

# A Systematic Literature Review of Ethical Branding: Definitions, Benefits, and Dimensions

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Although ethical branding is well recognized in the marketing literature, the multiple definitions, dimensions and conceptual approaches to the construct make it ambiguous and difficult to understand. Ethical branding often gets confused with other constructs such as corporate social responsibility and green branding, which further hampers its comprehension. So, this paper aims to enhance the theoretical foundations of the ethical branding construct by elaborating on its definition, benefits, and dimensions. A systematic review of the ethical branding literature is conducted to do so. Following established inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting a total of 80 journal articles published from 2002 to 2022 are analysed. Seven definitions of ethical branding are found in the literature. The dimensions of ethical branding are analysed, and benefits are also clarified.

**Keywords:** Ethical branding, Corporate social responsibility, Systematic literature review.

## Introduction:

Consumers see brands as integral components of the product or service since they relate meaning and interpretations to brands based on the services they deliver, their ethical responsibility, or their environmental responsibility (Thompson 2013). For example, 83% of The Body Shop's loyal and regular customers continue to purchase its products due to positive perceptions of their ethical and environmental responsibilities, which include prohibiting animal testing, supporting community trade, enhancing self-esteem, protecting human rights, and protecting the environment, as the products are exclusively derived from natural ingredients (Peattie 2021). Recently, consumers have become more sensitive to ethical conduct, such as animal welfare and vegan ingredients, sustainable packaging, and natural

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ingredients (Allard et. al. 2022). As well, consumers are becoming more sensitive to natural and ethical brands due to their association with better health (Bom, 2020).

In this regard, an ethical brand will result in greater brand association, customer loyalty, a positive reputation among consumers, a positive brand perception, higher consumer evaluations and brand choice (Newman and Trump 2017; Hunt 2019; Shah et. al. 2020). Based on this, it is obvious that brands have an immense role in how consumers associate themselves with a specific product or service, affecting their choice (Schamp et. al. 2019). Consequently, the importance of ethical branding has become a prerequisite for the success of many industries (Touchette et. al. 2020). As, companies have realized that ethical brands benefit society and boost long-term sustainability, as well as influencing consumers' brand choices (Hunt 2019, Yoganathan et. al. 2019).

However, from the marketing literature, corporate social responsibility is the construct that seems to have the closest relationship with ethical branding (Van de Ven 2008; Singh et. al. 2012; Wegerer 2018; Wegerer and Munro 2018). Nevertheless, there is confusion regarding the differences between these two constructs. Furthermore, ethical branding and corporate social responsibility are used interchangeably by several authors (Palazzo and Basu 2007; Newman et. al. 2017; Pinto et. al. 2019; Payne et. al. 2021). The differentiation of the constructs, recognising how they are interconnected, is a key priority for researchers, as each concept is provided with a clear discriminant validity, as well as for practitioners, as they can focus their attention more efficiently to obtain better results. To address these problems and given the relevance of ethical branding for researchers and organizations, this paper aims to enhance the theoretical conceptualisation of ethical branding by presenting definitions of the construct and specifying its different dimensions and outcomes. To attain the proposed aims, a systematic review of the ethical branding literature was conducted.

