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INFLUENCE OF GREEN BRANDING ON THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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Abstract:

Purpose of Study: This study examined the influence of green branding on the sustainability of public universities in Kenya. It sought to determine whether integrating environmental responsibility into institutional identity, communication, and branding practices contributes to improved sustainability outcomes, including stakeholder engagement, institutional reputation, revenue generation, and long-term organizational viability.

Methodology: The study adopted a positivist philosophy and an ex post facto explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Data were collected from 307 senior administrative and

academic staff drawn from 35 public chartered universities in Kenya. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Findings: The findings revealed that green branding significantly influences the sustainability of public universities in Kenya. Green branding increased the likelihood of institutional sustainability at both bivariate (OR = 2.777, $p < .001$) and multivariate levels (OR = 4.358, $p < .001$). The results showed that universities with stronger green identities, sustainability-focused communication, and environmental commitments were more likely to achieve sustainable outcomes. Qualitative findings further indicated that green branding enhances reputation, stakeholder trust, partnerships, and institutional differentiation when supported by actual sustainability practices. However, some universities demonstrated gaps between external green communication and internal integration of sustainability values.

Conclusion: The study concludes that green branding is a strategic sustainability tool for public universities rather than merely a communication practice. Universities should integrate environmental responsibility into their missions, policies, operations, and stakeholder engagement strategies to strengthen credibility, reduce greenwashing risks, and improve long-term institutional sustainability.

Keywords: *Green branding, public universities, Kenya, sustainability, green marketing.*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is a serious problem at public universities in Kenya. Per the Commission for University Education (CUE, 2025), more than 65% of the public universities showed sharp drops in internally generated revenues, with about 23 out of the 35 public universities falling into technical insolvency. The growth rate in enrolments is now 5% a year, from the double digit levels achieved 10 years ago, and with staff growth at 2% a year. The total institutional debt in the sector has crossed Kshs 72 billion, which brings about recurring strikes of workers, statutory default and paralysis in operations (Kihaki, 2025). These trends all pose a danger to the future of tertiary education in Kenya.

The long-term sustainability of public universities has remained a major concern as institutions face declining enrolment, constrained government funding, shrinking internally generated income, and competing political priorities. Addressing these pressures requires universities to integrate sustainability into their missions, values, operations, and marketing strategies so that they can attract students, faculty, partners, and funders who value environmental responsibility (Ghosh Ray, 2022). A strong green brand enhances reputation, increases stakeholder engagement, and differentiates an institution in a competitive higher education environment.

Jain et al. (2024) define green branding as the process through which organizations develop and promote a corporate identity grounded in sustainability. This entails embedding environmental values in institutional mission statements, promotional materials, governance, and organizational culture. A credible green university brand can attract environmentally conscious students and academics while strengthening relationships with sustainability-oriented sponsors and funding agencies. Shehawy et al. (2024) similarly demonstrate that green branding can improve institutional attractiveness and stakeholder loyalty. Despite this evidence, the contribution of green branding to the sustainability of Kenyan public universities has remained empirically underexplored.

Most existing studies on green branding focus on corporate, urban, manufacturing, retail, and destination contexts, while evidence from higher education in sub-Saharan Africa remains limited. Carrizo Moreira et al. (2023) showed that authentic and well-communicated green city brands can increase investment and community involvement, but their analysis did not address universities. Masocha (2020) identified a significant positive relationship between eco-branding and SME performance in South Africa, while Lőrincz et al. (2021) found that green branding improved destination image and community loyalty in Hungary. Javed et al. (2024) also linked green brand image to consumer satisfaction and loyalty in China's fast-fashion sector. None of these investigations directly examined the influence of green branding on the sustainability of public universities in Kenya. Kenyan evidence such as Koyoo (2024) concentrated on CSR-based city

branding in Kisumu rather than university sustainability. The analysis, therefore, addressed a distinct contextual, methodological, and conceptual gap.

