

# **Green Brand Identity and B2B Channel Partners' Tactical Green Marketing Orientation: Moderating Effect of Brand Governance**

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## **Abstract**

Even though environmental values and sustainable branding have garnered much attention in the B2C context, B2B contexts remain relatively less explored. This study introduces a novel synthesis of Signaling theory and Stewardship theory and examines the moderating impact of brand governance on the relationship between green brand identity, consistent communication and channel partner commitment, leading to tactical green marketing orientation. Distinguishing itself from previous research, our approach embraces a multi-perspective lens, delving into the viewpoints of both channel partners and organizations (i.e. managers). Employing an explanatory sequential mixed method design, the first phase involved an empirical survey with 248 respondents (Study 1). Subsequently, the second phase (Study 2) comprised qualitative interviews with 41 respondents. The findings from both studies converged, revealing a positive association between "consistent communication" and "attitude," a robust connection between "attitude" and "commitment," and a favorable correlation between "green brand identity" and "attitude," ultimately leading to a positive relationship between "attitude" and "green tactical marketing orientation. This research significantly contributes to the comprehension of B2B green brand positioning by

demonstrating, that in the B2B context, brand governance influences channel partners' commitment and tactical green marketing orientation

**Keywords:** Attitude, Brand Governance, Consistent Communication, Green Brand Identity, Green Marketing Orientation

## **1. Introduction**

Green brand positioning in the Business-to-business (B2B) context has not been extensively explored. There is limited knowledge about the development of effective brand positioning strategies within the B2B context - how brands navigate the complex landscape of factors like value, risk, and competition to successfully project themselves as environmentally conscious entities (Casidy & Lie, 2023; Iyer et al., 2023).

While the spotlight has increasingly turned to sustainability branding (Casidy & Lie, 2023; Olsen et al., 2014), amplified by environmental factors such as climate change, an important concern underlying green branding is the potential for firms to exploit a green image solely for transactional motives (Riquelme & Román, 2014; Schmuck et al., 2018). Firms with a clear strategic direction have the opportunity to be both competitive and environmentally friendly in practice - for example, making strategic investments in low-carbon technologies and research and development projects, which can be incorporated as specific goals in an organization's long-term business plan (Papadas et al., 2017). However, to achieve a balance between business competitiveness and ethical environmental practices, firms also need to adopt a tactical green marketing orientation (TGMO) within their overall strategic marketing operations, which includes taking short-term steps to transition to a greener marketing mix.

The tactical steps a firm may take to develop a green brand approach include product-related decisions like environmentally friendly packaging and constituents, promotion tools that

engage social media and blogs for pro-environment dialogues, commitment to a greener supply chain, and pricing strategies that consider end-user support (Papadas et al., 2017). With such choices, businesses can distinguish themselves from greenwashed rivals who make token moves to boost their brand recognition and organisational performance (Papadas et al., 2019).

Existing research has mainly examined green brand positioning in the B2C context (Rahman et al., 2023), and most studies have used a single-informant approach from the buyers' perspective (e.g., Casidy et al., 2018, 2019; Casidy & Lie, 2023; Casidy & Yan, 2022). This creates a gap in understanding, as we do not have adequate knowledge of how the green brand identity positioning of the firm influences the B2B seller's green marketing orientation. It is also noticeable that the majority of the sustainability positioning studies have been conducted in developed markets where sustainable practices have already been adopted by many firms. In contrast, in the emerging (and also developing) markets, the implementation of green branding and sustainability practices is still in its nascent stage (Rehman et al., 2026; Safari et al., 2018). Thus, there is a possibility that in the case of the latter, the adoption of the sustainability practices is not intrinsic to sellers; rather it is influenced by institutional handholding in the form of abidance with norms and incentivizing strategies (Casidy & Yan, 2022; Cobbinah et al., 2015). The focus on tactical green marketing orientation (TGMO), can give firms an advantage of quick feedback which may be fed into the overall strategy of turning the marketing mix into a greener one. Incentivizing through TGMO has also been found to have a direct benefit on the overall organizational performance (Negi et al., 2023).

Another gap in the literature is that prior research (e.g., Casidy & Lie, 2023), has addressed the alignment of buyer-supplier values and its impact on the efficacy of sustainable brand positioning, but there is no discussion of institutional hand-holding via brand governance that may impact commitment to green brand identity. Brand governance encapsulates the

mechanisms through which enterprises establish communication conduits, through online and offline channels, with stakeholders who seek insights into organisations' brand support mechanisms (Hatch & Schultz, 2010). According to Ind and Bjerke (2007), stakeholder involvement in brand co-creation is a facet of brand governance, implying that organizations relinquish a degree of brand control to stakeholders. In essence, the triumph of brands seeking to portray themselves as environmentally conscious does not rest solely on their sustainability initiatives. Instead, effective brand governance strategies assume a critical role in enhancing stakeholder awareness, fostering trust, and nurturing commitment. This not only safeguards a company's reputation but also reinforces its commitment to sustainable practices, building genuine trust among customers and stakeholders alike. Companies that weave sustainability into their brand governance strategies are likely to be better poised to authentically communicate their green brand identity to stakeholders.

In this study, we draw on both communication and sustainability literature by adopting signaling theory (Spence, 2002) and stewardship theory (Donaldson & Davis, 1991) as our lenses to explore the research question:

*RQ: “How does brand governance influence channel partners in communicating a brand's sustainability practices to consumers, and what role does consistent communication play in fostering the development of a tactical green marketing orientation among these channel partners?”*

Signaling theory (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Spence, 2002) suggests that organizations send out market signals (through online and offline communication) in terms of the display of specific attributes or characteristics (e.g., green initiatives and values), to signal their qualities and intentions to customers, which help in reducing information asymmetry to build trust between the parties. Stewardship theory, on the other hand, suggests how organizations manage and

safeguard their brands while considering the interests of various stakeholders. Both signaling and stewardship theory frameworks connect very well with brand governance which essentially refers to the set of practices, policies, and strategies, including the brand's messaging, that a company employs to manage and protect its brand's integrity, reputation, and value and building stakeholder commitment (Séguin & Abeza, 2019).

We have used a mixed method sequential explanatory design to gather data in two distinct phases - quantitative followed by qualitative (Creswell et al., 2003)- to investigate the research question. The first phase of our study was conducted to arrive at a general understanding of our research problem, while the more in-depth exploration of participants' views in the second phase helped us to explain the statistical results gathered in the previous phase further (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998; Creswell 2003).

By unravelling the complex dynamics that shape green branding in the B2B context, this study establishes the positive role played by brand governance in forming attitudes and commitment among channel partners. The study is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review followed by the theoretical framework in Section 3; Hypotheses and model development are explained in Section 4. Section 5 discusses the methodology and Section 6 discusses the results of the two studies (quantitative and qualitative). Section 7 discusses the theoretical contribution followed by practical contributions in Section 8. Section 9 concludes the study followed by the study limitations and agenda for future research discussed in Section 10.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Brand Governance*

It has been acknowledged in literature since long the significance of branding for a company's success (Helm & Jones, 2010). Several researchers explored the role of brand governance from

diverse perspectives such as associating brand co-creation with brand governance (Hatch & Schultz, 2010), brand governance implications while managing brand instability and capital market reputation (Kambara, 2010), the role of brand governance in regional brand building (Lucarelli & Giovanardi, 2016). An entire gamut of literature emerged on - relating brand governance to an experience-centric perspective (Merrilees, 2017), SME's brand orientation (Renton & Richard, 2019), and entrepreneurial marketers protecting core brand values through brand governance (Renton & Richard, 2020). Implications for brand governance have also been seen in the context of the sports industry (Taks et al., 2020), and performance consequences and conflicts for export channel partners (Pyper & Doherty, 2022).

Companies invest substantial resources in both financial and temporal aspects to introduce new brands and exploit existing ones to gain a competitive edge (Kumar, 2003). At the same time, while brand equity may be pivotal for an organization's prospective value generation capability (Helm & Jones, 2010), it concurrently faces intricate challenges arising from how the brand is managed. Such challenges arise in an interconnected society in which digital media (e.g., social media) increases the proliferation of communication touchpoints among stakeholders, as well as the perils associated with it (Helm & Jones, 2010). Brand governance has been seen as a paradigm for brand governance whereby the upper management or leadership in an organization establishes guidelines, standards, and protocols for communication (Helm & Jones, 2010; Ind & Bjerke, 2007). These may encompass components such as name, logo, typography, symbols, colour, or form – which are typically overseen by mid-level management (Zaichkowsky, 2010). Thus, by providing channel partners with predefined templates, content guidelines, and approved messaging, brand governance may minimise the risk of miscommunication.

While organisations seek to contribute to a sustainable environment by having lesser carbon footprints, they also want to partner with suppliers to cultivate green practices (Bommenahalli Veerabhadrapa et al., 2023). Brand governance can ensure that the brand identity is linked to a company's presentation of itself (Alessandri, 2001), and that channel partners remain updated on green branding elements through nomenclature, graphics, and promotional media updates to convey a consistent image (Cian & Cervai, 2014). As stakeholders are likely to form judgments about the brand based on the information they receive about the distinctiveness of the company's social responsibility (Melewar et al., 2017), coordinated brand governance may generate trust and motivate channel partners to align themselves closely with the brand's values. Partners who share these values are more likely to commit to convincing customers about the brand's green messaging and contribute to a cohesive green brand narrative. Thus, brand governance will enable managers to gauge how green brand communication is received by the channel partners to create the right motivations which can positively impact commitment.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

In this study, we have used a combination of signaling theory (Spence, 2002) and stewardship theory (Donaldson & Davis, 1991) to explore the interaction between brand governance, green brand identity communication and its effects on B2B suppliers' commitment and subsequent green marketing orientation.

As per stewardship theory (Davis et al., 1997; Donaldson & Davis, 1991) there is a relationship between stakeholders and the governance structures of an organisation (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). The concept of stewardship theory finds its roots in psychology and sociology and was developed to analyse scenarios where executives, acting as stewards, are driven to prioritise the best interests of those they represent (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). When faced with a choice between actions benefiting the organization and those serving their interests, stewards,

according to the theory, consistently align their behavior with the organization's goals. Ultimately, this benefits external owners (investors, shareholders) and managerial superiors, as their goals are advanced by the steward's actions. Stewardship theory posits a strong correlation between organizational success and the satisfaction of those represented (principals). A steward with a pro-organizational stance is driven to maximize organizational performance, concurrently addressing the diverse interests of shareholders (Davis & Donaldson, 1997). Importantly, this perspective acknowledges the awareness of a trade-off between personal needs and organizational objectives. Nonetheless, the steward believes that by actively contributing to organizational goals, personal needs will be met. The theory emphasizes intrinsic rewards that are challenging to quantify, encompassing opportunities for personal growth, affiliation, and achievement.

Therefore, there isn't a fundamental issue with executive motivation, the challenge may lie in the alignment of governance protocols of the organisation. To the extent the protocols provide clear and consistent job expectations and authorise and empower senior management, governance structures will facilitate the achievement of this objective (Donaldson & Davis, 1991, 1994). Stewardship theory provides an important lens to suggest that green standards, protocols, and guidelines provided and emphasised by managers as stewards to suppliers will elicit positive attitudes and commitment.

Signaling theory, as posited by Spence (2002), focuses on minimising information asymmetry between parties. Spence's groundbreaking work in 1973, particularly in labour markets, exemplifies how individuals, such as job applicants, employ actions to diminish information gaps that impede employers' selection processes. In this context, Spence showcased how high-calibre job candidates set themselves apart through prominent signals, such as rigorous higher education. This pioneering research laid the groundwork for an extensive body of literature



applying signaling theory across diverse disciplines, ranging from anthropology to zoology (Bird & Smith, 2005).