## **Methodology:**

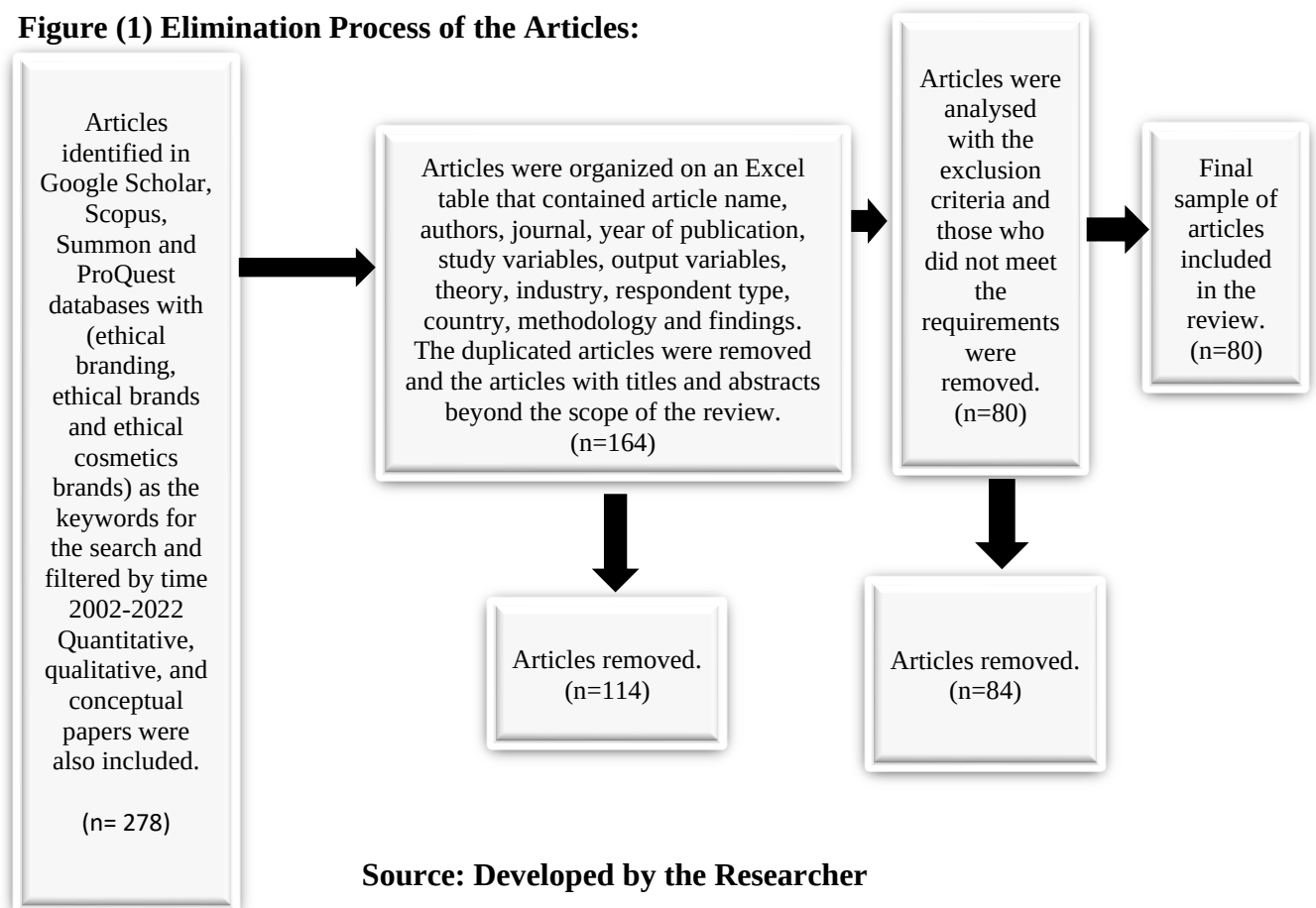
The study followed a systematic approach to the literature search. To analyse the more recently published academic literature on the construct, the search protocol focused on academic publications written in English and published from 2002 to 2022. The following table (1) outlines the inclusion and exclusion criteria used in the systematic review, followed by Figure (1) illustrates the process of eliminating the articles:

**Table (1) Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:**

| Inclusion Criteria                                                                                                      | Exclusion Criteria                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Academic publications written in English and published from 2002 to 2022                                             | 1. Articles where ethical branding was not the core focus of the study.                |
| 2. Quantitative/qualitative/conceptual (to consider empirical evidence and literature reviews).                         | 2. Articles pre-2002.                                                                  |
| 3. Articles that emphasise ethical branding, ethical brands and ethical cosmetics brands.                               | 3. The articles with a title and abstract beyond the scope of the review were removed. |
| 4. The entire article was analysed in cases where the title, keywords, and abstract did not clearly describe the study. |                                                                                        |

The elimination process of the articles is shown in Figure (1):

**Figure (1) Elimination Process of the Articles:**



## **Findings:**

As a result of established inclusion and exclusion criteria, 80 journal articles published from 2002 to 2022 were selected for analysis. The literature provides seven definitions of ethical branding. Out of the 80 reviewed papers, 17 are conceptual. 20 papers used qualitative methods, 38 quantitative, and five used a mixed-method approach.

## **Construct Clarity and Definitions of Ethical Branding:**

A frequently used definition found in the literature states that ethical brands should act morally, consider economic, social, and environmental responsibilities, have integrity, honesty, and accountability and create added value for the firm, its customers, and its stakeholders (e.g. Allard and McFerran, 2022; Alwi et al., 2017; Fan 2005).

According to, Flores-Hernández et al. (2020); Garanti (2019); Schamp et al. (2019); Pinto et al. (2019) and Szmigin et al. (2007) ethical branding should be a continuous system of production, exchange and management that respects producers, communities, consumers, and the environment, and this system is rooted in people-to-people connections, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Ethical branding is not just a continuous system that respects all shareholders and stakeholders, but it should deliver a promise that the company's ethical values of sincerity, modesty and compassion are reflected in the products and/or services it offers (Van De Vern, 2008). Bertilsson (2014) indicated that ethical branding is a concept in which the corporation is a citizen of a society with rights and responsibilities.

However, Wegerer (2018) emphasized that ethical branding should not only continue to engage businesses in ethical behaviour and contribute to economic growth, but it should also simultaneously enhance the quality of life of the workforce, families, local communities, and society as a whole.