Specifically, the study explored whether green branding have a significant influence on the sustainability of public universities in Kenya.

Significance of the Study

The study offers university leaders strong evidence that investing in ‘green branding’ embedding sustainability into institution's identity and communications, delivers tangible improvements in enrolment, funding and stakeholder engagement. Using the results, leaders can prioritize branding strategies that are truly representative of their institutions' sustainability approach.

The Ministry of Education and the Commission for University Education can use the empirical evidence to integrate green branding principles into national sustainability standards for public universities. The results can inform requirements for sustainability reporting, truthful environmental communication, and institution-wide green branding guidelines.

The study also contributes to a limited empirically based literature on green branding in higher education in Africa. Clearly marked directions for future scholarship are suggested by identified gaps, such as longitudinal studies and comparisons across institutions.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Consumer Perceived Value Theory

Consumer Perceived Value (CPV) Theory, developed by Zeithaml in 1988 and further refined by Blut et al. (2024), proposes that stakeholders assess an institution by comparing the benefits they receive with the costs they incur. These benefits include functional, emotional, social, and symbolic value. In universities, functional value may arise from access to eco-friendly facilities, lower operating costs from resource-efficient infrastructure, and employment opportunities in the sustainability sector. Emotional value derives from the pride and satisfaction associated with an institution that demonstrates environmental stewardship. When a university's green brand symbolizes social responsibility, it can strengthen competitive differentiation in the higher education sector (Ruschak et al., 2023).

Consumer Perceived Value Theory directly supports the proposed influence of green branding on university sustainability. Higher perceived value can generate increased enrolment, stronger stakeholder partnerships, donations, advocacy, and loyalty. Sustainability-related social responsibility that is clearly identified with the university and communicated credibly can enhance institutional reputation among stakeholders (Azizi & Sassen, 2023). The theory therefore explains how a credible environmental identity can translate into sustainability outcomes in Kenyan public universities.

Empirical Review

Green Branding and Sustainability: Global Evidence

International evidence indicates that green branding positively influences institutional performance and sustainability. In a quantitative cross-sectional study of 156 SMEs in Limpopo, South Africa, Masocha (2020) established statistically significant relationships between eco-branding, eco-labelling, and firm performance. The findings show that green marketing practices such as branding can improve financial and market outcomes. In a survey of 490 banking customers in Ethiopia, Jalu et al. (2024) found that perceived green value mediated the relationship between green brand innovation and brand loyalty. The evidence emphasizes authenticity and innovation in brand communication as foundations for durable stakeholder loyalty.

In an empirical study of 257 Chinese fast fashion consumers, Javed et al. (2024) found that green brand image had a significant impact on satisfaction, brand equity and purchase intention. The consumers also were more likely to find ethically branded institutions credible and trustworthy. The case study of City of Veszprém (Hungary) conducted by Lőrincz et al. (2021) with structured interviews showed that the city's green branding indeed has a positive effect on the image of the city and the involvement of the population. However, this requires a systematic communication strategy that must be implemented on a long-term basis. In a systematic literature review of 32 articles from Scopus Carrizo Moreira et al. (2023) identified that effective communication of a green brand results in more investment and confidence of the brand. On the other hand, lack of alignment between words and action of an institution reduces the impact of the brand. Reynolds et al. (2023) suggested that inclusive brand governance is key to adding value to involved stakeholders when examining Bristol's European Green Capital. This was revealed through 29 key informant interviews, but carries the risk of alienating disadvantaged groups.

Green Branding and University Sustainability: African and Kenyan Evidence

Evidence on green branding within African higher education remains scarce. Drawing on field observations, GIS mapping, and interviews in Kisumu, Koyoo (2024) found that CSR-oriented landscape branding improved urban identity and community perceptions, although the analysis did not apply inferential statistics or examine universities. Mohammad et al. (2023) established that green branding significantly influenced customers' green consciousness toward green technology and argued that similar principles can help educational institutions develop sustainability-oriented identities. These findings provided relevant foundations but did not directly test the effect of green branding on the sustainability of Kenyan public universities. The present analysis supplied that institution-specific inferential evidence.