Management scholars have applied the theory to highlight an information asymmetry between customers and firms regarding the quality of products and services. This information gap arises from firms possessing superior knowledge about their product or service quality compared to customers. Consequently, this information disparity poses challenges in discerning between high and low-quality products (Almutairi, 2006). Firms, in response to this informational imbalance, employ signaling strategies to establish the credibility of their product or service quality (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Rao et al., 1999). A "signal" refers to a tangible action taken by the seller to convey reliable information about the underlying, unobservable product quality to the buyer (Rao et al., 1999). A brand, acting as an effective and credible signal, embodies the firm's reputation, serving as a quick and reliable heuristic for assessing product or service quality (Erdem & Swait, 1998). In the realm of green brand identity, firms leverage their brand names as signals to cultivate a perception among customers that these names epitomise eco-friendliness, thereby mitigating the risks associated with a purchase. A brand's signal can alleviate customer uncertainty and simplify the decision-making process.

Consistent green brand stewardship and signaling play a crucial role in establishing a green brand identity through a conscientious approach (Kapital et al., 2022) built on responsibility and commitment to innovative green brand practices (Iglesias and Ind, 2020). As indicated by Rahman et al. (2023), recognizing the possibilities and challenges arising from global climate change strengthens the correlation between industrial brand value and long-term creditworthiness. Proactive environmental initiatives and positioning through technological, operational, and managerial resources are crucial for corporate image and branding in the implementation of sustainability-based business models (Martin-de Castro, 2021). The integration of these factors, as also indicated by Pattinson et al. (2023), enables organizations

to deliver multi-value benefits to stakeholders. Digital channels like social media, vlogs, blogs, and websites are essential to reflect the common values of the company and promote user interaction and trust (Zhang & Hon, 2020). Digital channels enable exchanges and discussions about sustainability-driven products, disseminating knowledge, and engaging with different customer groups (Belz, & Peattie, 2012).

Therefore, through consistent green brand identity communication, leveraging digital channels to send signals, and providing institutional support, brands can foster pro-green attitudes and commitment in the channel partner leading to the development of TGMO.

#### **4. Hypotheses and Model Development**

##### ***Green Brand Identity Elements Promotion and Attitude Formation among Channel Partners***

Typically, promotions and advertising have three key functions, i.e., to remind, to inform, and to persuade purchasing or trying the product. However, the purpose of green branding or green promotion is to create awareness and strong attitudes toward the brand's offerings (D'Souza & Taghian, 2005). Organisations are increasingly focused on positioning their brands as environmentally conscious entities, and achieving this involves precise communication and differentiation from competitors, with an emphasis on the brand's eco-friendly attributes (Cronin, Jr et al., 2011; Pickett et al., 1995). Developing a green brand identity through strategic green brand positioning is a vital aspect of green marketing strategies (Coddington, 1993). Consequently, brand professionals should prioritise the creation of a distinct green brand identity to gain a competitive edge in emerging green markets (Gong et al., 2020).

The evolving landscape of digital technology has prompted organisations and their partners to make a shift from conventional marketing strategies toward digital channels which wield a growing influence. The adoption of digital channels, coupled with organisational and

environmental factors, acts as a catalyst for innovation (Khan et al., 2019). Among prominent platforms, Websites, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram stand out in terms of user base, underscoring users' trust in these platforms as sources of information. Additionally, visual branding cues, including the use of colours like green or blue in logos, environmentally conscious taglines, content focused on awareness, shapes, labels, and graphics, hold significance beyond their aesthetic appeal (Magnier & Schoormans, 2015; Pancer et al., 2017). These elements, along with the visual representation of the product itself, often carry an implicit message of sustainability or a commitment to eco-friendliness (Moltaji, 2018). Importantly, consumers tend to categorise products based on these visual cues, which subsequently form their initial perceptions influencing purchasing choices (Gong et al., 2020). In a parallel vein, channel partners who are aware of the prominence of these green branding elements on digital platforms can strategically harness these cues (Mehdikhani & Valmohammadi, 2022). By aligning their messaging with the visible sustainability facets of the brand, channel partners can effectively persuade their customers and encourage them to validate claims through available digital channels.

Thus, the visibility of green branding elements on digital channels not only enhances the visual appeal of products but also serves as a persuasive tool for channel partners (Brown et al., 2011; Brown et al., 2019). This alignment allows partners to tap into the consumers' eco-conscious mindset thereby shaping their attitudes and fostering a shared commitment to sustainability.

Hence, we propose:

**H1:** Green brand identity elements on digital channels have a significant positive effect on forming the attitude among channel partners

### *Consistent Communication and Attitude*

Continuous communication about green initiatives, including green advertising on online and offline channels, significantly impacts both individual consumers (B2C) and organizational consumers (B2B) by conveying information and signals about product sustainability (Sultan et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2015). Additionally, incentives and subsidies play a pivotal role in influencing green orientation among B2B consumers (Ting et al., 2019).

In the realm of brand identity implementation, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) emphasise the necessity of communicating the brand identity to organisational members and partners (p.89), while de Chernatony et al. (2006) highlight the presentation of the brand to stakeholders through marketing communications (p.53). Integrated marketing communication plays a crucial role in manifesting an organisation's brand identity (Madhavaram et al., 2005) and all stakeholders are equally important for inclusion in the communication strategy (Bendixen et al., 2004). Consistent brand communication is a cornerstone in shaping channel partners' attitudes (Murphy & Sashi, 2018), particularly when advocating environmental friendliness (Yang et al., 2015). This practice engenders trust and credibility by transparently conveying the brand's dedication to sustainability (Bommenahalli Veerabhadrapa et al., 2023). The practice of consistent communication is instrumental in guiding partners to harmonise their attitudes with the brand's eco-friendly stance (Luu, 2021). Consistent messaging also diminishes cognitive dissonance, reinforcing positive perceptions (Koponen et al., 2019). Moreover, this approach solidifies the brand's identity as an environmentally responsible entity. It establishes shared norms and values, influencing partners to adopt attitudes congruent with the brand's established ethos (Bommenahalli Veerabhadrapa et al., 2023; Sultan et al., 2020). The enduring engagement facilitated by consistent communication deepens emotional connections between the brand and its partners, promoting lasting, positive attitudes (Bommenahalli Veerabhadrapa et al., 2023).

Consistent brand communication propels attitude formation among channel partners, catalyzing a collective commitment to environmental stewardship. By fostering trust, capitalising on psychological principles, and building shared values, brands can influence partners' attitudes and behaviours, forging a resilient alliance dedicated to sustainability. Hence, we propose:

**H2:** Consistent communication practices have a significant positive effect on forming the attitude among channel partners

### *Attitude and Commitment*

Research on attitude formation and transformation can be understood through persuasion process paradigms, such as Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model (ELM) and Buck et al. 's affect-reason-involvement model (ARI) (1995). These models differentiate central and peripheral methods in the former, and rational and emotional approaches in the latter, emphasizing that greater subject involvement leads to increased cognitive elaboration, with the ARI model highlighting the role of emotional involvement in profound emotional elaboration. In the ELM, attitudes formed via the central route involve intensive cognitive processing, critically evaluating information central to the object (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). In contrast, attitudes formed via the peripheral route involve simpler inference processes or emotional associations, often influenced by emotionally charged brand advertising (Edell & Burke, 1987).

In the context of green marketing, numerous scholars have emphasized the effectiveness of cognitive persuasion strategies, assuming heightened stakeholder engagement with environmental concerns due to growing awareness (Fuller, 1999). Green marketing research predominantly adopts a cognitive orientation, with studies demonstrating the significant influence of environmental knowledge and consciousness on attitudes toward the environment

(Hines et al., 1987; Stone et al., 1995). Consequently, many scholars have advocated rational persuasion strategies in terms of aligning brand positioning with comprehensive information about environmental product benefits for catering to consumer informational needs (Peattie, 1995). Organisations employ both avenues to foster a green brand attitude by promoting their green brand identity (Hartmann et al., 2005).

The proliferation of information and communication technologies has led B2B channel partners to be influenced by various communications from the organisations to endorse their green initiatives. Channel partners' attitude encapsulates their comprehensive assessment, perception, or inclination towards a brand, product, service, or business entity with which they share a professional relationship (Mo et al., 2020). This perspective materialises through a fusion of beliefs, emotions, and interactions tied to the brand or company. Such attitudes can be categorised as positive, negative, or neutral, and wield influence over their conduct, interactions, and decisions within the partnership. Numerous factors contribute to the formation of attitudes, including the partner's experiences with the brand, its reputation, perceived partnership value, value alignment, product or service quality, and the brand's communication and interaction strategies (Nilsson, 2019). Positive attitudes typically foster greater commitment, loyalty, and engagement from channel partners, while negative attitudes can lead to reduced cooperation and satisfaction within the partnership (Fock et al., 2010).

In earlier research, scholars delving into organisational and social psychology contexts delineated three distinct motivations or commitments (affective/emotional, calculative/continuance, and normative) underpinning the propensity for continuity (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Additionally, it is suggested that marketing managers can strengthen channel partnerships by being aware of the three unique forms of attitudinal commitments when devising tactics and strategies for channel management (Kelly, 2004).

Commitment has been defined as ‘an implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity between exchange partners’ (Dwyer et al., 1987, p.19). Zaltman and Deshpandé (1992, p.316) describe it as a ‘persistent inclination to sustain a cherished relationship’. This suggests that both partners are willing to make immediate concessions for the sake of long-term advantages in the partnership (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). Commitment, as a psychological and emotional state, is characterized by a resolute dedication and attachment to specific goals, relationships, causes, or courses of action (Sharma et al., 2015). It encompasses a willingness to invest time, effort, and resources, coupled with a sense of responsibility and obligation to uphold the commitments made (Zafari et al., 2023). Commitment manifests in various forms, influencing attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making, often serving as a driving force behind sustained, enduring engagement (Gounaris, 2005; Gustafsson et al., 2005; Stanko et al., 2007). Many researchers (e.g., Brown et al., 2019; Ganesan et al., 2010; Kelly, 2004; Kim et al., 2011; Sharma et al., 2015) have extended this framework to the context of channel partner relationships.

Attitude formation regarding a brand's green practices wields a profound and positive influence on cultivating normative, affective, and calculative commitment among channel partners (Hartmann et al., 2005). This argument underscores the pivotal role that positive attitudes play in fostering different dimensions of commitment. In the subsequent paragraphs, we will first briefly discuss each commitment followed by how they get impacted by the attitude. We also propose our macro-level hypothesis as:

**H3:** A positive attitude about the brand will have a significant positive impact on the commitment of channel partners

**Normative Commitment (NC):** Normative commitment refers to the commitment that arises from a sense of moral or ethical obligation to fulfill promises or responsibilities (Allen &

Meyer, 1990). It is based on alignment with shared values, norms, and principles. In the context of partnerships, normative commitment signifies a partner's commitment due to a belief in the moral significance of upholding their role and responsibilities in the relationship. Commitment predominantly includes the motivation and attitude to continue a relationship (Cater & Zabkar, 2009). NC is driven by a sense of duty and the desire to act following established norms (Beatson et al., 2006).

When channel partners develop favourable attitudes towards a brand's green practices, they internalise the brand's commitment to sustainability (Hartmann et al., 2005). This alignment of values triggers a sense of moral obligation and shared ethical standards. Partners are more likely to view the brand as a like-minded collaborator, resulting in heightened normative commitment (Cater & Zabkar, 2009; Malhotra & DF, 2007). They feel compelled to uphold the partnership due to the belief in common principles and collective responsibility toward environmental stewardship.

