

ORIGINAL PAPER

Decoding Sustainable Storytelling: The Brewing ESG Framework of Coffee Brands on Digital Platforms

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Received: 15 March 2026 / Revised: 27 April 2026 / Accepted: 29 April 2026

Abstract. This study aims to decode the digital Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) strategies of leading coffee brands in Thailand by analyzing their content structures, persuasive mechanisms, and sustainability storytelling. As digital platforms become the primary medium for sustainability communication, brands face consumer skepticism and accusations of greenwashing. To understand how organizations construct brand authenticity to mitigate this skepticism, a qualitative deductive content analysis was conducted on 219 digital footprints across official websites, public relations news, Facebook, and Instagram from three major coffee chains: Café Amazon, Starbucks, and Punthai Coffee. The findings unveil the Brewing ESG storytelling framework, comprising three distinct strategic typologies. First, the planet-focused global standard pattern (Starbucks) utilizes the central route of persuasion and journey stories on official platforms to build systematic authenticity through international certifications. Second, the planet-people integrated engagement pattern (Café Amazon) relies on the peripheral route and impact stories on social media to empower marginalized groups, constructing relational authenticity. Third, the profit-local origin pattern (Punthai Coffee) leverages origin stories and local ingredients to foster identity-based authenticity, proving that localness is a powerful signaling mechanism. The study concludes that effective digital ESG communication requires a sophisticated media segmentation strategy. By partitioning logical evidence on official channels and emotional storytelling on social media, organizations have the potential to support perceived credibility and cultivate genuine sustainability communication.

Keywords: Brand authenticity, Content analysis, Digital ESG, Greenwashing, Sustainability storytelling

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the concept of sustainability has gained widespread global attention, shifting

from a macro-policy concept to an essential corporate strategy. In the digital era, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards have become a critical framework for businesses to evaluate and direct their operations (Puriwat and Tripopsakul 2022). For the highly competitive chain coffee shop industry in Thailand, sustainability communication is no longer merely a public relations activity but a critical strategic response for values-based competition. However, as online platforms become the primary medium for ESG communication, a rapid increase in sustainability claims has emerged. This phenomenon has led to a significant consumer "crisis of faith" and widespread skepticism regarding "digital greenwashing" (Fang 2024; Shen et al. 2024). When organizations leverage sustainability for marketing purposes without concrete operational evidence, it breeds accusations of corporate hypocrisy and severely damages brand trust (Mäncher et al. 2023).

1.1 The research objective This study aims to decode the digital ESG strategies and sustainability storytelling of three leading coffee chains in Thailand (Café Amazon, Starbucks, and Punthai Coffee). Specifically, it investigates how these brands construct brand authenticity to function as a strategic response to greenwashing risks. By systematically decoding these communication typologies, this study proposes the 'Brewing ESG storytelling framework' as a theoretical and practical guideline for navigating digital sustainability communication.

1.2 Literature review the online environment is characterized by a high degree of information asymmetry between brands and consumers (Spence 1973). On digital platforms, consumers cannot directly observe or verify the backend sustainability practices of coffee chains, such as ethical sourcing or waste management processes. This knowledge gap creates a fertile ground for digital greenwashing, where organizations leverage sustainability for marketing without concrete operational evidence, breeding corporate hypocrisy and severely damaging brand trust (Mánchez et al. 2023; Shen et al. 2024). To overcome this crisis of faith, organizations must utilize strategic communication to bridge the information gap, foster emotional connections, and ultimately build brand authenticity that proves their genuine commitment to sustainability.

Furthermore, recent literature highlights the critical role of "localness" in driving sustainable consumption, particularly in developing countries and the Southeast Asian context. Localness refers to the brand's embeddedness in the local economy, culture, and community empowerment (Sims 2009; Feldmann and Hamm 2015). For Thai consumers, the concept of localness-such as supporting local coffee farmers and utilizing regional ingredients-serves as a core belief that shapes their attitudes toward sustainability (Discetti et al. 2024). Communicating localness effectively transforms abstract environmental policies into tangible socioeconomic benefits, thereby strengthening the perceived authenticity of the brand.