Gaps in the Literature

The reviewed evidence consistently identifies benefits of green branding for performance, perceived value, reputation, and stakeholder loyalty. Nevertheless, the literature is concentrated in

manufacturing, retail, urban, banking, and destination settings, with minimal application to Kenyan higher education. Studies that address educational or public-sector settings are commonly qualitative and descriptive, and they often measure indirect outcomes such as reputation or green consciousness rather than institutional sustainability. Previous work also did not apply binary logistic regression to evaluate sustainability outcomes in Kenyan public universities. This investigation addressed these limitations through institution-level descriptive, inferential, and qualitative analyses.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Philosophy

A positivist research philosophy guided the investigation because the hypothesized relationship could be measured objectively using empirical data and statistical modelling (Creswell, 2014). This approach supported the estimation of observable patterns between green branding and institutional sustainability and enabled conclusions to be derived from replicable analytical procedures.

Research Design

An ex post facto research design was used. This design is appropriate because it investigates the influence of green branding practices on university sustainability without manipulating the variables (Almalki, 2021; Ishtiaq, 2019). The quantitative design was supplemented with qualitative data from key informants to enhance the interpretation of statistical data.

Target Population

The target population comprised 1,313 senior administrative and academic leaders from 35 public chartered universities in Kenya that were registered by the Commission for University Education and had operated for more than ten years. The selected categories—campus directors, academic registrars, deans, heads of departments, marketing officers, and heads of finance—were directly involved in policy formulation, institutional marketing, resource management, and the implementation of sustainability strategies.

Table 1
Population Distribution

Category	Size
Campus Directors	58
Academic Registrars	189
Deans	225
Heads of Departments	512
Marketing Officers	175
Heads of Finance	154
Total	1313

Note. Source: Commission for University Education [CUE] (2025).

Sampling Procedure

Stratified random sampling was used, which involves dividing the population into strata according to the staff's designation, and then randomly sampling within each stratum (Levitt et al., 2018). This method allowed for the representation of staff members from all categories, minimized over- and under-representation, and captured a variety of institutional views on green branding and sustainability.

Sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where N = 1,313 and e = 0.05, yielding n = 307 at a 95% confidence level. Proportional allocation across strata produced the distribution in Table 2.

Table 2
Sample Distribution

Category	Population Size	Sampling Ratio	Sample Size
Campus Directors	58	4.4%	14
Academic Registrars	189	14.4%	44
Deans	225	17.1%	52
Heads of Departments	512	39%	120
Marketing Officers	175	13.3%	41
Heads of Finance	154	11.7%	36
Total	1313	100%	307

Note. Source: Author (2026).

Data Collection Instruments

The main instrument was a structured questionnaire divided into three parts: demographic characteristics, green branding indicators, and sustainability measures. Green branding was measured through eco-brand image, environmental mission focus, sustainability-centred branding, green symbols, green brand association, and green brand identity. Sustainability was measured through academic programme relevance, quality education, staffing, internally generated revenue, annual student enrolment, and industry alignment. All construct items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Campus directors were purposefully sampled for the interviews to ensure strategic leadership of branding and sustainability on the campus and were conducted in a semi-structured format. Themes concerning green branding implementation, barriers, and sustainability impacts were

included in the interview guide. Interviews were audio recorded with permission and supported by field notes, face-to-face or Zoom/ Teams.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through physical questionnaires and Google Forms to reach respondents in geographically dispersed public universities. Participants received authorization and ethical clearance information before providing informed consent. Systematic follow-up reminders and multiple communication channels were used to support completion while preserving voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality.

Pilot Testing

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal consistency, with 0.70 adopted as the minimum acceptable threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The pilot instrument was completed by 30 participants drawn from comparable staff categories. Ambiguous or weak items were revised before the main data collection exercise.

