

Ethical communication in Sustainable marketing: a Perspective of Dalits

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Abstract

Sustainable marketing has increasingly gained prominence in contemporary business discourse, emphasising environmental stewardship, stakeholder responsibility, and ethical branding. However, existing sustainability frameworks often prioritise ecological performance and corporate transparency while inadequately addressing structural social and caste-based inequalities embedded within market structures. Ethical communication is frequently reduced to disclosure practices and anti-greenwashing mechanisms, overlooking its normative role in shaping inclusion, dignity, and participatory representation.

The present study develops a justice-oriented communication framework by synthesising the social justice perspective of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the dignity-centred critique of Gopal Guru, and J. C. Kumarappa's ecological moral economy. Through conceptual analysis, the study argues that sustainability communication must move beyond symbolic inclusion towards participatory and dignity-based green narratives. The proposed framework positions ethical communication as the integrating axis linking environmental sustainability, economic ethics, and structural social equality. The study contributes to sustainable marketing theory by expanding the ethical foundations of green narratives and reframing sustainability communication as a democratic and socially transformative practice.

Keywords: Sustainable Marketing; Ethical Communication; Dalit Philosophy; Social Justice; Dignity; Green Narratives; Inclusive Sustainability Communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable marketing has gained global prominence as organisations increasingly attempt to align business strategies with environmental responsibility and social accountability. Ethical communication plays a central role in this shift by shaping public perception and legitimising sustainability claims. Nevertheless, much

of the sustainability discourse remains concentrated on ecological performance indicators and corporate governance mechanisms.

While these developments improve transparency, they often fail to address deeper structural inequalities embedded within socio-economic and market structures. Green narratives frequently emphasise environmental responsibility but overlook representation, dignity, and participation of historically marginalised communities. Ethical communication, therefore, must be examined not merely as truthful messaging but as a mechanism through which social inclusion and justice are constructed.

Dalit philosophical thought provides a critical framework for addressing these limitations. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's emphasis on structural equality highlights the necessity of institutional transformation. Gopal Guru's focus on dignity and experiential knowledge underscores the importance of participatory representation in public discourse. J. C. Kumarappa's ecological moral economy extends sustainability beyond environmental metrics towards ethical and socially responsible economic practices.

The present study contends that sustainable marketing must be reimagined through a Dalit philosophical lens, wherein ethical communication becomes a site of social justice and democratic participation.

Research Problem and Objectives

Research Problem

Existing sustainable marketing frameworks emphasise environmental sustainability and ethical disclosure but inadequately address structural inequality, dignity, and inclusive representation within sustainability communication.

Research Objectives

1. To analyse ethical communication in sustainable marketing from a social justice framework rooted in Ambedkarite thought.
2. To integrate Dalit philosophical insights into sustainability discourse.
3. To examine ecological moral economy in relation to ethical marketing communication.
4. To develop a conceptual framework for socially just and inclusive green narratives.

Literature Review

Sustainable Marketing and Ethical Communication

Sustainable marketing seeks to integrate environmental stewardship, social equity, and economic viability into core business strategy rather than treating sustainability as a peripheral activity. It redefines value creation by aligning long-term ecological responsibility with stakeholder welfare and organisational performance (Belz & Peattie, 2012).

Ethical communication plays a central role within this framework. Sustainable marketing requires transparent messaging, accountability, and stakeholder dialogue (Gordon et al., 2011). Communication must move beyond persuasive promotion to foster informed decision-making and behavioural change. Transparency, authenticity, and evidence-based claims are essential for building public trust.

However, scholars caution that sustainability narratives frequently function as reputational strategies rather than transformative commitments. Corporate communication may selectively highlight environmentally responsible initiatives while concealing exploitative supply chains or systemic inequalities. Thus, there exists a tension between sustainability as discourse and sustainability as structural practice.

Dalit Philosophy and Structural Equality

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar argued that inequality is embedded within institutional arrangements rather than confined to individual prejudice. Structural reform through constitutional safeguards, redistribution, and institutional redesign is central to achieving social justice (Ambedkar, 1936/2014).

Applying this framework to marketing ethics suggests that communication cannot be evaluated solely on symbolic inclusivity or representational diversity. Ethical communication must interrogate structural exclusion embedded within markets, including access to capital, labour conditions, and leadership representation. From this perspective, marketing practices that celebrate diversity while ignoring systemic marginalisation risk perpetuating tokenism.

Dignity and Representation

Gopal Guru distinguishes between experience and theory, arguing that marginalised communities are frequently theorised about without being recognised as epistemic agents (Guru, 2002). Representation detached from lived experience risks becoming symbolic and paternalistic. Dignity, therefore, requires recognition of voice, agency, and participation.

Within ethical communication, this insight challenges marketing paradigms that appropriate marginalised identities for narrative appeal. Campaigns portraying inclusion without enabling meaningful participation may reproduce hierarchies of knowledge and power. Ethical communication must incorporate experiential voices in the design and production of messaging to avoid symbolic inclusion.

Ecological Moral Economy

J. C. Kumarappa proposed the “economy of permanence” as an alternative to extractive industrial capitalism, emphasising ecological balance, moral restraint, and decentralised production (Kumarappa, 1945). His framework prioritises sustainability, self-sufficiency, and ethical accountability over growth-driven economic models.

Kumarappa's ideas deepen sustainability discourse by linking environmental responsibility with moral economic organisation. Sustainable marketing, from this perspective, must align communication strategies with regenerative economic practices rather than reduce sustainability to branding. Ethical communication must reflect genuine structural commitment to ecological and social resilience.

Theoretical Framework: Justice-Oriented Sustainability Communication Model

The framework proposes that ethical communication acts as the connecting mechanism between:

- Environmental Sustainability
- Economic Moral Responsibility
- Structural Social Justice

Structural Equality

Ethical communication must challenge systemic exclusions within production, representation, and market participation.

Dignity-Based Representation

Participatory narrative practices and experiential knowledge are essential for inclusive sustainability communication.

Ecological Moral Economy

Sustainability narratives must align with ethical production practices and ecological balance.

Integrated Model

Sustainability communication gains legitimacy only when environmental responsibility, moral economic practice, and social equality are integrated within a single ethical framework.

Discussion

The proposed framework reframes ethical communication as a democratic and participatory process. Green narratives must move beyond symbolic representation towards meaningful inclusion and structural empowerment. Ethical sustainability communication must avoid both environmental greenwashing and social exclusion by ensuring dignity-centred representation and transparent economic ethics.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

Theoretical Implications

- Expands sustainable marketing theory by integrating Dalit philosophical perspectives.

- Positions dignity and structural equality as core components of ethical communication.

Managerial Implications

- Encourage participatory narrative practices.
- Align sustainability messaging with inclusive supply-chain practices.
- Integrate social justice considerations into sustainability communication strategies.

II.CONCLUSION

This study reimagines ethical communication in sustainable marketing through a Dalit philosophical framework. By integrating structural equality, dignity-based representation, and ecological moral economy, sustainability communication evolves from a compliance-based exercise into a transformative ethical practice. Future research may explore empirical applications of this framework across industries and cultural contexts.

III.REFERENCES

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