1.3 Relevant theoretical framework to systematically analyze digital sustainability communication and decode its mechanisms, this study integrates five theoretical lenses. First, the triple bottom line (3Ps: People, Planet, Profit) provides the core framework for categorizing sustainability content, shifting focus from economic outcomes to a balance with social equity and environmental protection (Elkington 2018). Second, integrated marketing communication (IMC) theory examines how brands align tools such as public relations,

sales promotions, and interactive events with the affordances of digital platforms (Schultz and Schultz 1998; Belch and Belch 2020).

Third, the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) explains persuasion through two cognitive pathways (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). The central route relies on logic and evidence, requiring high motivation, whereas the peripheral route leverages emotional cues and visuals for lower-effort processing. Fourth, narrative transportation theory is applied to decode storytelling strategies (Escalas 2004). When consumers are immersed in narratives, resistance decreases and emotional attachment increases (Ryu et al. 2019). This study classifies sustainability narratives into origin stories (identity-based authenticity), impact stories (empathy through social outcomes), and journey stories (trust through process transparency).

Finally, signaling theory (Spence 1973) explains how these elements function as costly signals. In a digital context prone to greenwashing, brands must deploy credible signals-such as real human representation, local embeddedness, or third-party certifications-to reduce information asymmetry (Connelly et al. 2011). These signals reinforce brand authenticity, defined as consumers' perception of genuineness, transparency, and moral intent (Mánchez et al. 2023). Prior research indicates that strong brand authenticity mitigates greenwashing skepticism and enhances long-term brand loyalty (Fang 2024).

1.4 Related Research A review of existing literature reveals a significant methodological gap in sustainability communication research in Thailand. Previous studies have predominantly employed quantitative approaches, using surveys to measure micro-level consumer attitudes, satisfaction, and purchase intentions (e.g., Koh et al., 2022; Puriwat and Tripopsakul, 2022; Shen et al., 2024). However, these studies often treat the communication stimulus as a "black box" (Bunchabusabong et al., 2024). The actual message architecture, narrative

strategies, and platform-specific designs that brands deploy. By primarily measuring the outcomes without dissecting the inputs, current research lacks a comprehensive understanding of how digital ESG content is constructed. Therefore, utilizing a qualitative content analysis is essential in this study to systematically unpack this black box. By explicitly decoding the specific narrative typologies, persuasive routes, and authenticity signals that serve as the initial stimuli, this method provides a necessary foundation for understanding 'how' and 'what' brands communicate before these messages influence consumer psychological processing." failing to decode the actual message architecture, narrative strategies, and platform-specific designs that brands deploy. By primarily measuring the outcomes without dissecting the inputs, current research lacks a comprehensive understanding of how digital ESG content is actually constructed. This study bridges this gap by utilizing a qualitative content analysis to unveil the strategic architecture of sustainability communication before it reaches the consumer's psychological processing.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Population and sampling This study employed a purposive sampling method to select the target sample from chain coffee shops operating in Thailand. To systematically identify the most prominent brands, the researcher conducted a preliminary online consumer survey prior to the main study. This preliminary survey was distributed among social media communities focused on coffee consumption (e.g., café lover groups) between February 1 and February 15, 2025. Based on the data collected from 150 respondents, the results indicated that Café Amazon, Starbucks, and Punthai Coffee possessed the highest consumer awareness regarding sustainability communication in the Thai market, accounting for 82.00%, 64.67%, and 43.33%, respectively. Therefore, these three leading coffee brands were purposefully selected as the final target sample to decode their digital ESG strategies.

2.2 Data collection and ethical considerations Data collection focused on digital footprints—publicly accessible corporate communications including social media posts, press releases, and official webpages—produced by selected brands from January 2024 to December 2025. To capture the full digital ecosystem, data were gathered from four channels: official websites, PR news via search engines, Facebook, and Instagram, using keywords such as 'ESG', 'sustainability', 'environment', 'social', 'green', and 'community' in both Thai and English.

A rigorous screening and de-duplication process was applied. Exclusion criteria included: 1) identical cross-platform posts, 2) repetitive daily promotions unrelated to sustainability, and 3) content lacking environmental, social, or economic dimensions. After screening, 219 valid units of analysis remained, defined as individual social media posts (text and visuals), press releases, or webpages. The final sample consisted of 82 units from Café Amazon, 55 from Starbucks, and 82 from Punthai Coffee.