Content validity was established through expert review by academics in marketing and higher education, who assessed the coverage and relevance of the green branding and sustainability constructs. Construct validity was evaluated using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. KMO values above .60 and statistically significant Bartlett's tests indicated that the item sets were suitable for factor analysis and measured their intended constructs.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, summarized green branding and sustainability patterns. Binary logistic regression was appropriate because sustainability was categorized as sustainable (1) or non-sustainable (0). The analysis proceeded in two stages: bivariate regression tested the independent influence of green branding, while multivariate regression estimated its adjusted effect alongside the other green marketing practices. Model interpretation used the Omnibus test, Hosmer-Lemeshow test, Nagelkerke R^2 , classification accuracy, Wald statistics, odds ratios, and statistical significance at $p < .05$.

The bivariate model was specified as $P(Y=1) = 1 / (1 + \exp(-B_0 + (B_1 X_1)))$, where Y represents university sustainability and X_1 represents green branding.

Key informant interview transcripts were analyzed thematically through familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Recurring ideas concerning green branding, institutional credibility, and sustainability outcomes were integrated with the quantitative findings to provide explanatory depth and triangulation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the University Ethical Review Committee (KeMU/ISERC/BUS/96/2025) and NACOSTI license No: NACOSTI/P/25/4182139. Participation was

voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and participants could withdraw without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected through de-identification and secure, password-protected storage of questionnaires, recordings, and transcripts.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Reliability and Validity of Measures

The scales demonstrated excellent internal consistency and construct validity. Green branding recorded Cronbach's alpha of .979, while sustainability of public universities recorded .991, both above the accepted .70 thresholds (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The KMO values ranged from .951 to .955 and Bartlett's tests were significant at $p < .001$, confirming adequate sampling adequacy and factorability.

Table 3: Reliability and Validity of Key Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's α	Items	KMO	Approx. χ^2	df	p-value	Decision
Green branding	0.979	6	0.951	2537.611	15	< .001	Adequate
Sustainability of public universities	0.991	6	0.955	3562.951	15	< .001	Adequate

Note. Source: Survey data (2026).

Descriptive Findings on Green Branding

Green branding was done moderately with the mean composite rating of 3.83. The highest rated item was the university branding which communicates commitment to sustainability ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.167$). Sustainability-centred branding was also considered positively to affect the public image ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.057$); eco-friendly branding was considered as an important aspect of marketing strategies ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.121$). They reveal the presence of environmental topics in institutional communication, and how they help to shape the reputation and differentiate.

The least satisfactory item was about the inclusion of green branding in the university mission and values with a mean of 3.43 ($SD = 1.143$). The outcome shows a disconnect between the sustainability messaging outside the institution and its level of institutionalization. Green branding is a value that stands the test of time because the environmental identity that is projected to the stakeholders is aligned with the purpose of the organization, the governance model, the culture, and the operations (Jain et al., 2024; Florez-Jimenez et al., 2025).

Table 4: Descriptive Analysis of Green Branding

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
The university uses eco-friendly branding as a central part of its marketing strategy.	280	1	5	3.89	1.121

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
The university's branding communicates its commitment to sustainability.	280	1	5	4.04	1.167
Green branding is integrated into the university's mission and values.	280	1	5	3.43	1.143
Sustainability-centred branding enhances the university's public image.	280	1	5	3.91	1.057
The university's green branding helps differentiate it from competitors.	280	1	5	3.82	1.023
The university receives recognition for its green branding efforts.	280	1	5	3.88	1.137
Composite mean				3.83	

Note. Source: Survey data (2026).

Descriptive Findings on Sustainability of Public Universities

Sustainability achieved an overall average of 3.77, which is a medium level of institutionalization. The highest rating was for addressing community challenges through research and outreach ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.116$). There was also a positive rating on effective strategies for income generation outside of the government ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.012$) and contribution of internally generated revenue to the operations of the university ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.029$). The visible capacity of these patterns is in the field of society participation and revenue diversification.