Along with the previous definitions Ferrell et al. (2019) define ethical branding as doing something that benefits society or consumers, such as using organic ingredients, supporting fair trade, or addressing the needs of stakeholders.

Finally, Amoako et al. (2021) then re-organized the previous definitions of ethical branding into three parts; the first part is how the conduct of business reflects ethical considerations, the second part is how the company's operations affect the environment, and the third part, it is the extent to which these operations interfere with social and human rights.

Table (2) shows seven definitions of ethical branding found when conducting the systematic literature review. Forty-one of the eighty articles analysed presented a definition of ethical branding. The table is organized from the greater to the lower number of citations of each definition.

**Table (2) Definitions of Ethical Branding:**

| No | Definitions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | References                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Ethical branding indicates that brands should act morally, consider economic, social, and environmental responsibilities, have integrity, honesty, and accountability, and create added value for the firm, customers, shareholders, and its stakeholders.        | Allard and McFerran (2022); Da Silva Tolentino et al. ( 2021); Payne et al.( 2021); Peattie and Samuel (2021); Hunt (2019); Iglesias et al. (2019); Javed et al. (2019); Alwi et al. (2017); Klink and Wu (2017); Trump et al. (2017); Wen and Song (2017); Antonetti and Maklan (2016); Kang and Choi (2016); He and Lai (2014); Moore et al. (2014); Dhillon (2013); Nga and Soo (2013); Papista and Krystallis (2013); Singh et al. (2012); White et al. (2012); Balmer et al. (2011); Khatri and Sharma (2011); Story and Hess (2010); Beard (2008); Shaw and Tomolillo (2007); Fan (2005). |
| 2. | Ethical branding is a continuous system of production, exchange and management that respects producers, communities, consumers, and the environment, and this system is rooted in people-to-people connections, social justice, and environmental sustainability. | Flores-Hernández et al. (2020); Garanti (2019); Schamp et al. (2019); Pinto et al. (2019); Lai and Hsu (2015); Goworek et al. (2012); Szmigin et al. (2007).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

| No | Definitions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | References                                                                                      |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3. | Ethical branding is not just a continuous system that respects all shareholders and stakeholders, but it should deliver a promise that the company's ethical values of sincerity, modesty and compassion are reflected in the products and/or services it offers.                                                         | Markovic et al. (2018); Hawkins and Emel (2014); Lehner and Halliday (2014); Van De Vern (2008) |
| 4. | Ethical branding is a concept in which the corporation is a citizen of a society with rights and responsibilities.                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Bertilsson (2014).                                                                              |
| 5. | Ethical branding should not only continue to engage businesses in ethical behaviour and contribute to economic growth, but it should also simultaneously enhance the quality of life of the workforce, families, local communities, and society as a whole.                                                               | Wegerer (2018)                                                                                  |
| 6. | Ethical branding is defined as doing something that benefits society or consumers, such as using organic ingredients, supporting fair trade, or addressing the needs of stakeholders.                                                                                                                                     | Ferrell et al. (2019)                                                                           |
| 7. | Ethical branding definition can be composed of three parts; the first part is how the conduct of business reflects ethical considerations, the second part is how the company's operations affect the environment, and the third part, it is the extent to which these operations interfere with social and human rights. | Amoako et al. (2021)                                                                            |

In terms of processes and dimensions, there are some similarities and differences between the seven definitions of ethical branding. Table (3) summarises the common points and the unique features of the presented definitions of the construct.

**Table (3) Similarities and Unique Features of the Definitions of Ethical Branding in Terms of Processes and Dimensions:**

| Definitions of Ethical Branding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Similarities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Unique Features                                                                                                                              |
| <p>Brands should act morally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical branding indicated that brands should act morally (definition 1).</li> <li>• Ethical brands should behave ethically (definition 5).</li> <li>• brands reflect ethical considerations (definition 7).</li> <li>• Ethical branding is doing something good for society (definition 6).</li> <li>• it should deliver a promise that the company's ethical values of sincerity, modesty and compassion (definition 3).</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>Ethical branding is a concept in which the corporation is a citizen and has the same rights and duties as any citizen (definition 4).</p> |
| <p>Three main responsibilities that a brand must fulfil: economic, social and environmental:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical brands should reflect (e.g., economic, environmental, and social responsibility) (definition 1).</li> <li>• Ethical brands should fulfil economic responsibility, social justice, and environmental sustainability (definition 2).</li> <li>• Ethical branding should simultaneously improve the quality of life of the workforce, families, local community, environment and society at large (definition 5).</li> <li>• Ethical branding definition can be composed of three parts; the first reflects the business's ethical considerations; the second reflects the company's operations, and the third is the extent to which these operations interfere with social and human rights (Definition 7).</li> </ul> | <p>Ethical branding is doing something good for society or the consumer such as organic ingredients (definition 6).</p>                      |

