Integrating Sustainable Design Features with Visual Identity of the Brand

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Abstract:

This study aims at how brands blend sustainable aspects as green economy efforts into famous company and product visual identities. As consumers and other stakeholders place a higher priority on sustainability, Brands face the difficulty of adding eco-friendly features into their visual designs without risking consistency and brand Identity. This study analyses design elements that strike a balance between environmental messaging and brand identity by analyzing cases studies on selected consumer products. Important design elements like color, typography, images, and layout selections are evaluated for how well they convey sustainability without losing brand values. In addition, a practical enhancement on national selected samples were applied to investigate the analytical results and a survey was distributed to academics and experts in visual communication to verify these enhancements. Findings show that by demonstrating how visual identities may be modified to support sustainability ideals in ways that support the brand identity.

Key Words:

Sustainability; Green Branding; Visual Identity.

Introduction:

Integrating sustainable design in already known brands is somehow difficult as these brands are already create their own identities and costumers known their colors, fonts, styles and layout in their subconscious. Adding new colors or shapes or style of fonts or even changing the layout will consider a major change in the identity which may lead to the consumer confusion and trust issues with the brand. And changing some of these elements of design is a must to enhance the identity of the brand to show or support the idea of sustainability. This paper is merging more than one methodology trying by this to get trusted results, the methodologies are descriptive samples, practical design enhancements and a survey. Accordingly, the research will be divided into three parts; the first part will show the cognitive framework. The second part will analyze international samples. The third part will depend on the practical enhancements to national selected samples and finally the survey that was distributed between academics and experts.

Research objective:

This study aims at how international brands blend sustainable aspects as green economy efforts into companies and produce visual identities and to what extent we can enhance our national brands that already well known but didn't merge the sustainability concept. Accordingly, in the following part will show research hypothesis and questions.

Research hypothesis:

Integrating green economic goals into visual identities can be achieved by applying particular design components, including color, imagery, and typography, to convey sustainability successfully. This will be examined by answering the following research questions:

1. To what extent can designers combine green economic objectives into existing visual identities while maintaining brand recognition?
2. Which design elements (such as color, images, and typography) are most helpful in communicating a brand's commitment to sustainability?

Importance of research:

This study is significant because it addresses the increasing need for environmentally friendly advertising strategies in relation to their

identities. This study investigates how a brand's commitment to sustainability can be effectively expressed through visual components such as color, font, images, and layout. The study offers designers theoretical and practical insights on creating visual identities.

Research field:

Visual communication as an important aspect in designing brands identities by merging them with sustainable aspects can make audiences care about the environmental edge and climate change.

Research methodology:

Descriptive analytical approach of three chosen samples as cases studies for international well-known brands. These brands were selected according to three main points, the first point is that they were globally well-known brands. The second point is that they have merged already the sustainable edge in their branding. The third point is they must have a website. Additionally, an applied enhanced design will be made to another three chosen national brands that were selected according to having website and were nationally known. Trying by this to apply all the results of the analytical approach. A survey will then distribute between academics and visual communications experts as to compare the changes that was applied with the original designs.

Previous studies:

A paper titled with "Exploring the concept of brand sustainability: comprehending its importance and implications" by Kulova, Ivelina & Alexieva, Valentina (2024). The purpose of this essay is to give readers a thorough understanding of the concept of sustainability, explain its real-world applications, and investigate how these ideas can be successfully incorporated into both conventional business models and the e-commerce industry. It emphasizes how brand perceptions and immediate purchasing decisions are shaped by sustainable activities, which in turn has an impact on long-term success. One of their important results is that by making strategic investments in transformative projects, promoting these efforts effectively, and carefully measuring their effects, sustainability can become a powerful source of long-term economic advantage.

Another research paper by Aleksandar, Grubor & Milovanov, Olja (2017) titled with "Brand Strategies in the Era of Sustainability" This paper looks at how branding theory and practice change in the contemporary commercial world, where sustainability has emerged as a

key worldwide concern and seeks to emphasize the central role of sustainability in branding theory and practice as well as strategies for successfully integrating green values into brand management, with a focus on brand equity construct. Finally, one of the paper important findings that The field of sustainable branding research is only getting started. The study's primary weakness and a fantastic potential for further research is the fact that there are still not enough businesses that have truly incorporated the sustainability idea into their business models. In the future, one of the key prerequisites for a successful business will be understanding customers, greening business processes and brands, and encouraging a wide audience to embrace sustainable behavior. Accordingly, each brand will try to build its corporate reputation.