**Calculative Commitment (CC):** Calculative commitment also known as continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990) reflects the extent to which exchange partners perceive the need to preserve a relationship to avoid the switching costs involved in leaving (Ganesan et al., 2010). It is rooted in a rational evaluation of the benefits and costs associated with maintaining a commitment. Partners with CC weigh the advantages and disadvantages of continuing the relationship and make decisions based on the perceived outcomes (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). In partnerships, calculative commitment is driven by the consideration of tangible gains, financial benefits, and the cost-effectiveness of remaining committed (Cater & Zabkar, 2009).

Positive attitudes towards a brand's green practices also have a favourable impact on calculative commitment. When partners perceive the brand's eco-friendly efforts positively, they associate



the partnership with added value. The alignment of attitudes with the brand's sustainability objectives enhances the perceived benefits of the partnership, both financially and ethically. This, in turn, reinforces calculative commitment by highlighting the strategic advantages of collaborating with a brand that mirrors its values.

**Affective Commitment:** On the other hand, affective commitment signifies emotional and social bonding with a partner in a transactional context (Allen & Meyer, 1990), stemming from emotions such as loyalty, affiliation, and recognition (J. R. Brown et al., 2019; Cater & Zabkar, 2009; Ganesan et al., 2010; Jain et al., 2014). This type of commitment embodies sentiments of dedication and steadfastness, showcasing the favorable emotions a party holds for its collaborative partner (Fullerton, 2003; Gounaris, 2005). Affective commitment is marked by emotional association, active participation, and alignment with a commitment or relationship (Brown et al., 2019). Those who possess affective commitment experience a profound emotional link and allegiance to the partnership (Cater & Zabkar, 2009; Jain et al., 2014). In partnerships, this commitment arises from a sincere concern for the relationship and a wish to nurture it through emotional investment and mutual positive encounters (Gustafsson et al., 2005). This variable has a strong presence in marketing literature, for instance, Cassidy & Lie (2023) unveiled the crucial function of calculative and affective commitment in mediating the connection between sustainable brand positioning in B2B scenarios, willingness to pay a higher price, and the intention to switch. They observed that value congruence negatively moderates the effects of sustainable brand positioning on affective commitment. Contrastingly, a study conducted by (Ma & Zhang, 2022) surveyed 245 pairs of sales managers from Chinese B2B manufacturing companies and discovered that the utilisation of relational gatekeepers contributes to the cultivation of sales managers-purchasing manager guanxi. This, in turn, enhances emotional commitment to the sales manager, consequently amplifying the effectiveness of the sales gatekeeping strategy.

Attitude formation rooted in positive perceptions of a brand's green initiatives nurtures affective commitment among channel partners. Partners' affinity for the brand's eco-friendly endeavors creates an emotional bond, which in turn will solidify the partnership. Thus, the formation of positive attitudes regarding a brand's green practices is a linchpin in establishing robust normative, affective, and calculative commitment among channel partners. These attitudes foster a deepened sense of shared values, emotional connection, and perceived mutual benefits. Therefore, we propose:

**H3a:** A positive attitude about the brand will have a significant positive impact on the affective commitment of channel partners

**H3b:** A positive attitude about the brand will have a significant positive impact on the normative commitment of channel partners

**H3c:** A positive attitude about the brand will have a significant positive impact on the calculative commitment of channel partners

#### *Commitment and Tactical Green Marketing Orientation*

The green marketing literature ascertains three main pillars of orientation, namely strategic green marketing, tactical green marketing, and internal green marketing (Chamorro, 2009; Leonidou & Leonidou, 2011; Papadas et al., 2017). Strategic green marketing orientation (SGMO) denotes enduring, high-level managerial efforts and policies that specifically target the corporate environmental strategy (Banerjee, 2002), forward-looking environmental approaches (Aragón-Correa, 1998), and engagement with external environmental stakeholders (M. Polonsky, 2011). An instance of SGMO might involve forming partnerships with entities aligned with relevant environmental policies. Internal green marketing orientation (IGMO) encompasses spreading environmental principles throughout the company to establish a

broader corporate culture of sustainability (Papadas & Avlonitis, 2014). This includes training employees, fostering environmental consciousness within the organization (Charter & Polonsky, 1999; McDaniel & Rylander, 1993; Wells et al., 2015), and taking on environmental leadership roles (Ramus, 2001). Finally, Tactical Green Marketing Orientation (TGMO) involves short-term strategies that adapt the traditional marketing mix to prioritise environmental considerations (Papadas et al., 2017). The TGMO dimensions include product-related decisions aimed at minimising environmental impact (Devashish et al., 2003), adopting promotion tools such as green brand identity elements highlighting products' environmental benefits (Kilbourne et al., 2002), actions to enhance the environmental performance of the supply chain (Zhu & Sarkis, 2004), and adjusting pricing policies for eco-friendly products (Chen, 2001). These tactics provide flexibility for firms aiming to be sustainable and protect the environment (Ottman, 1993).

We have mainly considered TGMO as the focus of our study to investigate the green branding elements (identity) and their impact on channel partner's orientation through attitude and commitment.

Effective promotion plays a pivotal role in TGMO since the success of green strategies hinges on clear communication (Prothero, 1998). Promotional tactics such as green brand identity (Hartmann et al., 2005), awareness campaigns on digital platforms, environmental sponsorships (Papadas et al., 2017), product changes driven by environmental concerns, and concrete environmental initiatives (Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001). Digital platforms like social media, blogs, WhatsApp business accounts, and websites can enhance this dialogue by openly engaging in discussions about eco-friendly products, educating consumers, and fostering authenticity (Belz, & Peattie, 2012), engaging with new and strategic audiences. Further, in distribution programs, TGMO includes collaboration with channel partners to

identify reduction and reuse opportunities, promoting eco-friendly packaging, product benefits such as energy saving, urging end customers to return recyclable materials etc. (Leonidou et al., 2013). Green marketing orientation requires long-term commitment (Papadas et al., 2017). Through consistent communication and governance, over time, the channel partners will show commitment and develop TGMO, signifying a transition towards sustainability. Therefore, at the macro level, we propose:

**H4:** Commitment from channel partners will have a significant positive impact on TGMO.

In channel literature, the emotional bond that a company forms with its partner is termed affective commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990). This commitment involves the company's strong connection, loyalty, and allegiance to its partner, signifying the company's identification with them (Ganesan et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2011). When it comes to affective commitment, channel partners with strong affective commitment are likely to behave in two ways: 1) they are likely to maintain a positive relationship (Jain et al., 2014) with the brand hence, will form a green marketing orientation, or 2) they are genuinely concerned by the climate change and feel obligated, and therefore will push environment-friendly features of the products to their customers. The literature conveys that the underlying characteristics of affective commitment are based on the feelings of identification, loyalty, and affiliation (Gilliland & Bello, 2002) which means effectively committed channel partners experience a feeling of being part of the supplier network, resulting in a strong connection and attachment to the suppliers. Affective commitment stems from identification, shared values, belongingness, dedication, and similarity (Fullerton, 2003), so it is highly likely that channel partners align their marketing orientation with the principal organization (Papadas et al., 2017) and subsequently adopt environment-friendly practices. They may switch to green practices such as the use of digital channels for their promotions (setting up their business profile on Google, using Google

location services for easy finding, Google SEO, and Google reviews, etc.). Channel partners who feel emotionally connected to green initiatives may become passionate advocates for sustainable products. This could result in more genuine and compelling marketing campaigns. Affective commitment can lead to longer-term partnerships between channel partners and companies (Fullerton, 2003) that prioritize green initiatives. These partners may be more willing to invest time and effort into developing sustainable marketing practices while focusing on building relationships with environmentally-conscious consumers and leveraging shared values to create a loyal customer base.

**H4a:** Affective commitment of channel partners may have a significant positive impact on the tactical green marketing orientation

In the context of TGMO, channel partners with a strong normative commitment to environmental sustainability may align their marketing strategies with eco-friendly practices. Channel partners may prioritize promoting environmentally friendly products, even if these products might have slightly higher costs (Papadas et al., 2017). In the global landscape of climate change, environmental issues are a rising concern with customers. This is also a core competitive aspect in product markets (Belz, & Peattie, 2012; Prothero & McDonagh, 2014). The broader adoption of environment-friendly products is evident across consumer goods industries such as clothing (Fuentes, 2015), electronics (Gershoff & Frels, 2015), and also services and tourism (Wells et al., 2015).

As companies recognize and demonstrate sustainable consumption through green brands, suppliers may engage in educating consumers about the benefits of green products, helping them make informed choices that align with sustainability goals. Since a majority of customers focus on low energy consumption, and they use digital channels for information, a channel partner intervention could be useful. Channel partners can use green branding elements to

foster customers' trust and use marketing messages that highlight the positive environmental impact of products, emphasizing the importance of sustainable consumption. Moreover, they follow the compliance and advocate reuse-reduce-recycle policy, targeting to become a paperless office, or sending and receiving communication using digital channels such as email, SMS, WhatsApp, etc. Hence, we propose:

**H4b:** Normative commitment of channel partners may have a significant positive impact on the tactical green marketing orientation

As discussed in the preceding section, calculative commitment (CC) refers to commitment based on rational assessments of the costs and benefits of maintaining a relationship (Cater & Zabkar, 2009). In the context of green marketing, the motivation of channel partners could be bi-directional, unless they have clarity on product benefits and incentives. Channel partners with CC might weigh the financial gains over promoting eco-friendly products with low margins. The study supports that partners with CC might engage in green marketing if they identify a growing market trend toward sustainability, recognizing it as a business opportunity or see a clear financial advantage (Kim et al., 2011), such as increased consumer demand for environmentally friendly products or additional incentives (e.g. complementary holidays, cash incentives, or recognitions like 'partner of the year'), otherwise it will refute the underlying cause (Hartmann et al., 2005). These partners may carefully evaluate the costs of adopting green marketing strategies, such as training staff or adjusting supply chains, against potential benefits like higher sales or improved brand reputation. Hence, we propose:

**H4c:** Calculative commitment of channel partners may have a significant negative impact on the tactical green marketing orientation

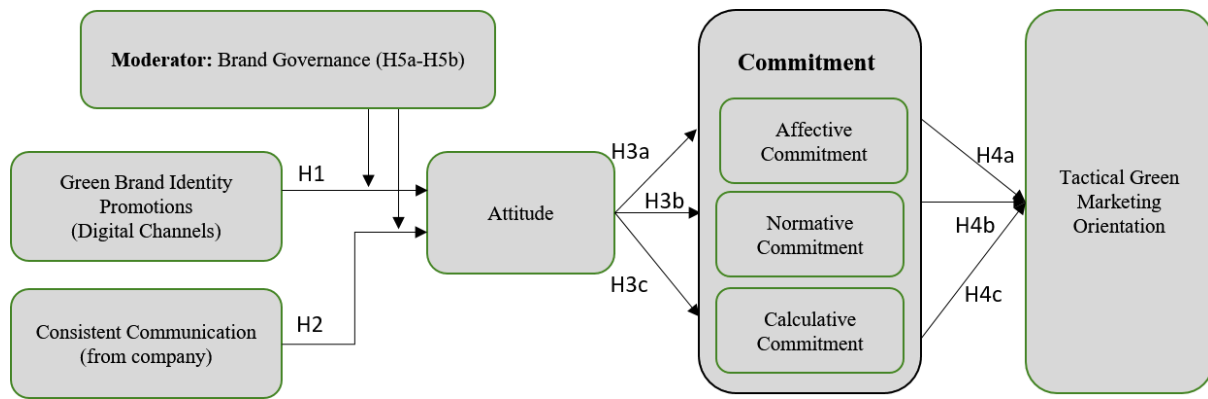
Companies allocate significant resources, both in terms of finances and time, to establish new brands and leverage existing ones, to secure a competitive edge (Kumar, 2003). At the same time, while brand equity stands as a crucial factor in an organization's potential to generate value (Helm & Jones, 2010), it faces intricate challenges related to its management. These challenges are palpable in a digital media-driven society, especially with social platforms being the site of amplified communication with stakeholders, along with the associated risks (Helm & Jones, 2010). A strong brand can create superior value and competitive advantage if well managed and nurtured and can be a source of value in the long term (Helm & Jones, 2010). Brand governance thus emerges as a vital paradigm for managing brands, which involves information exchange, solidarity and interactive engagement with stakeholders (Renton & Richard, 2019).