Regarding ethics, all data were sourced from public domains and analyzed solely for academic purposes without altering original message contexts. The screening followed a systematic flow: initial retrieval using defined keywords, first-stage removal of promotional and irrelevant content, and second-stage de-duplication by retaining the most original or comprehensive version. This process yielded the final 219 units for coding.

2.3 Reliability and validity testing to ensure methodological rigor, the content validity of the coding instrument (Coding Sheet) was evaluated by a panel of four academic experts. Prior to the full-scale analysis, a pilot test was conducted on a randomized sample of 40 digital content units to establish inter-coder reliability. The coding process involved three independent coders. The inter-coder reliability was calculated using Holsti's equation (Holsti 1969), yielding a Coefficient of Reliability (C.R.) of 0.85. This score significantly exceeded the acceptable minimum threshold of 0.80, confirming a high level of agreement among the coders and

ensuring the structural reliability of the qualitative data analysis instrument.

2.4 Data analysis the study utilized a qualitative deductive content analysis approach coupled with descriptive statistics. The extracted digital footprints were systematically evaluated using a structured coding sheet that integrated five theoretical dimensions and specific sub-categories. These analytical lenses included: 1) the content dimension based on the Triple Bottom Line where sub-themes included Planet (e.g., circular economy, waste reduction), People (e.g., vulnerable groups, community support), and Profit (e.g., local sourcing, grassroots economy); 2) the platform communication dimension utilizing IMC tools (e.g., public relations, sales promotion, event marketing); 3) the persuasive mechanism dimension evaluating ELM through the central route (focusing on logic, data, and standards) and peripheral route (focusing on emotion, visuals, and human elements); 4) the narrative dimension classifying storytelling strategies into Origin, Impact, Journey, or No narrative;

and 5) the authenticity and signaling dimension assessing the use of costly signals classified into real people/places, verifiable evidence/certificates, or no clear evidence. The coded data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, coupled with qualitative comparative analysis to synthesize the digital ESG typologies of the leading coffee brands.

3. Results

The deductive content analysis of 219 digital footprints-comprising 82 units from Café Amazon, 55 units from Starbucks, and 82 units from Punthai Coffee-reveals that leading coffee chains do not apply a uniform sustainability communication strategy. By decoding their digital content structures (3Ps), persuasive mechanisms (ELM), narrative typologies, and authenticity signals, the findings unveil three distinct digital ESG architectures, as comprehensively summarized and compared across all dimensions in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Digital ESG Strategies among Leading Coffee Brands

Analytical Dimensions	Café Amazon	Starbucks	Punthai Coffee
1) 3Ps Focus	Planet (46.34%) & People (34.15%) integrated	Planet-focused (49.09%)	Profit-focused (39.02%) & Local origin
2) Dominant Platform	Facebook (social media) and official websites / PR news	Official websites and PR news	Facebook (social media) and PR news
3) ELM Route	Peripheral route (on Facebook) & Central route (on official websites / PR news)	Central route (90.5% on official platforms)	Peripheral route (84.0% on social media)
4) Narrative Typology	Impact stories (32.6%) & Journey stories (supporting role)	Journey stories (38.1%) & Origin stories (28.6%)	Origin stories (44.0% on Facebook / 36.4% on PR news) & Impact stories (28.0%)
5) Authenticity Signals	Relational authenticity (real people, marginalized individuals 46.5%)	Systematic authenticity (third-party certifications, scientific targets 61.9%)	Identity-based authenticity (real people, real places, local roots 52.0%)

3.1 The planet–people integrated engagement architecture: Café Amazon Café Amazon’s digital ESG strategy reflects a hybrid integration of environmental and social dimensions, with strong emphasis on planet (46.34%)-notably circular economy initiatives (19.51%)-and

people (34.15%). The brand adapts message design to platform affordances. On official websites and PR news, it employs the central route and “journey stories” to explain systemic processes, such as the AI-driven “Cup Return” project. On Facebook, it shifts to the peripheral

route, using “impact stories” (32.6%) to evoke empathy by showcasing vulnerable groups, including deaf baristas and elderly staff in the “Café Amazon for Chance” project. To reduce greenwashing concerns, the brand builds relational authenticity by featuring real and marginalized individuals (46.5%) as evidence of tangible social impact.