1- Sustainability and Design:

Sustainability is a common term these days that most governments and organizations all over the world are using the term "sustainability" verbally and visually. Accordingly, environmental concepts lead to the market in different industries. The idea nowadays is not only about creating a green product or a sustainable material, it's now about marketing the idea of sustainability as to be the main marketing edge that also affects consumer behavior *(Kulova & Nikolova-Alexieva, 2023)*. Brands like Starbucks, Nokia, and Johnson & Johnson use the sustainability concept and immerse it in their business line *(Kumar & Christodoulopoulou, 2013)*. As a result of these huge concerns and efforts made by the government and the brands so the below terms are most likely to be mentioned as follows:

1.1 Brand Responsibilities:

It is the responsibility of delivering good, healthy, sustainable, quality brands or even ideas to your employees, your consumer, and your environment *(Casey, 2021)*.

1.2 Sustainability Branding:

This term is not assigned to be universal in other meaning there is no certain criteria that can apply sustainability on all brands and organizations. But this term can include unique criteria for each brand as it needs working in teams, learning, creating, merging, enhancing, evaluating and developing. Then you will reach the most suitable way for your brand to apply sustainability concept *(Grubor & Milovanov, 2017)*.

1.3 Sustainability Visual Communication:

This term merges between three main perspectives. The first is referring to applying the sustainability edge to a certain brand, the second one is how to communicate this to the consumer and the third edge is the visual communication method used. Maria Cadarso, an Architecture who wrote her PhD in sustainable communication design in 2013, defined sustainable communication design as follow: "Sustainable communication design is the application of sustainability principles to communication design practice. Practitioners consider the full life cycle of products and services, and commit to strategies, processes and materials that value environmental, cultural, social and economic responsibility" *(Cadarso, 2015).*

2. Case studies:

This research paper is applying a case study methodology on selected international brands that have sustainable edge as they are highly integrating it into their visual identity and advertising. In addition, the chosen brands must have a website that the researcher will analysis the sustainable visual communication from. The selected brands are Patagonia, Ikea, Unilever (Dove, Seventh Generation). These brands are commonly cited as case studies in sustainable design research and marketing strategies as they were able to balance profit, brand identity and sustainable values.

2.1 <u>Patagonia Brand:</u>

It is a clothing brand that merges sustainability in their visuals and in their business. Their website has a button named climate goals and it shows their responsibility to climate crises as they stated their ambitions goals that depend on set of standards provided by Science Based Target Initiative (SBTi). Also, they add their near and long terms on their website.

2.1.1 Brand Responsibility:

Patagonia's honesty and commitment to sustainability have gained them widespread confidence and devotion from environmentally aware customers.

2.1.2 Sustainability Branding:

They are well known by their environmental concerns as they most of the time links their visuals to the Campaigns such as "Don't Buy This Jacket" and the Worn Wear Program showcase creative, unusual ways that integrate environmental messaging with brand identity.

2.1.3 Sustainable visual communication:

They usually used natural colors and real photos of the universe and outdoors photos. Their designs are neat and enhancing photos with simple shapes and a readable simple plain font. Their brand colors are blue which represents trust, nature and the purple that shows creativity and nature too. The orange color symbolizes energy and passion as shown in figure (1).
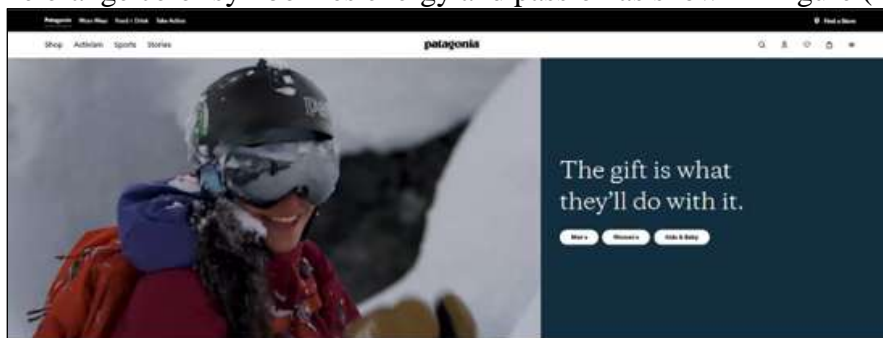