Consistent communication to keep channel partners well-informed about green identity aspects fosters a consistent brand image (Cian & Cervai, 2014), and adopting a well-coordinated brand governance strategy will motivate channel partners to closely align with the brand's core values. Therefore, we propose:

**H5a:** Brand Governance moderates the relationship between the visibility of green brand identity elements and the channel partner's attitude

**H5b:** Brand Governance moderates the relationship between consistent communication and the channel partner's attitude

Based on our hypotheses, the research model is developed as shown in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1.** Research Model

## 5. Methodology

To explore our hypotheses further, we adopted a mixed methods study following the paradigm of ‘explanatory sequential design’ (Creswell et al., 2006; Creswell & Clark, 2017). Employing this methodology, we initially tested our conceptual model in phase 1 using quantitative methods. Subsequently, in phase 2, we conducted a qualitative study through semi-structured interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of our initial quantitative findings. According to Dwivedi et al. (2023), using an explanatory sequential mixed-method design enables researchers to gradually integrate important underlying theories into a proposed conceptual model for tracking, exploration, and validation. Also, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies enables integration in an explanatory sequential design at the levels of methods, interpretation, and reporting through narrative and the use of results joint display (McTigue & McCrudden, 2019). Moreover, the imperative to foster more sustainable societies highlights the necessity for multidisciplinary research and systematic approaches that encompass the environmental, economic, social, and technical dimensions of sustainability, as emphasized by Pappas et al. (2023).

### 5.1 Phase 1 - Quantitative Study

#### Sample and Data

The data were collected from 248 channel partners in India specializing in global lifestyle brands. These partners, engaged in the sale of goods, received instructions and updates on



sustainability initiatives from their principal organizations. These partners were selling diverse lifestyle products such as televisions, washing machines, laptops, printers, and smartphones from multinational companies like Samsung, HP, Luminous, OnePlus, Apple, LG, Panasonic, Lenovo, Hitachi, and Philips, among others. Each organization boasts a diverse product range, global recognition for innovation, and a commitment to achieving sustainability goals by 2030. According to a recent analysis by a market research company (Data Bridge, 2023), the global white goods market (lifestyle products), estimated at USD 700.92 billion in 2022, will rocket up to USD 1,321.57 billion by 2030 and is expected to undergo a CAGR of 8.25% during the forecast period. This growth surge has important implications in the context of the environmental impact (e.g., energy consumption, concerns about hardware recycling ending up in landfills), understanding consumer trends, and the need for compliance with regulations (Dalhammar et al., 2021). Companies are on a fast track to fostering innovation (de Kwant et al., 2021), gaining a competitive edge, and improving supply chain practices (Dalhammar et al., 2021) to ensure long-term viability.

India is selected for four key reasons: Firstly, as the third-largest market globally for electronic products, India is expected to generate USD 73.0 billion in revenue by 2024, with an anticipated annual growth rate of 6.06% from 2024 to 2028. Among various products, the Telephony segment is the largest, projecting a market volume of USD 47.2 billion in 2024. When compared globally, China leads in Consumer Electronics revenue, reaching USD 218.6 billion in 2024, followed by the USA at USD 150 (Statista, 2024). Second, India is experiencing a rising interest in sustainability, providing a crucial context for studying the impact of green brand identity. Third, the distinctive nature of business relationships in a developing economy like India (Berger et al., 2020; Rajan et al., 2020) presents insights into challenges and opportunities linked to sustainability initiatives. This knowledge is valuable for businesses operating in similar environments. Finally, India's implementation of environmental policies

and regulations offers a research opportunity to understand how such regulations influence channel partners' commitment and the development of green marketing strategies in the sustainability context (Jaiswal et al., 2021; Sadorsky, 2021).

We employed a targeted non-probabilistic sampling technique (Campbell et al., 2020) to gather responses from channel partners familiar with green initiatives. Respondents included 117 (47%) dealership owners, 90 (36.3%) store managers, 25 (10%) customer executives, and 16 (6.5%) marketing managers. Additional demographic details, such as age, experience (see Table 1), and partner types (see Table 2), were also collected. Integrating age and experience in partner research addresses generational differences, identifies trends, and enhances strategies and communication (Keeling et al., 2020). There was a considerable range in executives' professional experience, spanning from early-career individuals with two years of experience to managers with up to 25 years of experience in selling electronic products, further ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the partner ecosystem, reducing bias, aligning with Tuten and Urban (2001). Moreover, Varied partner types possess different business models, customer bases, and experiences, influencing their interactions with a brand's offerings. This extensive diversity in industry backgrounds proved advantageous in the research context, allowing researchers to mitigate potential biases stemming from industry-specific factors (Berger et al., 2020). The social desirability bias was overcome by assuring the respondents of full confidentiality and an external data management organisation was hired for survey collection (Ferrerias-Méndez et al., 2022; Krumpal, 2013) from April-June 2023. To address common method bias (CMB), we have used mixed-method research instead of a single research method. The research incorporated various theoretical and empirical approaches suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2012).

### **Table 1**

Respondents' Demographics.

Age (in years)	Experience in years			Total
	<5	5-10	>10	
Less than 25	13	2		15
25-35	27	79	5	111
35-45	5	49	43	97
Above 45	1	3	21	25
<b>Total</b>	46	133	69	248

**Table 2**

Distribution of Channel Partner Type.

	Retailer	Wholesaler	Distributor	Authorised Dealer	Premium Reseller	Total
Single Brand	0	3	8	21	2	34
Multi Brand	0	23	6	185	0	214
<b>Total</b>		26	14	206	2	248

Lifestyle product brands collaborated with channel partners having varying durations of association. Specifically, there were 21 partners associated for less than 5 years, 92 for 5 to 10 years, 86 for 10 to 15 years, 28 within 15-20 years, and 21 for over 20 years. Prominent brands among partners included Samsung (101), Whirlpool (34), Vivo (30), Sony (24), Oppo (20), Realme (15), Apple (14), Voltas (13), Hitachi, and Panasonic (12 each). Additionally, Table 3 presents data on the frequency of marketing collaterals received by channel partners.

**Table 3**

Frequency of Collaterals Received by Channel Partners.

	Every Week	Every Month	Quarterly	Half Yearly	Rarely	Total
Single Brand		4	5	4	21	34
Multi Brand	32	87	37	17	41	214
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>248</b>

The survey contained an inquiry regarding the frequency of receiving marketing materials. In response, participants indicated the frequencies at which they received marketing collaterals from the organization as follows: 32 individuals (12.9%) noted receiving them weekly, 91

individuals (36.7%) received them monthly, 42 individuals (16.9%) received them quarterly, 21 individuals (8.5%) reported receiving them semi-annually, and a significant portion of 62 individuals (25%) mentioned receiving them infrequently. They also shared information about the digital channels where the brand's green identity elements are visible. The most popular channel is Instagram (mentioned by 116 respondents) followed by Facebook (106), YouTube (80), WhatsApp messages (32), and Google Advertisements (20). None of the channel partners mentioned the brand's websites.

### **Survey Questionnaire**

The survey comprised statements on research disclosure and ethical considerations, construct scales, measurements, and details regarding respondents' socio-demographic information. The measurement items in this study were predominantly drawn from earlier studies and responses were gathered using 5-point Likert scales, ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The scale for 'green brand identity' was adapted from two sources, green identity elements (such as green logos, icons, and taglines) from Olsen et al., (2014) and green brand promotion elements from Leonidou et al. (2013c). The six-item scale for measuring consistent communication was adapted from Coleman et al. (2011) and Luu (2021). A five-item scale to measure attitude was adapted from Gong et al. (2020) and Hartmann et al. (2005). Since the scale is available for measuring consumer's attitude towards brand, it was modified in the context of channel partners on 3 fundamental dimensions: quality of communication and association with the brand, trust, and continued intentions (Gong et al., 2020; Olsen et al., 2014), the three components of commitment normative, affective, and calculative from (Cater & Zabkar, 2009; Gounaris, 2005; Kim et al., 2011), 'brand governance' scale from (Pyper & Doherty, 2022), and 'tactical green marketing orientation' (TGMO) from Papadas et al. (2017b). The scales were modified to make them more contextual. To maintain high reliability, 2 items (1 and 9) were deleted from the 'green brand identity' scale and reported evaluations

demonstrated satisfactory results for all measurement scales. The survey items are presented along with their mean values and VIF are presented in Appendix A. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is used to assess multicollinearity in a cause-effect model. A higher VIF indicates a greater degree of multicollinearity, suggesting that the variance of the estimated regression coefficients is inflated due to the high correlation among predictor variables. In our study, all items were found to have  $VIF < 5.0$  indicating a low level of multicollinearity which is desirable (Akinwande et al., 2015)

### **Analysis**

The study employed a two-stage structural equation modeling (SEM) approach to examine the proposed hypotheses. To begin with, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis and checked for reliability, convergent and discriminant validity. Subsequently, PLS-SEM tested hypotheses, measuring consistent communication, green brand identity, brand governance, attitude, commitment, and TGMO with defined scales.

Analyses were conducted using Smart PLS 4.0. The two-stage SEM process addressed reliability and validity, and served as a control for external validity, enhancing model generalizability across contexts (Henseler, 2017). SmartPLS, a software tool for structural equation modeling (SEM), utilizes the Partial Least Squares (PLS) algorithm for analysis. Specifically, it employs a technique known as Partial Least Squares Path Modeling (PLS-PM) for the estimation of relationships and latent variables in structural equation models. We chose PLS-SEM over covariance-based AMOS for two reasons: the tool is suitable for small samples like ours and another is its ability to model latent constructs even for conditions of non-normality and small to medium-sized samples (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011; Hair et al., 2013). Fit indices for both measurement and structural models were computed to assess the model's strength.

### **Results - Factor Analysis, Reliability, and Measurement Model**

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis satisfy the construct reliability and validity requirements. The Cronbach alpha for all the constructs exceeded 0.750, which confirms the data is reliable and free from measurement error ensuring internal consistency (Hair et al., 2013). Additionally, content, convergent, and discriminant validity requirements were also satisfied. The factor loadings of all the constructs exceeded 0.600, satisfying the requirement for content validity (Nunnally, 1978; Portney & Watkins, 2000). The average variance extracted (AVE) values surpassed 0.5, confirming the convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) of items. To evaluate discriminant validity, we employed the Fornell-Lacker (1981) approach. As per the Fornell-Lacker criterion, our findings indicate that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each latent variable exceeds the highest squared correlation between that latent variable and any other latent variable in the model, thus satisfying this criterion (Table 4), which affirms the discriminant validity requirements.

**Table 4**

Reliability and Discriminant Validity Analysis.