3.2 The planet-focused global standard architecture: Starbucks Starbucks adopts a system-driven ESG strategy centered on the planet dimension (49.09%), positioning itself as a global sustainability leader. Its architecture relies on official websites and PR to establish structural trust, primarily through the central route (90.5%). The dominant “journey story” format (38.1%) explains processes such as LEED-certified “Greener Stores” and resource management systems. Additionally, “origin stories” (28.6%) are used to communicate ethical sourcing via C.A.F.E. Practices. To reinforce systematic authenticity and address greenwashing concerns, Starbucks employs high-cost signals, including measurable targets (e.g., 50% waste reduction by 2030) and third-party certifications (61.9%), rather than emotional appeals.

3.3 The profit–local origin architecture: Punthai Coffee Punthai Coffee diverges from global patterns by centering sustainability on the economic dimension (39.02%), emphasizing local empowerment and grassroots value distribution. Its strategy is driven by “origin stories,” comprising 44.0% of Facebook content and 36.4% of official news, highlighting local ingredients such as toddy palm from Songkhla and Arabica beans

from Mae Hong Son in the “Thairicano” campaign. On social media, the brand relies heavily on the peripheral route (84.0%) to evoke cultural pride. It also engages in real-time CSR through “impact stories” (28.0%), communicating actions like flood relief and wildlife support. Authenticity is reinforced through “real people and real places” (52.0%), featuring local farmers and communities, demonstrating that its sustainability is deeply embedded in the local economy.

3.4 The proposition of the brewing ESG storytelling framework the qualitative findings confirm that the diverse digital ESG communication strategies within the coffee industry can be systematically synthesized into a novel conceptual model: the brewing ESG storytelling framework (illustrated in Figure 1). By decoding the message of 219 digital footprints, this study discovers that brands strategically “brew” or blend specific narrative typologies, persuasive routes, and authenticity signals to effectively mitigate greenwashing. The analysis reveals three distinct patterns within this framework. First, Starbucks represents the planet-focused global standard pattern, signaling systematic authenticity through journey stories and international certifications. Second, Café Amazon embodies the planet-people integrated engagement pattern, signaling relational authenticity through impact storytelling and vulnerable group empowerment. Finally, Punthai Coffee illustrates the profit–local origin pattern, signaling identity-based authenticity by leveraging origin stories, local roots, and grassroots economic distribution.