Figure (1) Patagonia Brand website (Patagonia, n.d.)

2.2 <u>Ikea Brand:</u>

It's a furniture, kitchen, decoration, home accessories brand mainly use sustainability strategy according to the effort they made to use renewable materials with their simple minimal flat eco-friendly products. Their website is highly showing their responsibility towards people, family, and environment.

2.2.1 Brand Responsibility:

IKEA's advertising targets environmentally concerned consumers while keeping its signature minimalist design approach.

2.2.2 Sustainability Branding:

IKEA incorporates green ideals into their visual language by using eco-friendly advertising and sustainable product design, such as flat-pack furniture to cut emissions and renewable materials.

2.2.3 Sustainable visual communication:

They usually used earthy tones with mainly blue to reveal trust and dependability, and the yellow color that gives the feeling of energy and warmth and optimism. The real photos of their products were put in a very neat way. The fonts used are simple, bold and clear as shown in figure (2).

Figure (2) Ikea Brand website *(IKEA, n.d.)*

2.3 <u>Unilever (Dove, Seventh Generation) Brand:</u>

It's global consumer goods across different sectors. Dove is known for skincare and hair products. Sustainability is recognizable by this brand, especially the seventh generation that focuses on eco-friendly packaging and natural ingredients, adding to this the recycling ability to their used materials.

2.3.1 Brand Responsibility:

Unilever has effectively linked various brands under its corporate sustainability framework, thereby boosting its reputation as an environmentally responsible company.

2.3.2 Sustainability Branding:

Sustainability is integrated into the company's framework, with brands like Seventh Generation (clean product branding) and Dove (recyclable packaging) leading in green advertising.

2.3.3 Sustainable visual communication:

They usually use shapes in design more than using a real photo as the plain shape that represents a leaf. The brand colors are blue as the meaning of trust innovation, green which shows the bran eco-friendly, sustainability and nature, adding to these colors, white as purity and simplicity. Regarding the fonts used it was simple and bold in style as shown in figure (3).
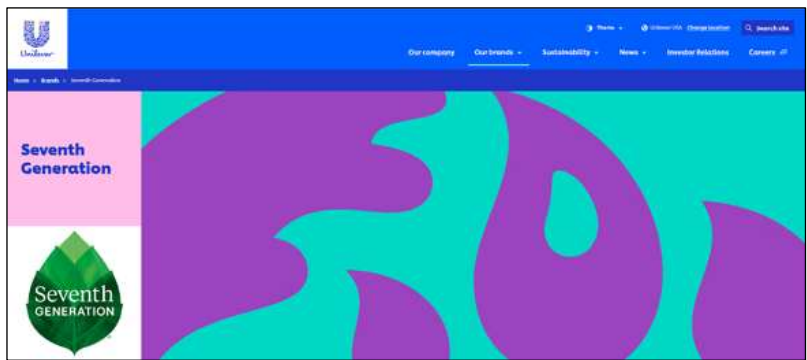
Figure (3) Unilever (Dove, Seventh Generation) Brand website *(Unilever, n.d.)*

3. Case Study Discussion:

According to the previous analysis for the chosen three cases Patagonia, Ikea and Unilever brands the researcher found that the most common color used in the three brands was the blue color merging it with the common neutral white these indicates the sustainability and the eco-friendly environment although they are different products seeking different audiences. Fonts used in the three are very different in styles, but they all used bold font style. Using real pictures adding to it simple shapes are commonly used. Sustainability-driven in both Patagonia and Unilever brands were obvious visually, verbally in their slogans and stated crestal clear in their websites as shown in table (1)

