateness. Content validity experts determined whether each item sufficiently represented the study constructs. The content validity index (CVI) was calculated and CVI values of 0.80 or above were found as acceptable. A pilot study was carried out for the reliability of the instrument involving 40 consumers from a state other than those included in the main study. The internal consistency reliability was also assessed by Cronbach's Alpha with the acceptable limit of $\alpha \geq 0.80$.

Population and Sample size of the Study

The target population comprises adult consumers (18 years and above) who purchase and consume alliance-branded Fast-Moving Consumer Goods produced by Nigerian manufacturing companies. The accessible population consists of consumers purchasing alliance-branded products in supermarkets, shopping malls, modern retail stores, open markets, wholesale outlets, neighborhood convenience stores. Since the population of consumers is unknown and very large (infinite), Cochran's (1977) formula for infinite populations will be adopted and estimated to be 385. A total of 274 questionnaires were retrieved from the respondent for the purpose of coding and the IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29) was used to analyze all the hypotheses tested with regression analysis at 5% level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling technique was employed using purposive selection of one commercial city from each geopolitical zone in Nigeria. The second stage involved the random selection of supermarkets, shopping malls, modern retail stores, open markets, wholesale outlets, neighborhood convenience stores. While the final stage of the multistage sampling of the study used systematic random sampling to select consumers purchasing alliance-branded FMCG products.

Decision Rule for Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses will be tested at the 5% significance level.
Reject the null hypothesis if $p \leq 0.05$.
Accept the alternate hypothesis if $p > 0.05$.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

A total of 274 questionnaires were retrieved from the respondent for the purpose of coding and the IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29) was used to analyze all the hypotheses tested with regression analysis at 5% level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Test of Hypothesis

Consumer Trust has no significant effect on Ethical Marketing claims in alliance-branded products.

Table 1: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.020[a]	.000	-.003	.32901	.000	.106	1	272	.745

a. Predictors: (Constant), Ethical Marketing claims

The model summary indicates a correlation coefficient R = 0.020, suggesting a very weak positive relationship between Ethical Marketing claims and Consumer Trust. The R^2 value of 0.000 shows that Ethical Marketing claims explains virtually none of the variance in Consumer Trust, while the Adjusted $R^2 = –0.003$ confirms the negligible predictive ability of the model.

Table 2: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.012	1	.012	.106	.745[b]
	Residual	29.443	272	.108		
	Total	29.455	273			

a. Dependent Variable: Consumer Trust
b. Predictors: (Constant), Ethical Marketing claims

The ANOVA results further support this conclusion. The regression model produced an F-value of 0.106 with a corresponding p-value of 0.745, which is far above the conventional significance level of 0.05. This indicates that the model is not statistically significant, and Ethical Marketing claims does not significantly improve the prediction of consumer trust among respondents.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.989	.215		18.545	.000
	WE	.018	.054	.020	.326	.745

a. Dependent Variable: Consumer Trust

The coefficients table shows that the unstandardized coefficient for Ethical Marketing claims is B = 0.018, with a t-value of 0.326 and a p-value of 0.745. Although the coefficient is positive, the effect is extremely small and not statistically significant. The constant term (B = 3.989, $p < 0.001$) indicates that respondents report moderate to high customer trust irrespective of variations in the Ethical Marketing claims. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis is retained, confirming that the Ethical Marketing claims does not have a significant effect on customer trust in the selected retail outlets.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The results of the study revealed that ethical marketing claims did not significantly influence consumer trust in alliance branded products in the context of Nigerian Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) manufacturing firms. The regression results showed a near zero positive (R = 0.020) and a non-significant predictive effect (p = 0.745), depicting that ethical marketing claims do not solely influence the trust perception of consumers.

Such has led to Nigerian consumers becoming more cynical about ethical marketing communication with companies over the years, as a result of ongoing complaints about false advertising, greenwashing, exaggerated sustainability claims and a mismatch between what companies promise and deliver in line with business as usual. As a result, consumers no longer trust ethical assertions included in promotional messages but instead judge brands on evidence of ethical behaviour, openness, third-party accreditation, and consistent delivery of promised values. This finding is consistent with an emerging literature that suggests that consumers want evidence to be able to validate ethical claims before these claims can be considered as true and accepted. Similar critiques were raised by studies by Beck et al. (2024) Walter et al. (2024) and Riva et al. (2024) concluding that transparency, authenticity and consistency are more predictive of consumer trust than promotional ethical statements exclusively.

The result also seems to challenge the expectations of the Signaling Theory, which argues that ethical marketing claims function as believable signals that may decrease information asymmetry and increase consumer trust. While signaling mechanisms are still of theoretical importance, the results of this study suggest that ethical signals are weakened when they are perceived to be decoupled from concrete business practices. With alliance-branded products, it seems consumers scrutinizes not only the ethical claims per se but also the credibility, reputation, and ethical coherence of all alliance partners before they trust.

The implication from a management perspective is that Nigerian FMCG companies do not rely on ethical advertising alone as a means of engendering consumers' trust. Rather, they can make claims more robust by additional verification of claims with third party certifications, transparent sustainability reporting, product traceability, adherence to regulations and a continuous record of ethical business practices. This type of activity is likely to increase the believability of alliance-branded products and help to insure long-term consumer trust.

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