The lowest-rated item was the contribution of graduates to national and regional development ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.092$), although the score remained above the neutral midpoint. As a whole, the findings suggest that public universities have bases for sustainability, with respect to academic pertinence, community involvement, staffing, and alternative income generation, but they are still in the process of being consolidated and ensuring their long-term sustainability.

Table 5

Descriptive Analysis of Sustainability of Public Universities

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
The university regularly reviews and updates academic programs to meet emerging societal and industry needs.	280	1	5	3.75	1.058
The university addresses community challenges through research and outreach activities.	280	1	5	3.86	1.116
Graduates from this university make a positive contribution to national and regional development.	280	1	5	3.66	1.092
The university has effective strategies for generating income beyond government funding.	280	1	5	3.81	1.012

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Internally generated revenue complements government funding in supporting university operations.	280	1	5	3.79	1.029
The university has adequate teaching staff to deliver quality education.	280	1	5	3.76	1.077
Composite mean				3.77	

Note. Source: Survey data (2026).

Qualitative Findings

During the interviews, it was recognized that green branding is institutional identity work which influences reputation, competitiveness, stakeholder expectations, and internal behavior. A stronger environmental identity was correlated with higher levels of attractability towards partners, environment oriented students, and public trust. They also said that green branding is not limited to logos or symbols as green values are visible in the actions of the staff and students once the green concept is well integrated in the values of the institution. The qualitative results thus corroborate the idea of a credible green brand influencing external confidence and internal norms. Illustratively, an interviewee (interviewee 005) stated, “A strong green brand makes it easier to attract partners because they see sustainability as part of our identity”.

Interviewees emphasized that credible green branding depends on visible implementation rather than unsupported environmental claims. Leadership commitment, faculty involvement, student ownership, government engagement, community collaboration, and partner projects were consistently associated with implementation capacity. Another respondent added, “Others (interviewee: 006, 004 and 008) added, “Green branding is not just a logo issue; it influences how staff and students behave when they know sustainability is part of our values”. Where sustainability messages were not backed by actual projects, respondents noted that institutional trust could decline. The qualitative evidence therefore reinforced the quantitative finding that green branding contributes to sustainability when brand communication is matched with operational evidence.

Inferential Findings

The bivariate binary logistic regression model was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 17.631$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$) and enhanced the prediction of sustainability as compared to the intercept-only model. Hosmer-Lemeshow test ($\chi^2 = 28.910$, $p = .251$) was not significant indicating good fit of the model. The model had a Nagelkerke R^2 of .081, which means that green branding alone accounted for 8.1% of the variance in the chance of sustainability.

Table 6

Bivariate Logistic Regression Model Fit for Green Branding

Statistic	Value
Omnibus chi-square	17.631
df	1
Omnibus p-value	< .001
Hosmer-Lemeshow chi-square	28.910
Hosmer-Lemeshow p-value	.251
-2 Log likelihood	369.831
Cox & Snell R ²	.061
Nagelkerke R ²	.081

Note. Source: Survey data (2026).

The green branding was statistically associated with sustainability ($B = 1.021$, $SE = .247$, $Wald = 17.070$, $p < .001$) and positively impacted sustainability, when the implementation of green branding was adequate. This odds ratio (2.777) indicates that the presence of adequate green branding of the university is more likely to produce sustainability outcomes compared to inadequate green branding. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, meaning that green branding has a significant impact on sustainability.

Table 7
Variables in the Equation for Green Branding

Variable	Category	B	S.E.	Wald	df	p-value	Exp(B)
Green branding	Inadequate adoption (RC)	—	—	—	—	—	1.000
	Adequate adoption	1.021	0.247	17.07	1	< .001	2.777

Note. Source: Survey data (2026).