	<b>CR</b>	<b>(AVE)</b>	<b>Att</b>	<b>BG</b>	<b>Comm</b>	<b>CC</b>	<b>GBI</b>	<b>TGMO</b>
<b>Att</b>	0.952	0.838	<b>0.916</b>					
<b>BG</b>	0.917	0.801	0.480	<b>0.894</b>				
<b>Comm</b>	0.973	0.804	0.757	0.416	<b>0.897</b>			
<b>CC</b>	0.941	0.772	0.351	0.410	0.304	<b>0.879</b>		
<b>GBI</b>	0.889	0.595	0.149	0.096	0.157	0.106	<b>0.771</b>	
<b>TGMO</b>	0.955	0.816	0.512	0.44	0.47	0.388	0.065	<b>0.903</b>

In the above table, the abbreviations Att, BG, Comm, CC, GBI, and TGMO correspond to Attitude, Brand Governance, Commitment, Consistent Communication, Green Brand Identity, and Tactical GMO, respectively.

Note: 1. CR denotes composite reliability; 2. AVE represents the average variance extracted; 3. The square root of AVEs is displayed in bold on the diagonal for each construct; 4. All values in the correlation matrix are statistically significant at a 99% confidence level.

Additionally, the cross-loading examination assesses whether the loading of each indicator surpasses its loading on any other unrelated construct (Henseler et al., 2009). Furthermore, all indicators exhibited stronger correlations with their respective latent variables rather than with

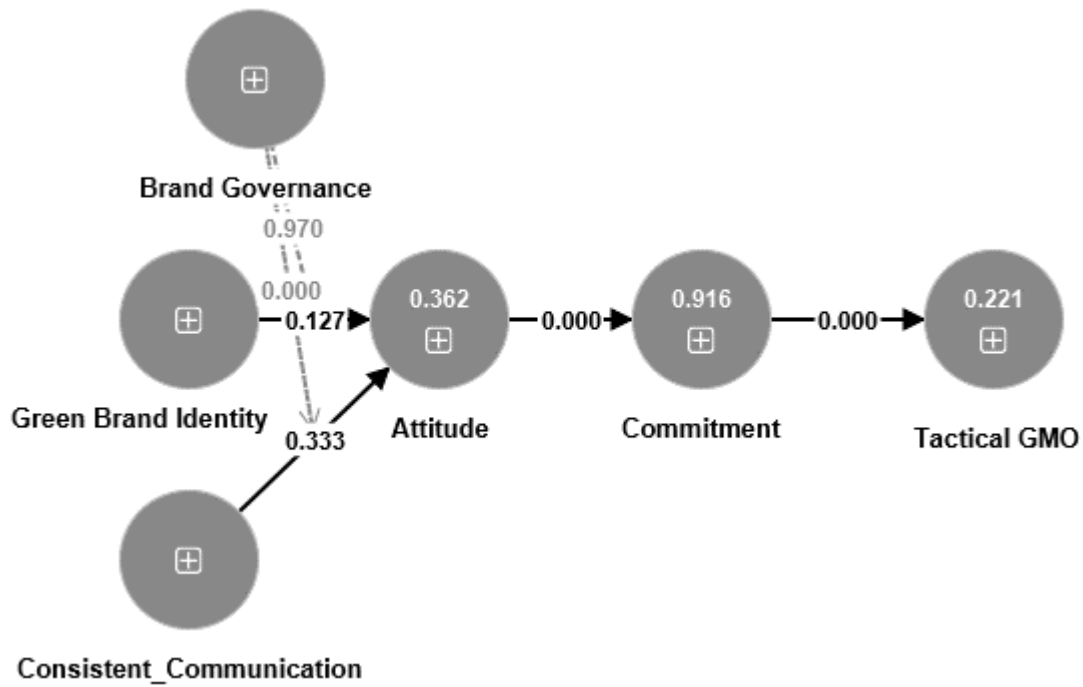
other latent variables within the model. For instance, all variables within commitment (affective, normative, and calculative) were found to be highly correlated, hence the validity was analysed for commitment as a higher-order construct, confirming the appropriateness of the measurement model (see Table 4).

### **Structural Model**

We tested two structural models: In the first structural model we considered commitment as a higher-order construct (combining scales of affective, normative, and calculative commitments), while in the second model, we tested the impact of all three commitments separately with the TGMO.

In the first structural model (Fig.2.), we evaluated four direct paths and two moderating paths (interaction effects of brand governance). It was estimated using the partial least square (PLS) algorithm with significance measured at a 95% confidence level. Our hypotheses H1 and H2 were discarded because of low and insignificant path coefficients ( $p > 0.05$ ), While the path coefficients testing hypotheses H3 and H4 were found to be positive and significant with low values of  $p < 0.05$  (see Table 5). The regression coefficient  $R^2$  for each path is shown in the circles representing each construct in Fig.2.

The interaction/moderation effects hypotheses H5a and Hb showed mixed results. We couldn't observe the effect of brand governance on the relationship between the visibility of green brand identity elements and the attitude formation of channel partners (H5a). Results conclude that there is a strong and positive impact of 'brand governance' with  $\beta = 0.239$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , with confidence interval CI [0.305, 0.174], on the relationship between consistent marketing communication and attitude formation (H5b).



**Fig. 2.** Path Analysis with Commitment as Higher Order Construct

The findings indicate a satisfactory model fit with SRMR = 0.48 (“Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.”), Chi Sq value = 2413.5 and NFI at 0.81 which is reasonable for restricted models like ours as per Gellatly (1998) and such models can be improved substantially (Bentler & Bonett, 1980).

**Table 5**

Analysis of First Structural Model Model.

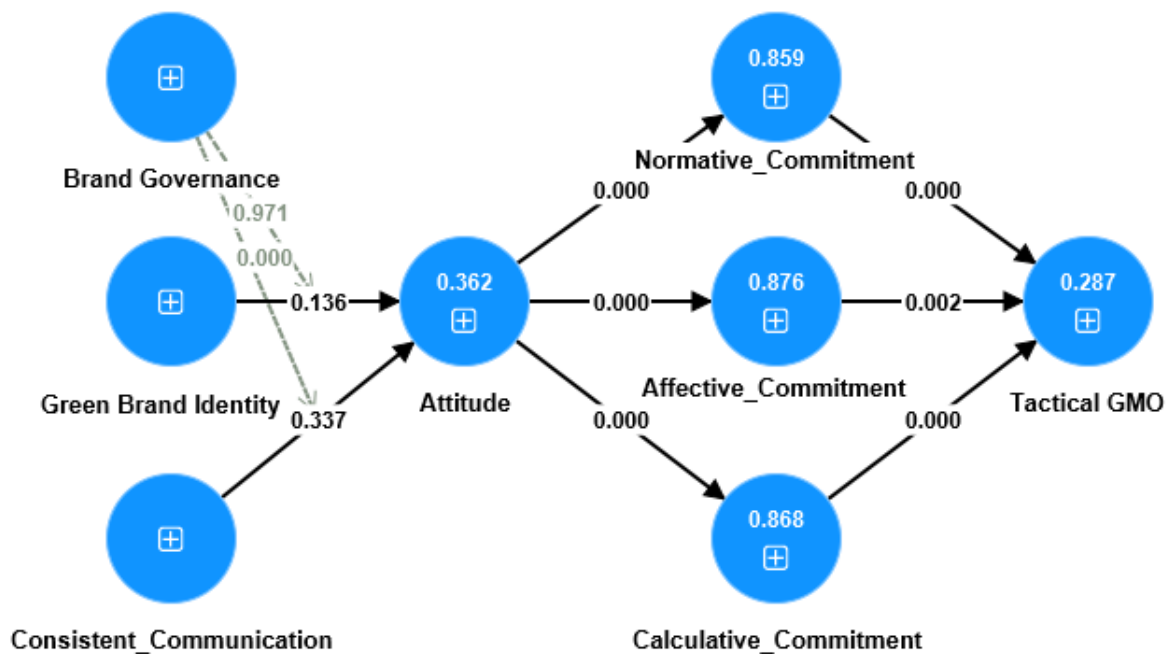
	<b>Path Estimates</b>	<b>P values</b>	<b>Hypotheses</b>
Green Brand identity -> Attitude	0.089	0.127	H1 - Rejected
Consistent_Communication -> Attitude	0.057	0.325	H2 - Rejected
Attitude -> Commitment	0.957	0**	H3 - Supported
Commitment -> Tactical GMO	0.470	0**	H4 - Supported
Brand Governance -> Attitude	0.266	0**	–
Brand Governance x Green Brand identity -> Attitude	0.002	0.971	H5a - Rejected
Brand Governance x Consistent_Communication -> Attitude	0.239	0**	H5b - Supported

\*indicates p-value <0.05 and \*\*p-value < 0.001

In the second structural model (Fig. 3.), we analysed how each of the commitment components (affective, normative, and calculative) impact Tactical GMO. The results indicate that apart



from calculative commitment (H4c), both normative and affective commitments have a significant positive association with tactical GMO, supporting our hypotheses H4a and H4b. While with normative the path coefficients were significant but displayed a negative value ( $\beta = -0.551, p < 0.001$ ). Similar to the first structural model, the interaction effect of brand governance is found to be significant between consistent communication  $\square$  attitude (supporting H5b) and inconsistent with green brand identity (rejecting H5a). The status of hypotheses support for the second structural model is shown in Table 6. The model fit indices indicate the SRMR at 0.52, Chi Sq. = 2658.031, and NFI = 0.78 confirming a reasonable fit.



**Fig. 3.** Path Analysis with Subconstructs of Commitment (Normative, Affective, and Calculative)

**Table 6**  
Analysis of the Second Structural Model

Model Paths	Path Coefficients	P value	Hypotheses
Green Brand identity -> Attitude	0.077	0.136	H1 - Rejected
Consistent_Communication -> Attitude	0.063	0.291	H2 - Rejected
GBG -> Attitude	0.275	0**	–
Attitude -> Affective_Commitment	0.924	0**	H3a - Supported
Attitude -> Normative_Commitment	0.921	0**	H3b - Supported
Attitude -> Calculative Commitment	0.926	0**	H3c - Supported
Affective_Commitment -> Tactical GM	0.504	0.001**	H4a - Supported

Normative_Commitment -> Tactical GM	0.508	0**	H4b - Supported
Calculative Commitment -> Tactical GM	-0.551	0**	H4c - Supported
GBG x Green Brand identity -> Attitude	0.001	0.985	H5a - Rejected
GBG x Consistent_Communication -> Attitude	0.294	0**	H5b - Supported

\*indicates p-value <0.05 and \*\*p-value < 0.001

### 5.2 Phase 2 - Qualitative Study

As qualitative study can be used to expand on quantitative findings (Cresswell et al., 2006), we conducted exploratory interviews of 22 B2B channel partners and 19 managers (at different levels of seniority) of various lifestyle brands to further look for convergence or divergence with our empirical study results. Interviews were conducted to generate detailed and contextually rich data insights into participants' feelings, thoughts, and perspectives (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). The channel partners were retail shop owners and distributors, and managers ranged from Area Sales Manager, Chief of Channel Sales, Marketing Manager, and Zonal Sales Manager. The coding sheet included the demographics of the respondents such as name, email id, designation, number of years of experience in the business/company, and address. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and participants' permission was sought to keep written notes of the interviews. The interviewees were assured that their private data would not be disclosed.

We drew on the same set of codes used in our empirical study to frame the semi-structured interview questions. An *apriori* or deductive coding method was followed to give us a clear lens for looking at the data for the identification of convergence or divergence of perspectives that were unearthed in the empirical study. We focused on how the participants' own words (from the interview texts) reflected the values, attitudes, personal beliefs, and experiences related to the phenomenon under study. We followed the principle of discourse analysis to analyse the statements. Discourse analysis, as explained by Van Dijk (1997) does not always aim to provide specific solutions to problems; rather, it seeks to explore a subject, offering a

broader perspective on the issue. This approach unveils subtle implications hidden within the language used, leaving readers to decide how to respond to the analysis and ultimately construct their own discourse. A prevalent aspect of discourse study is its predominant focus on naturally occurring talk and text, favouring 'real data' derived from sources like (e.g., recording of conversations). The data are examined in their unaltered state, close to their original appearance or use in specific contexts.