Table (1) Sustainable visual communication

Visuals	Patagonia Brand	Unilever (Dove, Seventh Generation) Brand	Ikea Brand
Colors	Blue, purple and orange	Blue and green	Blue and Yellow
Neutral	Black and white	white	Black and white
Fonts used	Mix of bold and regular styles, using both serif and sans-serif elements. Merging straight and curvy edges, these created a dynamic feel.	Bold and curvy, giving a modern and natural approachable feel	Bold and straight edged, giving a strong and professional feel
Pictures used	Real picture	Illustrations	Real picture
Shapes	Rarely used Simple shapes	Depending on shapes and illustrations	Using simple shapes

Visuals	Patagonia Brand	Unilever (Dove, Seventh Generation) Brand	Ikea Brand
Obvious and direct existing of the sustainable edge on the website	Existing	Existing	Not obvious
Sustainability driven	From the beginning	From the beginning	Grew with time as it wasn't promoted from the beginning
Verbal (Campaign slogan)	We're in business to save our home planet	The products that work for the planet	Make home a better place
Meaning and reflections	Reflects their deep commitment to environmental sustainability	Reflects environmental responsibility for creating cleaning and personal product.	Shows the functional and sustainable home products

The researcher can sum up the conclusion of the previous analytical study of the three international brands, Patagonia, Ikea, and Unilever (Dove, Seventh Generation) was that the color mainly used is the blue shades and white, the real pictures are commonly used than the illustrated pictures, also used shapes are simple. Fonts used are mostly bold fonts and the style used were both sharp and curved. In addition, the Sustainability direction is driven from the beginning in Patagonia and Unilever brands, but Ikea brand was enhanced in it later as maybe a marketing tool. The slogans used were direct in relation to the sustainability in the same two brands, but Ikea used a smart slogan that can be considered from both sides the house side and the worldwide home.

4. Practical designs:

In this part the researcher will choose three national brands (Egyptian brands), that have the same business and websites for their brands. Accordingly, the chosen Brands are Mitcha which represent a leading online shopping platform launched in 2018 and their vision was to unite and promote all Egyptian designers reviving the culture of fashion in Egypt so it represents a clothing Egyptian brand, Frida represents a

privately owned Egyptian company established in 1957, it is a major supplier of a wide range of products needed for household and personal care. Mffco Helwan is one of the largest furniture companies in the Middle East. It was first shown in 1970 and most of their furniture was designed and applied with high quality natural wood as will be shown on table (2).

Table (2) Sustainable visual communication

Visuals	Mitcha Brand	Fridal Brand	Mffco Helwan Brand
Colors	Red	Orange	Red
Neutral	Black and white	Black and white	Black and white
Fonts used	Mix of bold and regular styles, using both serif and sans-serif elements. Merging straight and curvy edges, these created a dynamic feel.	Bold and straight edged, giving a strong and professional feel.	Bold and curvy, giving a modern and natural approachable feel.
Pictures used	Real picture	Real picture	Real picture
Shapes	Rarely used Simple shapes	Using simple shapes	Using simple shapes
Obvious and direct existing of the sustainable edge on the website	Not obvious	Not obvious	Not obvious
Sustainability driven	It wasn't promoted.	It had a sustainability driven.	It wasn't promoted.
Verbal (Campaign slogan)	A culture of fashion.	Discover nature's essence.	Furniture is made from natural wood.
Meaning and reflections	Reflects their commitment to cultural issues.	It shows its production.	It shows its production.

In the following part the researcher took a screenshot from each website of the opening page and the ending page and tried to enhance the identity of these brands by applying the results of the analytical study so according to the color shades of blue will be added and white too. The fonts will be changed if necessary to bold fonts that may enhance more and inserting simple shapes and real pictures to improve the sustainability

enhancements. The aim of the research is to enhance the brands that already have identities that are not related to the sustainability concept and these enhancements are done carefully to keep the brand identity safe with no significant changes.

4.1 Mitcha, the following pictures represent the screenshots of the original website figure 4, while figure 5 represents the enhanced design of the same website.