| Similarities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Unique Features                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Respects all shareholders and stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create value for stakeholders and shareholders (definition 1).</li> <li>• Respects producers, and communities (definition 2).</li> <li>• A continuous system that respects all shareholders and stakeholders (definition 3).</li> <li>• Improving the quality of life of the workforce, families, local community, and society at large (definition 5).</li> <li>• Addressing the needs and desires of stakeholders and shareholders (definition 6).</li> </ul> | <p>Ethical branding should reflect the company's operations and the extent to which these operations interfere with social and human rights. (definition 7).</p>                                                                                                                      |
| <p>A continuous system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A continuous system of production, exchange and management that respects producers, communities, consumers, and the environment (Definition 2).</li> <li>• Is not just a continuous system that respects all shareholders and stakeholders, but it should deliver a promise (Definition 3).</li> <li>• Ethical branding should be the continuing commitment of businesses to behave ethically (Definition 5).</li> </ul>                                                               | <p>Ethical brands reflect the company's ethical values of sincerity, modesty and compassion (definition 3)</p> <p>Ethical brands should have integrity, honesty, and accountability and create added value for the firm, customers, shareholders and stakeholders (definition 1).</p> |

In summary, a generally accepted view of ethical branding states that the construct is a continuous, conscious, and deliberate process taken by a brand to do what is morally right, which includes not harming people, animals, and the environment and making an environmental, social, and economic contribution to society. Alternative views affirm that ethical branding is not only acting morally and adding CSR values and dimensions (e.g., economic, environmental, and social responsibility) but also, should have integrity, honesty, and accountability to reflect the company's ethical values of sincerity, modesty and compassion and create added value for the firm, customers, shareholders, and stakeholders (Alwi et al. 2017, Hunt2019, Iglesias et al. 2019, Javed et al. 2019, Allard and McFerran 2022, Da Silva Tolentino et al. 2021, Payne et al. 2021, Peattie and Samuel 2021).

According to this systematic review, ethical branding has multiple definitions; however, they all agree that it should be a continuous, conscious, and deliberate process for a brand to fulfil: economic, social, and environmental responsibilities. To fulfil the economic responsibility of brands, they must be profitable while providing goods and services needed by society and respecting supplies and customers. In terms of brand social responsibility, the brand's responsibilities are towards politics and society, while in terms of the final dimension, environmental responsibility refers to the management of natural resources, such as raw materials and energy, or the recycling and disposal program for handling waste and pollution (Allard and McFerran 2022, Alwi et al. 2017, Fan 2005).

Therefore, this study will adopt this definition since it is the most frequently cited and most commonly used.

### **Dimensions of Ethical Branding:**

The following table (4) is going to review the ethical branding dimensions. A total of 42 of eighty articles included in the sample (51%) explain ethical branding with its dimensions.

**Table (4) Dimensions of ethical branding:**

| Ethical Branding Dimension   | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | References                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Social Responsibility        | Social responsibility includes perceptions of responsibility toward political and socio-cultural systems. And it also includes enhancing the quality of life of the workforce, families, local communities, and society as a whole. | Allard and McFerran (2022); Amoako et al. (2021); Da Silva Tolentino et al. (2021); Payne et al. (2021); Peattie and Samuel (2021); Flores-Hernández et al. (2020); Hunt (2019); Iglesias et al. (2019); Garanti (2019); Javed et al. (2019); Ferrell et al. (2019); Schamp et al. (2019); Pinto et al. (2019); Wegerer (2018); Alwi et al. (2017); Klink and Wu (2017); Trump et al. (2017); Wen and Song (2017); Antonetti and Maklan (2016); Kang and Choi (2016); He and Lai (2014); Lai and Hsu (2015); Bertilsson (2014); Moore et al. (2014); Papista and Krystallis (2013); Goworek et al. (2012); Singh et al. (2012); White et al. (2012); Balmer et al. (2011); Khatri and Sharma (2011); Story and Hess (2010); Beard (2008); Szmigin et al. (2007); Shaw and Tomolillo (2007); Fan (2005). |
| Environmental responsibility | Environmental responsibility refers to the company policy regarding natural resources, such as raw materials and energy, or its recycling and disposal program for handling waste and pollution outputs.                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Economic Responsibility      | The economic responsibility dimension of the brand includes items addressing profit maximization and respect for supplies/customers.                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