This multivariate model adjusted for age was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 86.813$, $df = 5$, $p < .001$); it accounted for 35.6% of the variation in sustainability and correctly classified 72.9% of cases. Green branding continued to be a significant independent predictor after controlling for the other green marketing practices ($B = 1.472$, $p < .001$, $OR = 4.358$). It is the second most powerful predictor after green advertising, which showed that the impact of the other marketing dimensions was insignificant.

Discussion of Findings

Through Green branding, public universities greatly enhance their sustainability prospects. The level of descriptive mean is moderately high, indicating that institutions are already utilizing environmental identity as a means of communicating commitment, improving public identity and distinguishing themselves. However, the relative lack of considering green branding in mission and values demonstrates that some universities are better at communicating sustainability than institutionalising it. To brand in green, the claims must be congruent with governance, culture,

policies, services and daily life at the University (Azizi & Sassen, 2023; Jain et al., 2024; Javed et al., 2024).

The odds ratios in the bivariate model (2.777) and adjusted model (4.358) indicate that green branding retained significant explanatory power, even when other green marketing activities were taken into account. This confirms that a credible environmental identity does more than improve outward image; it also contributes to institutional trust, differentiation, and perceived value. The result aligns with empirical evidence showing that authentic green branding improves reputation, loyalty, brand equity, and strategic positioning (Azizi & Sassen, 2023; Jain et al., 2024; Javed et al., 2024).

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Green Branding positively and significantly affects the sustainability of public universities in Kenya. Universities that have a proper incorporation of environmental responsibility in their identity, image and communication are more likely to reach sustainable results than institutions that don't have a good green branding. The effect is robust even when accounting for the impact of social media marketing, green advertising, green sponsorship and green marketing mix, indicating that green branding adds value to sustainability.

Descriptive and qualitative results demonstrate that going beyond only environment symbols and statements is the best way to be a green brand. Sustainability must be experienced in the institutional mission, values, policies, culture, services and stakeholder experience. The lower score on integration into mission and values indicates that public universities are not necessarily integrated in this regard, and there is a potential danger that external communication might be ahead of the integration process.

The findings position green branding as a strategic sustainability instrument for public universities rather than a peripheral communication practice. The evidence shows that the sustainability value of green branding is strongest when environmental claims are credible, visible, and supported by actual institutional practices. Green branding should therefore be developed as an institution-wide identity that links communication, governance, service delivery, research, community engagement, and campus operations.

Sustainability should be an integral part of the public university's institutional identity. Environmental commitments should be integrated in mission statements, strategic plans, policies, visual identity, public communication, academic programmes, procurement, infrastructure and the operation of campuses. This will harmonize the external brand communications and internal institutional practice.

There is a need to create evidence-based green branding standards by the University leaders. Environmental claims should be backed up with tangible measures like using renewable energy,

reducing waste, conserving water, going paperless, green procurement, community impact and sustainability-related research. To safeguard institutional credibility and minimize the risk of greenwashing, periodic sustainability reports and independent verification should be conducted.

Public universities must strategically utilise the green branding to attract the environmentally conscious students, staff, research partners, sponsors and development partners. Communicating the practical benefits of sustainability – lower operating costs, better learning environments, responsible research, graduate employability in green sectors and measurable benefits to the community.

The Commission for University Education and the Ministry of Education should integrate the concept of green branding into the framework of quality assurance and sustainability assessment of universities. The benchmarks should include truthful and transparent environmental communication, consistency between what is claimed and what is done in the institution, and public disclosure of sustainability achievements. Credible implementation should be rewarded through incentives, such as green-campus grants, recognition schemes, and performance linked support.

These are some of the indicators that can be used to assess the effectiveness of green branding on a longitudinal basis using universities as a focal point: enrolment, partnerships, external funding, staff and student participation, reputation measures, environmental performance. Future studies should include comparisons between public and private universities, analyse the impact of Green Branding over time and investigate the mediating role of perceived value, institutional trust or reputation between the green branding and Sustainability.

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