Figure (4) Mitcha original brand website *(MITCHA. n.d.)*

Figure (5) Mitcha suggested brand website

4.2 Fridal, the following pictures represent the screenshots of the original website figure 6, while figure 7 represents the enhanced design of the same website.

Figure (6) Fridal original brand website *(Frida Egypt. n.d.)*

Figure (7) Fridal suggested brand website

4.3 <u>**Mffco Helwan,**</u> the following pictures represent the screenshots of the original website figure 8, while figure 9 represents the enhanced design of the same website.
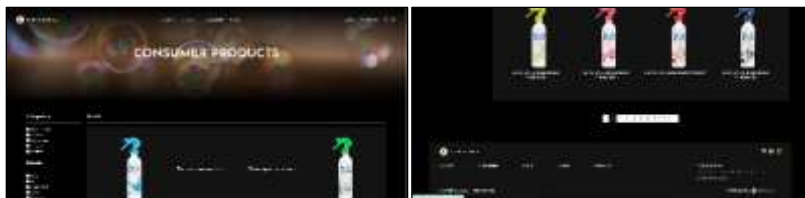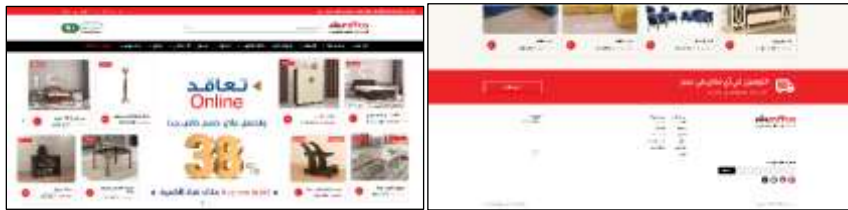

Figure (8) Mffco original brand website *(MFFCO. n.d.)*

Figure (9) Mffco suggested brand website

4.4 The Survey:

A survey was conducted to examine the primary focus of the research by collecting insights from academics and experts in the field. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the original designs of the selected brands utilized in the study's analytical section, as well as the improvements made by the researcher. This assessment aimed to identify which designs more effectively communicate a sustainable advantage. The criteria used in the survey were identical to those employed in both the analytical and practical components of the study, concentrating on visual aspects such as color, font, shapes, and images. It was distributed to academic and field experts of design and visual communication. The respondence number were 13 specialized as follows 4 professors, 3 PhD., 2 Assistant Lecturer, 3 Creative director, 1 Brand strategist. The survey consists of four sections, each section consists of the two pictures of the original screen shots of the website, followed by the survey questions. Then the enhanced designed websites that suggested by the researcher apply the analytical study results followed by the survey questions and the answers are according to the scale of five. Section four represents personal information, and the following shows the flow of the survey questions as will be shown in table (3).

Table (3) Survey questions and results

Website Name	Section	Question	Alignment Level	Percentage	Count
Mitcha	**Original**	Are the colors used in the original website align with the concept of sustainability?	Not at all	7.7%	1
			Somewhat	30.8%	4
			Moderate	53.8%	7
			Strongly	7.7%	1
			Perfectly	0%	0
		How do you perceive the font style used in the original website in terms of readability and professionalism?	Not at all	7.7%	1
			Somewhat	30.8%	4
			Moderate	46.2%	6
			Strongly	15.4%	2
			Perfectly	0%	0
		To what extent do the pictures on the original website evoke feelings of sustainability?	Not at all	0%	0
			Somewhat	23.1%	3
			Moderate	61.5%	8
			Strongly	7.7%	1
			Perfectly	7.7%	1
		Overall, how does the original design reflect sustainability?	Not at all	7.7%	1
			Somewhat	46.2%	6
			Moderate	30.8%	4
			Strongly	15.4%	2
			Perfectly	0%	0
Mitcha	**Enhanced**	Do the enhanced color changes (e.g., shades of blue and white) better align with sustainability themes?	Not at all	15.4%	2
			Somewhat	15.4%	2
			Moderate	30.4%	4
			Strongly	23.1%	3
			Perfectly	15.4%	2
		How effective are the new images and visuals in supporting a sustainable message?	Not at all	7.7%	1
			Somewhat	23.1%	3
			Moderate	38.5%	5
			Strongly	23.1%	3
			Perfectly	7.7%	1
	They can select more than one answer	Comparing the original and enhanced designs, which do you feel better conveys sustainability?	Original	7.7%	1
			Enhanced	61.5%	8
			Neither	0%	0
			Both equally	30.8%	4
		What specific elements in the enhanced design are most effective in promoting sustainability? (Check all that apply)	Color palette	61.5%	8