| Ethical Branding Dimension                                                      | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | References                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Honesty, Integrity, Responsibility, Respect, Quality, Trust, and Accountability | <p><b><u>Honesty:</u></b> Telling the truth and acting without stealing, fraud or breach of laws.</p> <p><b><u>Integrity:</u></b> In ethics, integrity is regarded by many people as the honesty and truthfulness or accuracy of one's actions.</p> <p><b><u>Responsibility:</u></b> To respect consumers, who expect to receive exactly what they are paying for.</p> <p><b><u>Respect:</u></b> Respect the rights of institutions and consumers to provide information in confidence and be sensitive to the beliefs and customs of local social and cultural environments.</p> <p><b><u>Quality:</u></b> Companies should offer products that reflect consumers' needs and have reasonable quality.</p> <p><b><u>Trust:</u></b> Telling the truth, keeping every promise, and always fulfilling a commitment.</p> <p><b><u>Accountability:</u></b> Ethical accountability aims to improve both the internal standard of individual and group conduct as well as external factors.</p> | Da Silva Tolentino et. al. (2021); Shah et. al. (2020); Egan-Wyer et. al. (2014); Dhillon (2013). |
| Product, marketing, the firm supplying the product and societal impact.         | <p><b><u>A product</u></b> such as the use of recycled materials as product materials or low-energy, low-pollution manufacturing.</p> <p><b><u>Marketing of the product</u></b> Utilization of marketing tools to demonstrate the brand's ethical responsibility to customers.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Kim and Stepchenkova (2021); Lee and Chen (2019); Hamidizadeh et.al. (2014).                      |



| Ethical Branding Dimension                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Definition | References                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------|
| <p><b><u>Questions used to measure ethical branding:</u></b></p> <p>Q1. Ethical brands add colour to our life.</p> <p>Q2. Ethical brands portray beautiful images.</p> <p>Q3. I feel proud to use ethical brands.</p> <p>Q4. Ethical brands reflect a lifestyle.</p> <p>Q5. Ethical brands are an expression of love.</p> <p>Q6. I feel ethical brands reflect my self-identity.</p> <p>Q7. I feel good about using ethical brands.</p> |            | <p>Nga and Soo (2013).</p> |

In the systematic review, three dimensions of ethical branding are usually acknowledged, since 35 of the 80 articles discuss ethical branding in terms of these three dimensions (economic, social and environmental responsibility). In five studies, ethical branding has been found to appeal more to women than to men. Males' perceptions of ethical branding are influenced by environmental practices, while females' perceptions are influenced by the environment and social practices. Females are more likely than males to support brand social responsibility, according to those studies (Beard 2008, Story and Hess 2010, Wen and Song 2017, Iglesias et al. 2019, Ferrell et al. 2019). Other Studies have shown that ethical brands contribute to emotional brand attachment and brand loyalty (He and Lai 2014, Wen and Song 2017, Allard and McFerran 2022, Amoako et al. 2021). It has been found that an ethical brand helps to build a positive reputation, which results in positive feelings towards the brand (Bertilsson 2014, Lai and Hsu 2015, Kang and Choi 2016, Alwi et al. 2017). Additionally, Others indicate that ethical branding social responsibility and environmental responsibility dimensions help to create and facilitate consumer loyalty and brand choice (Singh et al. 2012, Hunt 2019, Garanti 2019, Javed et al. 2019, Schamp et al. 2019).

However, some studies indicated that ethical brands would not have a significant impact on brand choice intentions (Szmigin et al. 2007, Shaw and Tomolillo 2007, Fan 2005). This outcome may be due to two main reasons; the first one sometimes consumers do not define ethical branding in the same way as it is widely defined in research, for many consumers if a brand is operating within the legal boundaries, it is considered to be ethical and socially responsible. Secondly, consumers usually purchase for personal reasons rather than for environmental, ethical, or social reasons (Fan 2005).

In (2012) Tuan suggests that ethical branding can be measured in terms of ethics of justice and ethics of care. As Tuan (2012) points out, three crucial attributes distinguish ethics of care from ethics of justice: "First, ethics of care emphasize responsibility and stakeholder relationships rather than rights and rules; second, it is embedded in specific circumstances rather than being abstract, formal, and universal; and third, it is best expressed not as a set of principles, but as an activity, the activity of caring." According to the author of this paper, there is a positive and significant relationship between the ethical care dimension of ethical branding and company performance (Tuan 2012). The ethics of care are thus a means of maintaining the focus of the process on people rather than on policies, and the "desire to see individuals live to the fullest extent of their potential" (Begley 2006). Accordingly, "the ethics of care" refers to the responsibility of the ethical brand to maximize the benefits for a wide range of stakeholders.

This is in addition to the obligation to adhere to the laws, policies, and rules established by the organization and the community in which it is located (Tuan 2012). As well, an ethical brand is responsible for maximizing a company's productivity and profitability (Begley 2006, Tuan 2012).