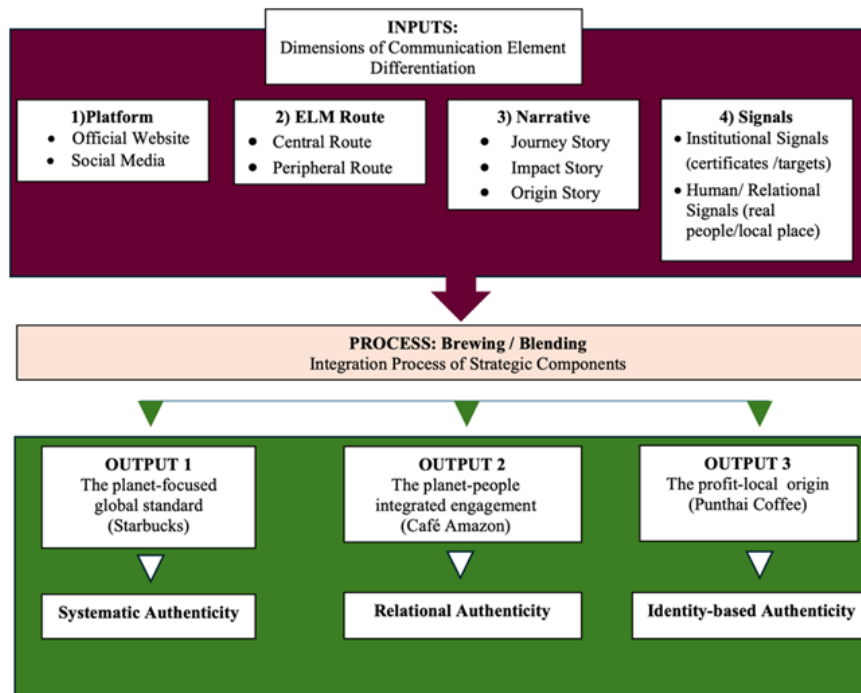


Figure 1. The Brewing ESG Storytelling Framework

4. Discussion

4.1 Discussion on content structure and sustainability storytelling by systematically decoding the digital message architectures of leading coffee brands, this study validates the structural integration of the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), narrative theory (Escalas 2004), and signaling theory (Spence 1973) in digital environments. The decoded results from 219 digital footprints demonstrate that the content structure and sustainability storytelling are intricately designed to match the specific affordances of digital platforms. More importantly, the qualitative content analysis unveils three distinct strategic typologies, to construct different dimensions of brand authenticity which appears designed to address skepticism regarding greenwashing (Mäncher et al. 2023; Fang 2024).

First, decoding the planet-focused global standard pattern (Starbucks) reveals a highly system-driven strategy. On official digital platforms, this multinational brand predominantly utilizes the central route of persuasion coupled with "journey stories." This content structure focuses on explaining the complex, chronological processes behind their eco-innovations, such

as the development of LEED-certified Greener Stores and the implementation of C.A.F.E. Practices. the brand may help signal "systematic authenticity". This finding aligns with the theoretical perspective that multinational corporations, which often face heightened consumer skepticism regarding their global supply chains, must prove their sustainability claims through rigorous, verifiable systems rather than relying purely on emotional appeals.

Second, decoding the planet-people integrated engagement pattern (Café Amazon) highlights a community-driven strategy that seamlessly blends environmental and social dimensions. On social media platforms, the brand heavily relies on the peripheral route of persuasion combined with "impact stories." By vividly portraying the improved lives of vulnerable groups, such as hearing-impaired baristas and elderly staff in the Café Amazon for Chance project, the brand constructs profound "relational authenticity". This strategic architectural choice perfectly validates the narrative processing theory (Escalas 2004). Showcasing tangible human impacts transports the consumer into the narrative, which effectively reduces cognitive counterarguing, triggers deep empathy, and fosters a strong emotional connection. Consequently,

this strategy appears designed to address skepticism and has the potential to support perceived credibility against greenwashing accusations.

Third, decoding the profit-local origin pattern (Punthai Coffee) unveils a highly localized strategy that challenges the traditional global sustainability norms. The brand strategically utilizes the peripheral route and "origin stories" on social media, emphasizing the geographical indications of their ingredients and featuring real local farmers and communities. This content structure builds a robust "identity-based authenticity" that is deeply rooted in the concept of "localness". This finding strongly supports the recent empirical evidence by Discetti et al. (2024), which emphasizes that supporting local economies and grassroots communities is a core belief shaping Thai consumers' sustainable attitudes. By transforming local ingredients and real community faces into powerful authenticity signals, this pattern proves that domestic coffee brands can successfully leverage their cultural roots to establish an anti-greenwashing mechanism that is just as formidable and competitive as the expensive, global standard certifications utilized by international giants.

When comparing the global brand (Starbucks) with the local Thai brands (Café Amazon and Punthai Coffee), a distinct dichotomy in sustainability communication emerges, which is deeply rooted in their corporate identities and missions. As a multinational corporation, Starbucks relies on 'systematic authenticity' through verifiable global standards to address the inherent skepticism associated with complex global supply chains. In contrast, the Thai brands leverage their domestic roots to construct 'relational' and 'identity-based' authenticity. Café Amazon aligns with its mission of social inclusivity by empowering local marginalized groups, while Punthai Coffee emphasizes 'localness' by sourcing regional Thai ingredients. This comparative finding extends the application of Signaling Theory; while global brands may need to signal through costly systemic evidence, domestic brands can signal authenticity through cultural and community embeddedness. Particularly in the Thai context, this aligns

with Discetti et al. (2024), demonstrating that supporting grassroots economies and showcasing local roots resonates profoundly with Thai consumers, offering a competitive advantage against abstract global certifications.