Website Name	Section	Question	Alignment Level	Percentage	Count
Fridal	Original	Comparing the original and enhanced designs, which do you feel better conveys sustainability? Are the colors used in the original website align with the concept of sustainability?	Typography	23.1%	3
			Visuals	38.5%	5
			Layout	30.8%	4
			Not at all	53.8%	7
	They can select more than one answer	What specific elements in the enhanced design are most effective in promoting sustainability? (Check all that apply)	Somewhat	23.1%	3
			Moderate	15.4%	2
			Strongly	7.7%	1
			Perfectly	0%	0
		How do you perceive the font style used in the original website in terms of readability and professionalism?	Not at all	15.4%	2
			Somewhat	38.5%	5
			Moderate	38.5%	5
			Strongly	7.7%	1
			Perfectly	0%	0
		To what extent do the pictures on the original website evoke feelings of sustainability?	Not at all	53.8%	7
			Somewhat	30.8%	4
			Moderate	7.7%	1
			Strongly	7.7%	1
			Perfectly	0%	0
		Overall, how does the original design reflect sustainability?	Not at all	53.8%	7
			Somewhat	15.4%	2
			Moderate	30.8%	4
			Strongly	0%	0
			Perfectly	0%	0
Fridal	Enhanced	Do the enhanced color changes (e.g., shades of blue and white) better align with sustainability themes?	Not at all	7.7%	1
			Somewhat	30.8%	4
			Moderate	38.5%	5
			Strongly	15.4%	2
			Perfectly	7.7%	1
Fridal	Enhanced	How does the updated font style contribute to the overall sustainability theme?	Not at all	0%	0
			Somewhat	15.4%	2
			Moderate	53.8%	7
			Strongly	23.1%	3
			Perfectly	7.7%	1
		How effective are the new images and visuals in supporting a sustainable message?	Not at all	0%	0
			Somewhat	23.1%	3
			Moderate	38.5%	5
			Strongly	30.8%	4
			Perfectly	7.7%	1

Website Name	Section	Question	Alignment Level	Percentage	Count
	They can select more than one answer	Comparing the original and enhanced designs, which do you feel better conveys sustainability?	Original	7.7%	1
			Enhanced	69.2%	9
			Neither	15.4%	2
			Both equally	7.7%	1
		What specific elements in the enhanced design are most effective in promoting sustainability? (Check all that apply)	Color palette	61.5%	8
Mffco	**Original**	Comparing the original and enhanced designs, which do you feel better conveys sustainability?	Typography	38.5%	5
			Visuals	38.5%	5
			Layout	30.8%	4
		Are the colors used in the original website align with the concept of sustainability?	Not at all	61.5%	8
	They can select more than one answer	What specific elements in the enhanced design are most effective in promoting sustainability? (Check all that apply)	Somewhat	23.1%	3
			Moderate	7.7%	1
			Strongly	7.7%	1
			Perfectly	0%	0
		How do you perceive the font style used in the original website in terms of readability and professionalism?	Not at all	38.5%	5
			Somewhat	23.1%	3
			Moderate	38.5%	5
			Strongly	0%	0
			Perfectly	0%	0
		To what extent do the pictures on the original website evoke feelings of sustainability?	Not at all	69.2%	9
			Somewhat	15.4%	2
			Moderate	15.4%	2
			Strongly	0%	0
			Perfectly	0%	0
		Overall, how does the original design reflect sustainability?	Not at all	61.5%	8
			Somewhat	23.1%	3
			Moderate	15.4%	2
			Strongly	0%	0
			Perfectly	0%	0
Mffco	**Enhanced**	Do the enhanced color changes (e.g., shades of blue and white) better align with sustainability themes?	Not at all	30.8%	4
			Somewhat	23.1%	3
			Moderate	30.8%	4
			Strongly	15.4%	2
			Perfectly	0%	0