All transcripts were independently coded by the authors (as subject-matter experts) and then compared for consistency and uniformity. The intercoder reliability came out to be above 90 percent. Table 7 depicts the sample statements from the respondents and the codes assigned based on insights gathered from the statements.

**Table 7**

Sample Statements from Channel Partners and Managers.

	<b>Channel Partners (CP)</b>	<b>Managers (MG)</b>	<b>Comments/Insights</b>
<b>Communication Channels</b>	<p>“Yes, we do make sure that customers are aware of the brand's commitment to environmental sustainability because it benefits for company reputation. At the beginning, it may set us apart from other products and provide customers a reason to pick ... consumers are searching for brands that reflect their values as they become more environmentally conscious. So, we keep developing trust among customers who care about the environment by promoting its green marketing strategy... eco-friendly features can help in attracting new clients.”</p>	<p>“Different channel partners may be motivated by different incentives to promote brand’s Green Brand Identity. Basically, it’s a mix of emotional, rule and monetary based incentives.”</p> <p>“Some channel partners might be inspired to promote environmentally friendly goods and methods out of concern for the environment. By emphasising the benefits of supporting environmentally friendly products and practises, we may entice these partners.”</p>	<p>Channel partners ensure that customers are aware of brand’s commitment to sustainable products - which suggests that they are in sync with the company’s value and policies. They also want to exploit the sentiments of customers who are aware of the importance of sustainability to sell green branded products, and eco-friendly products provide a brand distinction.</p> <p><b>(Calculative &amp; Normative)</b></p> <p>The organization ensures, through monetary incentives or building awareness, that channel partners are aware of the brand's commitment to environmental sustainability as it impacts the company’s reputation. It also recognizes that some channel partners may be inclined towards promoting environmentally friendly</p>

			products – thus providing emotional motivation and support they may be enticed. <b>(Calculative, Normative &amp; Affective)</b>
	“the company provides us with materials, guidelines, and training on how to promote the company's environmental initiatives and sustainability efforts. They also offer incentives for those who effectively promote product as environment friendly.”	“The requirement to uphold the conditions of their contract with the company may serve as a driving force for some channel partners. Partners are encouraged to abide by the terms of the agreement if promoting the brand's Green Identity is one of them.”  Financial incentives, foreign trips, awards, recognition, and other monetary advantages are used to incentivize many channel partners ... the company also provides commissions, bonuses, or other performance-based rewards to channel partners who are successfully promoting our green brand.”	Channel partners acknowledge that they are provided with the guidelines, training, systems and protocols set in place by the company. <b>(Normative)</b>  Incentives and rewards are provided by the firm to channel partners for leveraging green brand. <b>(Calculative)</b>
<b>Visibility of green brand identity</b>	“We do have to follow the policy agreement and the bond that we have signed and agreed upon while having the stocks of a certain brand. ... we have to follow all the clauses and all the agreements to sell out the products.	“Sure, we think it's crucial to let channel partners know about brand's commitment to the environment. By doing this, we can effectively market green identity to a larger audience by utilising the influence and reach of channel partners. Customers are becoming more interested in supporting businesses that promote sustainability and environmental responsibility as they grow more environmentally conscious.”	The channel partner is aware of the company’s policy and is in agreement with implementing the policies set by the firm. <b>(Normative)</b>  The organization emphasizes its commitment to sustainability norm. At the same time, it seeks to exploit growing customer sentiment about environment friendliness to promote its green brand identity through its channel partners to enhance its brand reputation and competitiveness in the market. <b>(Calculative)</b>
	“I can tell you that .... (company) has been promoting its efforts towards environmental sustainability for several years. The company has been working to reduce its carbon footprint, increase the use of renewable energy, implement recycling programs, and promote sustainable practices in its products and operations.”	“There is no such direct incentive that we require but a mix of all is required, that it is important that the employee is emotionally motivated only then the individual will give full efforts, there is also need for rules and regulation but important thing is these should not be rigid rules there should be room for changes, at last monetary incentives are also required to give a direct motivation that an	The channel is partner is aware and convinced of the company’s pro- environment policies. <b>(Normative &amp; Affective)</b>  The company believes in a combination of emotional, rule-based, and monetary motivation <b>(Affective, Normative &amp; Calculative)</b>

		upliftment has been done to the individual”	
<b>Attitude</b>	<p>“For me, I think what you called rule based and monetary based incentive will motivate us to promote the brand and not others. So, like if we do have any sales target or strict rules, we do follow those rules and try to promote the brand according to company objective. Moreover, nowadays if we have monetary benefits like incentives or discounts if we promote the brand according to company objective, we do put more efforts in that case.”</p>	<p>“The brand marketing team may help guarantee that all brand assets, particularly those connected to promoting the business's green brand identity, adhere with the defined brand guidelines by taking the above mentioned actions. This can support the company's brand identity, foster client trust, and increase sales”</p>	<p>The channel partners Confirms that a combination of rule-based and monetary incentives work best in promoting green brand identity. <b>(Normative &amp; Calculative)</b></p> <p>The company emphasizes that adhering to defined brand guidelines to promote green brand identity is a requirement for channel partners. <b>(Normative)</b></p>
	<p>“Effective communication and support are very helpful for channel partners in promoting brand as an environmentally friendly brand ... additional incentives or commissions or discounts on products will improve their sales.”</p>	<p>“Yes, to some extent it is important for a brand to communicate its environmentally friendly aspects to its customers for several reasons. As many people are not directly aware about that the brand is environmentally friendly, it also directly helps in building the brand reputation and loyalty ... by communicating green initiatives, we can build a positive reputation and increase customer loyalty. Also, we have to meet certain government regulation so we have to complete several environmentally friendly certificates”</p>	<p>The channel partner acknowledges that hand-holding by the company (effective communication and support) helps promote the brand as environment-friendly. But monetary incentives (commissions, discounts) will also play an important role in enhancing sales. <b>(Normative &amp; Calculative)</b></p>
<b>Brand perception / hand holding</b>	<p>“For me, it's a combination of all three types of incentives. I am concerned about the environment and appreciate the brand's commitment to sustainability...However, the agreement we have with the brand does require us to promote their goods. Monetary incentives are also important as they help us maintain our business and cover our expenses. Ultimately, it is the combination of all three that motivates us to promote the brand.”</p>	<p>“Indeed, conveying the green parts of a brand to customers is significant. Today, an ever-increasing number of individuals are becoming aware of the effect their activities have on the climate, and they are searching out organizations that share their qualities. By conveying your image's harmless to the ecosystem practices and drives, you can lay out trust and believability with ecologically cognizant clients and separate your image from rivals that don't focus on manageability.”</p>	<p>The emotional connection with the pro-environment product, the value system of the company, the agreement signed by the channel partner as well as monetary incentives motivate the channel partner. <b>(Affective, Normative &amp; Calculative)</b></p> <p>For the organization, it is important to be in sync with the rising sentiment of people regarding sustainability. By conveying a green brand identity, the organization seeks to win trust and loyalty. <b>(Affective, Normative &amp; Calculative)</b></p>

The interview texts of channel partners and managers revealed rich insights about their perspectives regarding green brand identity, its communication, and the mindsets they nurture.

Key Perspectives of Channel Partners:

- (i) *“I can tell you that .... (company) has been promoting its efforts towards environmental sustainability for several years. The company has been working to reduce its carbon footprint, increase the use of renewable energy, implement recycling programs, and promote sustainable practices in its products and operations.”*

The above statement reveals a positive assertion, emphasizing the company's commitment to environmental sustainability. The use of phrases like “promoting its efforts” creates a favourable impression, framing the company as proactive in addressing environmental concerns. The mention of “for several years” suggests a long-standing dedication to sustainability, conveying a sustained and consistent effort over time. The use of action verbs such as “working to reduce,” “increase,” “implement,” and “promote” conveys a sense of ongoing and dynamic engagement. They contribute to the narrative of a company actively pursuing sustainability goals. The testimony outlines specific initiatives, including reducing the carbon footprint, increasing the use of renewable energy, implementing recycling programs, and promoting sustainable practices. This specificity adds a layer of credibility and transparency, providing details about the nature of the company's environmental efforts. The use of buzzwords like “carbon footprint,” “renewable energy,” “recycling programs,” and “sustainable practices” reflects an awareness of current environmental discourse, and employing these terms aligns with the company's expectations. Overall, the statement emphasises the company's positive actions toward environmental sustainability and creates a favorable image. The urgency is conveyed through the tone of the message - “I can tell you...”

– is suggestive of both normative and affective commitment sentiments expressed by the channel partner.

(ii) *“We do have to follow the policy agreement and the bond that we have signed and agreed upon while having the stocks of a certain brand. ... we have to follow all the clauses and all the agreements to sell out the products.”*

The channel partner explicitly mentions that being part of the brand requires the channel partner to abide by the eco-friendly norms emphasized by the company. This suggests that the brand has control and influence over the actions and behaviours of its partners. The phrase “we have to follow all the clauses...” introduces a legal and ethical dimension, indicating that the eco-friendly norms are not just suggestions but contractual obligations. The use of “clauses” suggests a formalized agreement and failure to comply could result in legal consequences. It is thus evident that the brand sets clear standards for eco-friendly behavior, emphasizing a structured and disciplined approach to sustainability. Overall, the statement reveals a strategic and tactical communication approach aimed at ensuring compliance and promoting a positive brand image in the context of sustainability.

(iii) *“... I am concerned about the environment and appreciate the brand's commitment to sustainability...However, the agreement we have with the brand does require us to promote their goods. Monetary incentives are also important as they help us maintain our business and cover our expenses.”*

The initial line here conveys a personal concern for the environment, suggesting that the channel partner values sustainability. Appreciation is expressed for the brand's commitment to sustainability, and this signals an alignment of values between the channel partner and the brand. At the same time, the use of the term “agreement” emphasises a contractual relationship

- the transactional nature implies that there are mutual expectations and obligations defined in the agreement. The acknowledgment of the importance of monetary incentives reveals a practical consideration, the need for financial support to promote the sustainability initiative. The statement here presents a tension between the channel partner's environmental concern and the practical need for financial support. This dual perspective reflects the complex dynamics that individuals or businesses may face when navigating relationships with brands that have both sustainability goals and commercial expectations. Overall, the testimony reflects a pragmatic approach - the necessity to strike a balance between financial considerations and ethical concerns.

#### Key Perspectives of Managers:

*(i) Sure, we think it's crucial to let channel partners know about brand's commitment to the environment. By doing this, we can effectively market green identity to a larger audience by utilising the influence and reach of channel partners. Customers are becoming more interested in supporting businesses that promote sustainability and environmental responsibility as they grow more environmentally conscious."*

The use of the terms "sure" and "crucial" in the statement emphasizes the significance of communicating the brand's commitment to the environment. There is an emphasis on the strategic importance of informing channel partners about the brand's commitment to the environment. The mention of "effectively market" green identity" suggests a conscious effort to leverage the positive aspects of environmental commitment for marketing. The testimony underscores the idea of leveraging the influence and reach of channel partners to expand the communication to a larger audience. It also highlights the growing shift in consumer values, that customers are increasingly interested in supporting businesses that promote sustainability and environmental responsibility. This reflects an understanding of evolving consumer



preferences and the importance of aligning with those values. Overall, the statement suggests a strategic communication approach focused on channel partners as key facilitators for disseminating the brand's environmental commitment which also aligns with the broader goal of appealing to environmentally conscious consumers.