Ultimately, the successful decoding of these communication stimuli confirms that mitigating consumer skepticism is not achieved through a universal approach. Brands must dynamically align their persuasive route, narrative typology, and authenticity signal with their corporate identity and platform affordance to establish genuine sustainable brand equity.

4.2 The mechanism of mitigating digital greenwashing As highlighted in the introduction, the rapid influx of online sustainability claims has precipitated growing consumer skepticism, making digital greenwashing a primary threat to corporate credibility (Fang 2024; Shen et al. 2024). By decoding the message architectures of leading coffee brands, this study reveals that mitigating greenwashing allegations is not achieved merely by increasing the volume of ESG content. Instead, the most robust defense mechanism is the strategic implementation of "media segmentation."

Brands can function as a strategic response to greenwashing risks by partitioning their communication stimuli to simultaneously satisfy both the logical and emotional processing routes of consumers. Official communication channels, including corporate websites and public relations news, are specifically deployed to ensure structural transparency. On these formal platforms, brands utilize the central route of persuasion to provide in-depth, verifiable evidence, scientific targets, and global certifications. This systematic approach directly answers the logical consumer's demand for concrete proof, which may help signal authenticity and address accusations of corporate hypocrisy (Mäncher et al. 2023).

Simultaneously, social media platforms are utilized as dynamic engines to construct short-term relational engagement and emotional triggers. Rather than broadcasting complex technical data, brands leverage the peripheral

route on social media by deploying origin and impact stories that feature real people, local farmers, and tangible community empowerment. This dual-route mechanism ensures that the brand's sustainability strategy is perceived as both systematically verifiable and genuinely human-centric. Ultimately, aligning the logical weight of official evidence with the emotional resonance of social media storytelling is a strategic mechanism that has the potential to support perceived credibility and establish genuine brand authenticity.

4.3 Conclusion By decoding the digital ESG strategies of leading coffee brands, this study concludes that sustainable brand authenticity cannot be achieved through a uniform broadcasting approach. Instead, effective digital ESG communication requires a sophisticated alignment of content structure and sustainability storytelling across various digital platforms. Brands must strategically partition their narratives: utilizing the informative architecture of official websites to deliver verifiable journey stories, while simultaneously leveraging the interactive nature of social media to broadcast emotional origin and impact stories. Ultimately, the successful decoding of these digital footprints suggests that addressing greenwashing allegations may rely on deploying the right narrative signal through the right digital structural pathway. Furthermore, within the Thai context, the findings highlight that integrating 'localness' and community empowerment into the brand's mission serves as a potent authenticity signal. This approach allows domestic brands like Café Amazon and Punthai Coffee to compete effectively with the global sustainability standards set by multinational brands.

4.4 The Brewing ESG storytelling framework: Three distinct typologies A key theoretical contribution of this study is the "Brewing ESG Storytelling Framework," which explains how coffee brands strategically blend narrative types and authenticity signals. The framework demonstrates that sustainability communication is not a one-size-fits-all approach; instead, brands adopt distinct "brewing" strategies to construct different forms of brand authenticity. Three typologies emerge.

First, the planet-focused global standard pattern, represented by Starbucks, reflects a system-driven strategy. The brand relies on "journey stories" on official platforms to explain processes such as LEED-certified Greener Stores and environmental standards. It also uses "origin stories" to communicate C.A.F.E. Practices, reinforcing ethical sourcing. This approach emphasizes structural evidence over emotional appeal to build systematic authenticity.

Second, the planet-people integrated engagement pattern, embodied by Café Amazon, is a community-driven strategy combining environmental initiatives with human outcomes. The brand uses "impact stories" on social media to evoke empathy and build relational authenticity by showcasing vulnerable groups, such as hearing-impaired baristas and elderly staff. Complementary "journey stories" explain eco-innovations like the AI-driven cup return system, enhancing both credibility and care perception.