Further, Nga and Soo's (2013) paper measures ethical branding without utilizing dimensions but rather relies on some questions related to it. According to the results of this study, personal values do not have a significant impact on ethical branding. This may be due to concerns about "greenwashing," which involves misleading statements made about the practices of ethical brands (Nga and Soo, 2013). The authors of this study also stated that to cultivate long-term customer relationships and loyalty, ethical branding must involve trust, and the building of trust requires high levels of accountability, transparency, and authenticity (Burnett and Hutton 2007, Nga and Soo 2013).

Alternatively, seven articles are conceptual; they illustrate only a few dimensions that can be considered when measuring ethical branding. In four articles, ethical brand dimensions are described based on theoretical considerations, including honesty, integrity, responsibility, respect, quality, trust, and accountability (Da Silva Tolentino et al. 2021, Shah et al. 2020, Egan-Wyer et al. 2014, Dhillon 2013). Three articles suggest that ethical branding can be measured on four levels (product, marketing, product supply, and societal impact) (Kim and Stepchenkova 2021, Lee and Chen 2019, Hamidizadeh et.al. 2014).

In addition, the remaining articles from the review sample (36) are mostly case studies, literature reviews, and theoretical papers without any reference to any dimensions for measuring ethical branding.

### **Ethical Branding and Other Constructs:**

The relationship between ethical branding and other constructs is well documented in the literature. Some constructs are normally used as antecedents of ethical branding, and other constructs are seen as outcomes.

## **Ethical Branding as an Outcome:**

The review identifies that ethical branding is an outcome of several constructs (Table 2.6). The health concerns, brand trust and personal values (Nicholls 2010; Nga and Soo 2013), endorser ethicality and endorser-brand congruity (Kang and Choi 2016), brand personality (Pinto et. al. 2019), product quality, service quality and perceived price (Fan 2005; Cretu and Brodie 2007; Nnorom and Osibanjo 2008; van de Ven, 2008; Story and Hess 2010; Balmer et al. 2011; Parguel et al. 2011; Biraghi and Gambetti 2015; Alwi et. al. 2017).

The construct of brand trust, brand trust implicitly means that there is a high probability of expectancy that the brand will result in positive outcomes for the consumer (Andaleeb, 1992). Considering brand trust as expectancy, it is based on the consumer's belief that the brand has specific qualities that make it consistent, competent, ethical, transparency, honest, responsible and so on (e.g.; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Larzelere and Huston, 1980). Developing brand trust requires competence, sincerity, a culture of accountability and transparency through reporting based on the "triple bottom line" (Burnett and Hutton, 2007). So, ethical branding is based on a foundation of commonly shared values (Nga and Soo, 2013). This forms the foundation of brand trust towards the ethical brand by the consumer (Benzeçon and Blili, 2010). As such, the founder's role in developing a socially responsible culture within the corporate brand is crucial as consumers will only reciprocate towards genuine and trustworthy ethical brands (Hillstead et. al. 2010).

Ethical branding is also an outcome of personal values as cited in the ethical branding literature (Nga and Soo 2013). Personal values are those beliefs we hold most dear, they can be desirable goals that motivate our actions and guide us through our lives (Salleh et. al., 2010). Moreover, personal values differ from person to person and are often affected by one's culture, upbringing and life experiences among other factors (Anker et. al, 2011). Decision on the consumption of ethical brands involves personal choice and evokes values that extend beyond self-interest (Szmin et. al. 2003).

Kang and Choi (2016) study the three characteristics of an endorser (endorser reliability, endorser ethicality, and endorser-brand congruity) significantly influenced brand credibility and ethical branding. The ethical behaviour of endorsers and endorser-brand congruity were significantly correlated with ethical branding.

Pinto et al. (2019) argue that ethical branding is an outcome of brand personality. Ethical branding is significantly influenced by brand personality. Unlike sophisticated branding, sincere branding has a significant impact on ethical branding. Consumers consider sincere brands to be more ethical brands, while sophisticated brands are not considered ethical brands.

Although ethical branding is an outcome of product quality, service quality, and perceived cost. As outlined by Alwi et. al. (2017), tangible attributes, including product, service, and cost/price, are important antecedents of customer perceived value (Cretu and Brodie 2007) and ethical branding (Parguel et al., 2011). Since customer value is also a form of ethical branding (Singh et al., 2012; Urdu 2003), the inclusion of product and service quality is justified based on their value-added capabilities (Paluszek, 2005).