Website Name	Section	Question	Alignment Level	Percentage	Count
		How effective are the new images and visuals in supporting a sustainable message?	Not at all	30.8%	4
			Somewhat	30.8%	4
			Moderate	23.1%	3
			Strongly	15.4%	2
			Perfectly	0%	0
	They can select more than one answer	Comparing the original and enhanced designs, which do you feel better conveys sustainability?	Original	0%	0
			Enhanced	61.5%	8
			Neither	30.8%	4
			Both equally	7.7%	1
		What specific elements in the enhanced design are most effective in promoting sustainability? (Check all that apply)	Color palette	46.2%	6
		Comparing the original and enhanced designs, which do you feel better conveys sustainability?	Typography	7.7%	1
			Visuals	23.1%	3
			Layout	46.2%	6

Discussion of Results:

The original designs of the three brands are commonly not giving the sustainability direction in their designs as most of the survey answerers including the color, fonts, visual and layout used are chosen between not at all, somewhat and moderate. Especially Fridal was getting most of the answers for not at all. The question of did the overall of the design show sustainability was Mitcha brand was more to show sustainability than Fridal and Mffco. The enhanced designs were going for moderate, strongly and perfectly choice was existed but rare. The color enhancements are taking the more percentage of the enhancements that show sustainability, then visuals and layout and finally the least was for the typography that represents the sustainability line. The question that compares the original designs with the enhanced one was getting more than 60% choose the enhanced design in the three comparisons. According to the previous table and the above discussion these designs were enhanced and academics and experts saw that these enhancements show sustainability more than the original designs and that there was slightly differences between them in some elements but that was one of the research aims to not do significant changes that can change the identity and also the chosen brands in the

applied part are not related sustainability to see is it difficult to enhance these brands or it can be enhanced.

Conclusion:

1- Designers can enhance Sustainability in known brands.
2- Colors are the most significant way to show sustainability.
3- Visuals are the second edge to show sustainability.
4- Typography needs more enhancement to show the sustainability edge.

And according to this conclusion we can achieve the hypothesis to be true, as designers can enhance brand identities to convey sustainability successfully.

Recommendations:

1- Designers must pay attention to enhance sustainability features in their elements of design.
2- Design academics and colleges have to show the importance of using the sustainability concepts in their designs.
3- The media should promote the importance of sustainability ideas to the audiences.
4- Implementing sustainability features within the creation of the product and the slogan can be very effective.

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دمج ميزات التصميم المستدام مع الهوية البصرية للشركات

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المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة كيفية دمج العلامات التجارية للجوانب المستدامة كجهود الاقتصاد الأخضر في الهويات البصرية للشركات والمنتجات الشهيرة. نظرًا لأن المستهلكين وأصحاب المصلحة الآخرين يضعون أولوية أعلى للاستدامة، تواجه العلامات التجارية صعوبة في إضافة ميزات صديقة للبيئة إلى تصميماتها المرئية دون المخاطرة بالاتساق وهوية العلامة التجارية، كما تحلل هذه الدراسة عناصر التصميم التي تحقق التوازن بين الرسائل البيئية وهوية العلامة التجارية من خلال تحليل دراسات الحالة على منتجات استهلاكية مختارة، حيث يتم تقييم عناصر التصميم المهمة مثل اللون والطباعة والصور واختيارات التخطيط لمدى نجاحها في نقل الاستدامة دون فقدان قيم العلامة التجارية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تم تطبيق تحسين عملي على عينات مختارة على المستوى الوطني للتحقيق في النتائج التحليلية وتم توزيع استبيان على الأكاديميين والخبراء في مجال الاتصال المرئي للتحقق من هذه التحسينات. تظهر النتائج أنه من خلال إظهار كيفية تعديل الهويات المرئية لدعم مُثُل الاقتصاد الأخضر بطرق تدعم هوية العلامة التجارية.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الاستدامة؛ العلامة التجارية البيئية؛ الهوية البصرية.