*(ii) "Different channel partners may be motivated by different incentives to promote brand's Green Brand Identity. Basically, it's a mix of emotional, rule and monetary based incentives." "Some channel partners might be inspired to promote environmentally friendly goods and methods out of concern for the environment. By emphasising the benefits of supporting environmentally friendly products and practices, we may entice these partners."*

The statement acknowledges the diversity among channel partners, suggesting that different partners may be motivated by different incentives. This recognition reflects an understanding of the varied interests and drivers among the partners. The speaker categorizes the incentives into three types: emotional, rule-based, and monetary. This categorization suggests a nuanced approach to understanding, that is it is not a one-size-fits-all approach. The mention of emotional incentives implies that some channel partners may be motivated by a genuine concern for the environment. This highlights the role of values and personal beliefs in influencing the behavior of certain partners. The statement vouches for adopting a tailored approach based on diverse motivations - a customized strategy to effectively engage and motivate. Overall, the statement reveals an awareness of the diverse motivations among channel partners and an intention to tailor the strategy accordingly. The emphasis on emotional, rule-based, and monetary incentives demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing partner behavior to effectively involve them.

*(iii) "There is no such direct incentive that we require but a mix of all is required, that it is important that the employee is emotionally motivated only then the individual will give full*

*efforts, there is also need for rules and regulation but important thing is these should not be rigid rules there should be room for changes, at last monetary incentives are also required to give a direct motivation that an upliftment has been done to the individual”*

The statement suggests that a mix of emotional, adaptable rules, and monetary incentives is necessary. At the same time, the importance of emotional motivation to enable an individual to give full effort is also emphasised. There is an acknowledgement of the need for rules and regulations but emphasises that these rules should not be rigid. This recognition suggests a flexible and adaptive approach, allowing for changes as required, and that too much rigidity can be counterproductive. The mention of “room for changes” indicates a preference for a dynamic and adaptable set of rules as a way to encourage creativity, innovation, and responsiveness. The importance of monetary incentives is acknowledged by the speaker, stating that they are required to give direct motivation. Overall, the testimony suggests a balanced approach, combining emotional, rule-based, and monetary elements. It recognizes the need for a holistic strategy that considers various aspects of motivation to ensure an effective approach to generating commitment.

In summary, the perspectives of the channel partners and managers cohere in suggesting that there is a need for understanding the complexity of partner motivation and developing a well-rounded engagement, including norms and ethics-based motivations to emotional and monetary incentives and rewards. At the same time, the strategy should be adaptable and make the best of the individual partner's motivations.

## **6. Discussion**

### *6.1 Discussion on Quantitative Results*

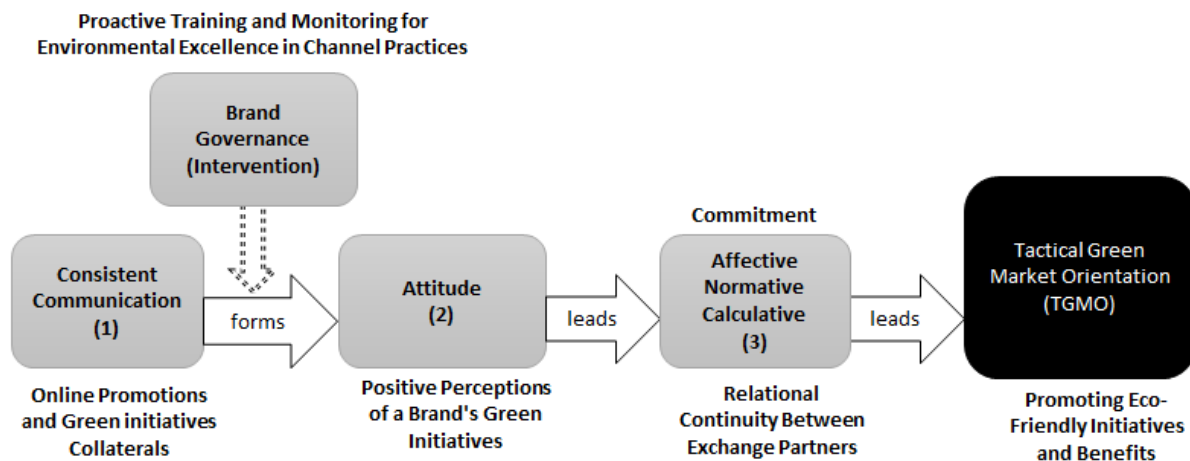
The quantitative study's results were instrumental in formulating and empirically testing the conceptual model using moderated regression analysis and Smart PLS.

Our analysis, considering 'commitment' as a higher-order construct and 'brand governance' as a moderator, exhibits a positive relationship between "Consistent Communication" and "Attitude" ( $\beta=0.057$ ) and between "Green Brand Identity" and "Attitude" ( $\beta=0.089$ ), although in both cases the p-value was insignificant ( $>0.05$ ). Hence further investigation is warranted.

Further, the association between "Attitude" and "Commitment" is robust and highly significant with  $\beta= 0.957$  ( $p<0.05$ ). A moderate positive relationship is observed between "Commitment" and "Tactical GMO" ( $\beta=0.47$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) and between "Brand Governance" and "Attitude" ( $\beta=0.266$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), confirming statistical significance. Nonetheless, the interaction between "Brand Governance x Green Brand Identity" does not show a significant association with attitude formation ( $\beta=0.002$ ,  $p=0.971$ ). In contrast, the interaction term "Brand Governance x Consistent Communication" contributes significantly to positive attitude formation with a path estimate ( $\beta$ ) of 0.291 at  $p<0.001$ . This suggests that organizations fostering consistent communication and supporting channel partners in marketing may cultivate a positive attitude toward the environment and sustainable practices.

Our results also indicate that certain connections related to "Attitude" and "Commitment," "Commitment" and "Tactical GMO," and "Brand Governance" and "Attitude," are statistically significant. This may stem from the gradual nature of attitude formation and mindset development, contrasting with commitment, especially normative and calculative commitments, which may take precedence over affective commitment to sustain business (see Fig. 4.). To demonstrate genuine commitment, brands should offer attractive benefits and rewards to their channels, emphasizing brand stewardship and ethical compliance. Brands committed to ethical and sustainable practices should incentivize channel partners through financial rewards, recognition programs, and exclusive promotions. Training initiatives enhance partners' skills in ethical business and environmental stewardship. Collaborative marketing, access to sustainability resources, and certifications showcase collective

commitment. Community engagement and loyalty programs further align partners with the brand's ethical initiatives, emphasizing transparency in communication for shared responsibility.



**Fig 4.** Process of Culminating TGMO among Channel Partners

The above findings have important takeaways for companies. They suggest that firms should invest in resources in B2B branding (Y. Chang et al., 2018; Österle et al., 2018), as this can play a key role in business markets, particularly as brand governance can ensure that the channel partner stays updated on the product features and attributes to transmit those information signals to the customers. Similarly, consistent communication with channel partners will build strong internal processes of communicating green practices to encourage similar values in them. Previous research has shown that brand reputation regarding environmental sustainability is not just a matter of the firm's operations but also the supply chain partner's perspectives towards sustainability and their interaction with the firm (Sheth & Sinha, 2015). Furthermore, research on sustainability lays significant emphasis on managing supplier relationships (Leppelt et al., 2011).

## *6.2 Discussion on Qualitative Results*

Our empirical findings show that there might be some evidence of a relationship between “Green Brand Identity ” and “Attitude,” we investigated it further in our qualitative study. Interestingly, we found that mostly normative and calculative perspectives were emerging vis-à-vis attitudes towards green brand identity, and comparatively, affective associations with the green aspects of the brand were less. As we have also observed earlier, attitudinal shift happens over time and B2B sellers likely will give precedence to normative compliance and the lucrative benefits associated with promoting green brands. As evident from the interviews of managers, a combination of motivations such as financial benefits, regular hand-holding, updating green brand identity elements, and encouraging those who already have an emotional connection with sustainability may be used to create value alignment between the firm and the channel partner.

Similar to the quantitative study, a strong relationship between brand governance and attitude was also found in the qualitative study. There was a convergence of opinions from channel partners as well as managers that green brand stewardship helps to create normative compliance amongst B2B stakeholders. This suggests that firms should invest in developing shared values and norms via training and online and offline interactions to strengthen the potential whereby the channel partner views the green brand as a major marketing asset (Vesal et al., 2020). Since there is a rising awareness of sustainable practices and environmental activism, consumers are looking for sustainable qualities in brands. Training channel partners about sustainability-based products and labels, highlighting the green practices, and educating them in giving green product lifecycle guidance to consumers can help firms to develop a robust alliance with the channel partners to deliver value.

To summarise, stewardship theory emphasizes long-term relationships, shared values, and transparent communication, while signaling theory involves using visible cues or signals to

communicate a commitment to green practices. For instance, Apple partnered with environmentally responsible suppliers (with more than 300 such suppliers) and stakeholders over the years, showcasing a commitment to long-term sustainability. This practice fosters trust and collaboration, aligning with stewardship principles. Apple not only develops cutting-edge, energy-efficient solutions, it also promotes them innovatively. In September 2023, they launched an online video (a skit) featuring CEO Tim Cook and the team nervously anticipating a visit from Mother Nature, portrayed by Octavia Spencer. Her sarcastic inquisition emphasizes Apple's environmental commitment, culminating in her begrudging approval (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Qm99OAO9p0>). Through this video, Apple signals its commitment to sustainability, and how its suppliers are also contributing and aligning with the latest eco-friendly technologies. Additionally, it demonstrates alignment with stewardship principles and innovative use of signaling to communicate commitment.

Thus overall our empirical and qualitative study findings show convergence. The overall findings suggest that a comprehensive approach involving consistent communication of green brand identity, and effective brand governance is vital for fostering positive attitudes and commitments towards sustainability in the B2B context. The convergence of findings from both quantitative and qualitative methods enhances the reliability and applicability of the study's implications for businesses.

### ***7. Theoretical Contributions***

In this study, we integrated signaling theory and stewardship theory to examine the influence of brand governance on the relationship between communication from the firm and channel partner commitment leading to TGMO. Such theoretical perspectives have never been united to look at brand governance.

Despite the increasing pressure on firms to adopt pro-environment values and build sustainable brands, and the subsequent attention in the literature mostly in the B2C context (e.g., Chen et al., 2016; Y.-S. Chen, 2010; Olsen et al., 2014), not much is known about developing brand positioning strategies in the business-to-business (B2B) context (Casidy & Lie, 2023; Iyer et al., 2023).

*First*, our research enriches B2B literature on green brand identity, revealing that both brand stewardship and signaling influence positive attitude formation in channel partners, fostering commitment and tactical green marketing orientation. It elucidates how brand governance, guided by stewardship principles, serves as signals to B2B partners, encouraging responsible and ethical green branding efforts. This theoretical integration advances the literature by bridging signaling and stewardship theories, paving the way for further exploration in various organizational contexts beyond green branding.

*Second*, by examining the interaction between brand governance, communication, and channel partner commitment, our research contributes to understanding how effective brand governance and strategic communication can foster stronger commitment levels among partners. This exploration provides insights into the intertwined dynamics shaped by signaling theory and stewardship theory. Given their inherent connection to trust and collaboration, the integration of these theories within the framework of brand governance elucidates the mechanisms through which trust is established and nurtured among channel partners via the signals emanating from branding initiatives.

*Finally*, the study's focus on tactical green marketing orientation within the framework of signaling theory and stewardship theory offers valuable insights into how organizations' strategic choices in green marketing align with their stewardship-driven brand governance

practices. This understanding can provide guidance for organizations aiming to achieve a balance between marketing strategies and ethical stewardship.