Crosby et al. (2003) defined quality as the ability of a product to satisfy the customers' needs and expectations. Product quality is aimed at meeting the minimum specifications necessary to satisfy customers' needs, such as product safety and health standards (Nnorom and Osibanjo, 2008), and social and environmental concerns (Alwi 2017). Ethical brands also meet societal, environmental and economic needs through their products and services (Biraghi and Gambetti, 2015), and products and services conforming to ethical standards distinguish themselves based on their environmental or social characteristics (Parguel et al., 2011). An ethical brand incorporates ethics into all aspects of branding and production practices, including product development. A consumer may choose a brand with a high-quality product that is deemed to deliver ethical values and behave responsibly (Alwi 2017). Furthermore, if a brand provides better quality service than its competitors, it may be perceived as credible and reliable, which are aspects of ethical branding. Also, consumers evaluate brands based on their social, economic, and environmental responsibilities (Balmer et al. 2011; Story and Hess 2010; van de Ven 2008). By utilizing high-quality products, manufacturers will be able to establish a strong brand identity (economic responsibility). Additionally, ethical brands require a comprehensive recycling, recovery, and disposal program to reduce the adverse effects of these materials on the environment and to maintain environmental responsibilities (Bertilsson 2014). This leads to an increase in the average cost of production, which in turn increases the price. Thus, a higher price may lead to a consumer's perception that the company offers an ethical brand in terms of its environmental, social, and economic responsibilities (Khayer et. al. 2014; Alwi 2017).

**Table (5) Ethical Branding as an Outcome of:**

| Constructs                                           | References                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Product quality, Service quality and Perceived Price | Fan (2005); Cretu and Brodie (2007); Nnorom and Osibanjo (2008); van de Ven, (2008); Story and Hess (2010); Balmer et al. (2011); Parguel et al. (2011); Khayer et. al. (2014); Biraghi and Gambetti (2015); Alwi et. al. (2017). |
| Health concerns, Brand trust and Personal values.    | Szmin et. al. (2003); Nga and Soo (2013).                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Endorser ethicality and Endorser-brand congruity.    | Kang and Choi (2016).                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Brand personality.                                   | Pinto et. al. (2019).                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

### **Ethical Branding Benefits:**

Forty-Two of the eighty papers included in the review identified 13 benefits of ethical branding. These are shown in Table (6).

### **Table (6): The Benefits of Ethical Branding Benefits:**

**Table (6) The Benefits of Ethical Branding Benefits:**

| Ethical Branding Benefit            | Explanation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | References                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Frequency |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Purchase/ Repurchase intentions. | <p>It has been shown in the majority of studies that customers take brand ethical practices into account in their purchasing decision-making process and therefore support brands that adhere to ethical responsibility. Several research studies showed the positive impact of ethical branding on repurchase intention(e.g. Da Silva Tolentino et. al. 2021; Payne et. al. 2021; Lopes et. al. 2020; Javed et. al. 2019; Alwi, et. al., 2017).</p> <p>According to Newman and Trump (2017), 86% of customers in four countries (Germany, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom) are more inclined to repurchase ethical brands.</p> | Da Silva Tolentino et. al. (2021); Payne et. al.(2021); Lopes et. al. (2020); Javed et. al. (2019); Yoganathan et. al. (2019); Newman and Trump (2017); Klink and Wu (2017); Kang and Choi (2016); White et. al. (2012); Story and Hess (2010); Joergens (2006); Viriyavidhayavongs and Yothmontre (2002). | 12        |

| Ethical Branding Benefit | Explanation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | References                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Frequency |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 2. Brand Loyalty         | <p>Reputable ethical brands with a positive relationship with society and a consistent reputation for being ethical players have strong incentives to maintain their reputations and retain their loyal customers.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>Amoako et. al. (2021); Georgieva and Stanimirov (2021); Garanti (2019); Markovic et. al. (2018); Alwi et. al. (2017); Fatma and Rahman (2017); He and Lai (2014); Papista and Krystallis (2013); Singh, et. al. (2012).</p> | 9         |
| 3. Corporate Reputation  | <p>products have been well labelled to provide information; disclaimers have been clearly communicated to service users, the supply chains do not utilize child labor; and the packaging does not end up in the ocean due to its recyclable nature. Therefore, consumers will view brands as ethical brands since they are doing the right thing. which, in turn, would enhance a company's reputation.</p> <p>Additionally, ethical branding ensures a good corporate reputation and a</p> | <p>Alwi et. al. (2017); Khayer et. al. (2014); Dhillon (2013); Fan (2005).</p>                                                                                                                                                 | 4         |

| Ethical Branding Benefit               | Explanation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | References                                                                | Frequency |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
|                                        | more positive image in the marketplace.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                           |           |
| 4. Willingness to pay a premium price. | Based on Lee and Chen (2019), Yoganathan et al. (2019); Shen et. al. ( 2012) the willingness to pay a premium price is positively influenced by the ethical practices of a brand, since some customers are willing to pay more for brands that address specific social and environmental issues because this provides them with satisfaction because they are contributing to resolving these issues. | Lee and Chen (2019); Yoganathan et. al. (2019); Shen et. al. ( 2012).     | 3         |
| 5. Consumer Satisfaction               | Ethical branding is beneficial to companies because it contributes to consumers' identification with and support for the brand. Identification of customers is likely to lead to greater satisfaction with a firm's products.                                                                                                                                                                         | Das et. al. (2019); van Gils and Horton (2019); Story and Hess (2010).    | 3         |
| 6. Word of Mouth                       | According to Flores-Hernandez et al. (2020), the key behavioural outcome                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Flores-Hernández et. al. (2020); Shah et. al. (2020); Lai and Hsu (2015). | 3         |