Third, the profit-local origin pattern, illustrated by Punthai Coffee, is a locally embedded strategy centered on grassroots economic distribution. The brand emphasizes "origin stories" to highlight geographical indications and local sourcing, such as toddy palm from Songkhla and Arabica beans from Mae Hong Son in the Thairicano campaign. It also uses "impact stories" for real-time CSR communication, including disaster relief. By leveraging local identity and community representation, this pattern signals identity-based authenticity and demonstrates how domestic brands can counter greenwashing through deep local embeddedness.

5. Recommendation for implication

5.1 Theoretical implications The primary theoretical contribution of this study is the development of the "Brewing ESG Storytelling Framework," which provides a novel conceptual mechanism for understanding digital sustainability communication in the coffee industry. Previous research often treated the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo 1986) and narrative theory (Escalas 2004) independently,

focusing either on cognitive message processing or the transportation effect of storytelling. However, this framework integrates these theories by demonstrating that the cognitive processing route directly dictates the narrative structure required to construct brand authenticity and mitigate greenwashing.

Specifically, the framework explains how coffee brands must strategically "brew" or blend persuasive routes and narratives to match digital platform affordances. When communicating through official platforms that activate the central route, brands must deploy "journey stories" with high-cost, objective signals (e.g., global certifications) to achieve systematic authenticity. Conversely, on social media platforms that trigger the peripheral route, logical data alone becomes insufficient. Brands must shift by deploying "origin stories" and "impact stories." By utilizing relational signals such as real human subjects, marginalized groups, and local identities, brands can construct identity-based and relational authenticity. Ultimately, the framework provides a new theoretical lens for understanding how the integration of persuasive routes and narrative typologies shapes the effectiveness of anti-greenwashing signals in the digital era.

5.2 Practical implications For marketing practitioners and coffee brand managers, this study provides actionable guidelines for designing effective digital ESG strategies without relying on a uniform "copy-paste" approach. A crucial practical implication is the strategic value of "localness" as a powerful authenticity signal, particularly for small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) and local coffee chains. While global brands, such as Starbucks, often rely on expensive international certifications like LEED or C.A.F.E. Practices to prove their environmental commitment, these high-cost systemic signals are frequently financially unattainable for smaller businesses. However, by decoding the successful digital ESG strategy of Punthai Coffee, this study demonstrates that SMEs can achieve comparable levels of brand authenticity by leveraging local identities.

Specifically, coffee SMEs should deploy "origin stories" that feature real local farmers, pinpoint exact geographical sourcing locations—such as toddy palm from Songkhla or Arabica beans from Mae Hong Son—and highlight tangible, grassroots community empowerment. Furthermore, showcasing real-time disaster relief efforts or direct community support can generate profound relational authenticity. Instead of purchasing expensive global sustainability labels, small brands can utilize the faces of real people, local ingredients, and direct community engagement as a highly effective, cost-efficient signaling mechanism. This localized approach triggers identity-based authenticity, which profoundly resonates with the cultural pride of Thai consumers (Discetti et al. 2024). Ultimately, integrating localness into the digital narrative proves that SMEs do not need massive budgets to combat digital greenwashing; rather, they require authentic community embeddedness and transparent storytelling featuring real human subjects to maximize their sustainable brand positioning.

6. Future study

While this qualitative study successfully decodes the digital ESG message architectures and sustainability storytelling typologies of leading coffee brands in Thailand, its scope is inherently bounded by a specific geographic and cultural context. To systematically advance the theoretical and practical understanding of digital sustainability communication, future research should employ a mixed-methods approach. By integrating qualitative content analysis with quantitative methodologies, researchers can empirically test how these decoded ESG communication typologies directly influence consumer psychological mechanisms—such as brand authenticity and brand loyalty—and subsequently drive behavioral outcomes like sustainable purchase intentions.

Furthermore, because consumer perceptions of sustainability and authenticity signals are deeply rooted in cultural values, future studies should extend this analytical framework to a

cross-cultural comparison. Researchers are strongly encouraged to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and multi-group structural equation modeling across different countries. Comparing how consumers from diverse cultural backgrounds respond to the planet-focused global standard pattern versus the profit-local origin pattern would provide profound theoretical insights. Such cross-national studies will offer valuable strategic guidelines for global coffee chains seeking to effectively localize their digital sustainability campaigns and mitigate greenwashing risks in international markets.

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