## **8. Managerial Implications**

Our study demonstrates the role of brand governance in forming an attitude among channel partners by moderating consistent communication. The findings of our study have important implications for organizations. As brand governance establishes guidelines, standards, and protocols for communication across all channels (Pyper & Doherty, 2022; Taks et al., 2020), this consistency ensures that the green branding message remains clear and coherent, thereby indicating a commitment to sustainability. These findings are also consistent with prior research in the context of end consumers (e.g., Hartmann et al., 2005; Olsen et al., 2014; M. J. Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001).

Organizations may also consider tangible elements of green branding seriously by having a green logo or statement on their packaging. They can create more awareness by embracing a storytelling approach on digital channels - e.g., Instagram stories, or YouTube videos to share how their efforts are contributing towards a sustainable environment, including climate change. By providing channel partners with storyboards, predefined templates, content guidelines, and approved messaging, organizations can minimise the risk of miscommunication and help in conveying a unified green identity. This will also help organizations to implement sustainable development goals and compliance at all levels. Further, by centralizing control over these updates, brand governance prevents irregularities and imprecisions on the account of the channel partner's role (normative compliance) that might arise from decentralized content management (Grewal et al., 2010). This can be achieved by implementing a centralised content management system (C-CMS). A C-CMS will provide timely and uniform updates ensuring consistent communication across all channels. Organisations can develop a platform empowered with analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) that allows for efficient collaboration,



approval workflows, and version control to maintain consistency. Having a platform will enable firms to conduct regular audits to assess normative compliance with brand guidelines across all channels. And analytics and automated tools can be used to monitor and flag deviations from established brand norms. Organisations should also create user-friendly templates for content creation that align with brand guidelines. These templates can guide partners in producing content while maintaining a level of flexibility for customization (promotions during regional festivals and in the local language) within defined parameters.

When stakeholders (in our case channel partners) adhere to a well-structured brand governance framework which emphasizes green branding, it will help to boost the organization's dedication to sustainability (Alamsyah et al., 2020; Mehdikhani & Valmohammadi, 2022). This will help build trust and confidence in the partnership, resulting in committed channel partners who will align themselves more closely with the brand's values (Brown et al., 2019; Chen, 2010). However, to have better results, organizations must incentivize their channel partners to promote sustainable products in the market (Casidy & Lie, 2023). The transparent and consistent communication of green initiatives through brand governance will help foster a sense of shared purpose and commitment. Finally, the emphasis on green branding elements and consistent communication through brand governance serves to lay the foundation for channel partners' tactical green marketing orientation. This alignment strengthens the overall green marketing orientation of channel partners and creates a unified front in promoting sustainability. Similar findings were observed in extant literature with respect to supply chain ecosystems (Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Kelly, 2004; Kim et al., 2011).

## **9. Conclusions**

This research aimed to explore the impact of brand governance on the relationship between firm communication and channel partner commitment, leading to tactical green marketing

orientation. A survey encompassing 248 B2B channel partners and lifestyle brand managers, coupled with 41 in-depth qualitative interviews involving 22 channel partners and 19 managers across various seniority levels, formed the basis of our investigation. The combined results from quantitative and qualitative analyses substantiate our proposition that, within the B2B context, brand governance plays a key role in shaping channel partners' commitment and their tactical green marketing orientation.

Our study revealed a positive moderating influence of brand governance on channel partners' attitudes, driving tactical green marketing orientation. The findings underscore the importance of fostering brand governance mechanisms, incorporating ethical norms and encapsulating them within brand signals—specifically, green identity elements. By doing so, firms can not only establish differentiation but also cultivate a sense of commitment among channel partners, offering valuable insights for companies seeking to navigate the complexities of sustainable business practices in the B2B landscape.

## **10. Limitations and Future Research**

In the present investigation, during the data collection process, we observed that nearly all lifestyle brands are placing some degree of emphasis on green branding, albeit not prominently. For instance, Apple has created a dedicated web page featuring phrases like ‘Engage with a Greener Grid’ and ‘Embrace Recycled Vibes Only.’ Similarly, Samsung also maintains an informative webpage with the slogan ‘Planet First’ where they outline their initiatives for responsible manufacturing and commitment to circular economy objectives. However, on their social media channels, a majority of promotional efforts revolve around introducing new products with or without green identity.

Although established organizations are actively showcasing various branding components on their websites and through their channel partners, the overall oversight in governance remains

evident. Notably, the process of search engine optimization/marketing (SEO/SEM) does not promptly lead to the immediate discovery of these brands' green branding pages. It would be valuable for future research to investigate this discrepancy comprehensively by gathering data from a diverse range of sales and marketing professionals. This research could shed light on whether this phenomenon is intentional or an oversight.

Through our interviews, we have also observed that marketing teams and sustainability teams tend to operate independently, with minimal or no collaboration between these departments. Exploring the potential outcomes of such collaborative synergies is an interesting avenue for future inquiry. A prospective study in this area could delve into whether such synergistic efforts yield positive outcomes or not. As we found out from our interviews B2B channel partners are not averse to aligning with the sustainable views of the company. However accurate and transparent communication about sustainability initiatives is crucial for maintaining credibility. On the flip side, the prevalence of greenwashing poses a challenge - some organizations might engage in greenwashing—presenting a false or exaggerated image of environmental responsibility (Jiménez Sánchez et al., 2023). This approach can involve superficial measures that appear environmentally friendly on the surface but lack substantive impact. Further research is required to analyse how brand governance can mitigate such incidents.

In the current research, we have not looked into the cascading effects across the supply chain (i.e., supplier/manufacturer→distributor→wholesaler→retailer), whereas many companies have complex and extended supply chains, making it challenging to ensure consistent adherence to green practices across all channel partners. This complexity can lead to gaps in implementation and enforcement. Future research may look into the complexity of the supply chain and its impact on governance and tactical GMOs.

Finally, our model fit and adjusted  $R^2$  was significant but small, this could be attributed to many factors. For instance, the adoption of environment-friendly products is still in its nascent stage and there could be elements such as, the absence of local language collaterals, price sensitivity, and value-oriented purchase over environment-friendly goods etc., affecting low levels of awareness among both customers and channel partners. In light of these factors, a low but significant value of  $R^2$  indicates a start, a positive and promising shift in the mindset of channel partners about their willingness to adopt TGMO. Therefore, a lower value of  $R^2$  can be expected.

Additionally, it seems that within our current sample, there are certain contrarian cases (some of the channel partners' responses may deviate from the norm). Hence, we propose to undertake a future study to employ configurational methods like fsQCA (Fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis) (Ragin, 2009) to uncover these divergent cases (Pappas and Woodside, 2021). Unlike PLS-SEM, fsQCA allows the identification of conditions that are either sufficient or necessary for the outcome, including those that may not be necessary as such, but are components that explain the desired outcome. Such conditions are known as INUS conditions (Pappas and Woodside, 2021). With the help of fsQCA, insights may be gained into the compound conditions (like behavioural and motivational attributes of channel partners) leading to a particular outcome (embracing TGMO), which traditional linear models like PLS-SEM is unable to capture.

#### **Appendix A. Scale Items, Mean and VIF for each Item**

<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>VIF</b>	<b>Scale</b>
GBI2	3.710	2.279	Taglines such as 'zero waste', 'plastic free', 'environment friendly'
GBI3	3.746	2.269	Taglines such as 'Reduce-Reuse-Recycle', carbon neutral'''
GBI4	3.722	1.613	Taglines such as 'Plug into a greener grid' or 'Recycled vibes only'
GBI5	3.734	2.042	Taglines such as 'Planet first' or '

GBI6	3.673	2.323	Information emphasizing the environmental aspects of products
GBI7	3.859	1.978	Statement of commitment to environmental preservation in their corporate
GBI8	3.802	1.552	Promotions highlighting and informing customers about the firm's environmental efforts
			The marketing team of the principal organization .....
CC1	4.044	2.676	Has frequent face-to-face interactions
CC2	4.016	3.775	Frequently share information about products
CC3	4.008	2.643	Regularly updates about marketing collaterals (such as posters, banners, brochures, discount schemes, flyers, catalogues, etc.)
CC4	4.048	4.066	Organize frequent online/offline trainings
CC5	4.109	3.73	Regularly updates about incentives and commissions
CC6	4.105	3.55	Take our feedback/inputs on how to improve the environment friendliness of the brand
Attitude1	4.238	4.689	I have a positive perception of the brand of the principal organisation.
Attitude2	4.117	3.841	I am satisfied with the support and resources provided by the organization
Attitude3	4.149	4.811	I believe in the brand values and they are in sync with my business goals
Attitude4	4.129	4.324	I feel motivated to promote and sell the brand's offerings
Attitude5	4.185	4.975	I have a favorable impression of the brand's visual identity and marketing materials.
			<b>The marketing team of the principal organization ...</b>
BG1	3.927	3.833	Puts efforts in building a strong relationship with us
BG2	3.931	3.559	Regularly update us about the green collaterals such as benefits, brochures, flyers, incentives, taglines, posters, etc.
BG3	4.012	2.284	Regularly check that we are adequately conveying to customers the benefits of using environment-friendly products
BG4	4.004	3.253	Regularly check that we are adequately displaying their green brand visual elements (logos, banners, flyers, etc.) In our store/outlet
			<b>On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 means hardly visible and 5 is frequently visible), suggest what all green brand identity promotions you have seen on digital channels from this brand.....</b>
NC1	4.222	2.587	I feel a sense of duty to remain a channel partner of this organisation

NC2	4.222	4.199	I will continue to work with this organisation, even if I receive a better offer from another organisation
NC3	4.012	3.524	I will feel dishonourable to leave this organisation for small benefits, even if it were to our firm's advantage
AC1	4.113	3.604	I want to stay in the relationship with this organisation as I feel the relationship is efficient
AC2	4.169	4.237	I want to stay in the relationship with this organisation as I enjoy working with them
AC3	4.202	4.398	I want to stay in the relationship with this organisation as our values match
AC4	4.222	3.651	I am committed to maintaining a long-term partnership with the brand.
CalCom1	4.177	3.665	I will continue to work with my current organisation as changing partners would be disruptive to our business
CalCom2	4.238	2.806	I will not shift from having business with this organisation as losses could be significant
CalCom3	4.101	4.249	I need to keep working with this organisation as leaving would create hardship for my business
TGMO1	4.278	3.663	I promote environmental benefits while selling products in our marketing communications.
TGMO2	4.319	4.473	I encourage our customers to use e-commerce for product information or comparison because it is more eco-friendly
TGMO3	4.214	3.789	I prefer digital communication methods for promoting products because it is eco-friendlier
TGMO4	4.266	5.576	I apply a paperless policy in our procurement where possible
TGMO5	4.210	3.849	I use recycled or reusable materials often
TGMO6	4.262	6.464	I use sustainable packaging materials wherever possible

#### Appendix B. Factor Matrix of Constructs' Scale Items

Rotated Component Matrix	Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
GBI2	0.809					
GBI3	0.809					
GBI4	0.704					
GBI5	0.797					
GBI6	0.817					
GBI7	0.784					
GBI8	0.682					
CC1		0.790				
CC2		0.865				
CC3		0.796				

CC4		0.891				
CC5		0.870				
CC6		0.858				
GBG1			0.810			
GBG2			0.822			
GBG3			0.798			
GBG4			0.849			
TGMO1				0.830		
TGMO2				0.837		
TGMO3				0.875		
TGMO4				0.822		
TGMO5				0.830		
TGMO6				0.844		
Attitude1					0.812	
Attitude2					0.848	
Attitude3					0.841	
Attitude4					0.867	
Attitude5					0.896	
NC1						0.847
NC2						0.891
NC3						0.819
AC1						0.852
AC2						0.850
AC3						0.906
AC4						0.838
CalCom1						0.894
CalCom2						0.872
CalCom3						0.906
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.						

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