| Ethical Branding Benefit   | Explanation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | References                           | Frequency |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
|                            | <p>of ethical branding is that customers are willing to speak positively about ethically responsible brands to their friends and family.</p> <p>According to Lai and Hsu (2015) and Flores- Hernández et al. (2020), word of mouth is positively and directly influenced by a brand's ethical practices. As well as Shah et al. (2020); reported that 75.7% of customers were willing to recommend ethical brands and encourage their family, friends, etc. to purchase these products.</p> |                                      |           |
| 7. Ethical Customer Choice | A significant percentage of consumers indicated that the social and environmental responsibility of the brand was a significant factor in their decision to purchase the brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Bridges et. al. (2019); Hunt (2019). | 2         |
| 8. Brand Equity            | The ethical practices of the brand can have a positive impact on brand equity.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Iglesias et. al. (2019).             | 1         |

| <b>Ethical Branding Benefit</b> | <b>Explanation</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>References</b>        | <b>Frequency</b> |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| 9. Competitive Advantage        | Ethical practices carried out by brands can provide many benefits, which may translate into competitive advantages.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Khatri and Sharma (2011) | 1                |
| 10. Brand Commitment            | A brand's hedonic value increases as a result of ethical branding. Moreover, ethical branding can assist in building a strong commitment to the brand, which in turn results in beneficial behaviour towards the brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Arayesh et. al. (2020).  | 1                |
| 11. Profit Maximization         | Bertilsson (2014) indicates that ethical branding has a positive impact on the profit and financial performance of a firm. Due to the growing concerns of consumers and their desire for ethical branding, brands are under increasing pressure to participate in activities that contribute to society and the environment. Those activities are considered to be intangible investments that increase the value of a firm's assets, thereby increasing profits. | Bertilsson (2014).       | 1                |

| Ethical Branding Benefit    | Explanation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | References      | Frequency |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|
|                             | Furthermore, brands that place a high value on ethical responsibility can pursue long-term profits, even if they have to sacrifice short-term profits.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                 |           |
| 12. Brand Citizenship Image | The Chun (2016) study indicates that a brand's ethical practices can have a positive impact on citizen image, reputation, and attitudes. Moreover, he demonstrated that consumers' perceived familiarity with ethical brands is positively related to their perceptions of the ethical brand's practices and, subsequently, their perceptions of the brand's citizen image. | Chun (2016).    | 1         |
| 13. Employees Satisfaction  | An additional benefit of ethical branding is that it increases employee satisfaction. Since employees will feel more comfortable and productive and will be more willing to contribute if they know they are being treated well by the brands they work for. Those brands that are ethically fair and open with their employees are more likely                             | Wegerer ( 2018) | 1         |

| Ethical Branding Benefit | Explanation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | References | Frequency |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|
|                          | <p>to retain their most talented employees.</p> <p>According to the findings of this study conducted in Germany, almost half of the employees (42%) expressed their desire to work for a brand that is environmentally responsible and contributes positively to society.</p> |            |           |

Based on the review, ethical branding has the potential to provide a number of benefits (Table 6). One of these benefits is the enhancement of corporate reputation. Khayer et al. (2014) found that ethical branding plays a positive role in enhancing and improving corporate reputation. Furthermore, Alwi et al. (2017) concluded that the social and environmental responsibilities of ethical branding have a significant impact on corporate reputation.

However, some researchers claim that there is no clear relation between ethical branding and corporate reputation, customer satisfaction and customer actual purchase behaviour (Miotto and Youn 2020; Monfort and Villagra 2016; Singh 2016). Whereas others claim that there is a positive relationship among those variables, where ethical branding proved to have a positive impact on a company's reputation, purchase intention and customer satisfaction (Payne et. al. 2021; Lopes et. al. 2020; Javed et. al. 2019). The same can be said for van Gils and Horton (2019), who showed that ethical branding is one of the strongest drivers of purchase intention. As well Das et. al. (2019) indicated that ethical branding positively correlate with corporate reputation, resulting in satisfied customers who are willing to share their experiences with the brand. Even so, the study by Hsiao et al. (2015) indicated that the most important purchasing evaluative criteria are price, value, quality, brand familiarity, product design and development, and cut security, rather than the brand's ethical responsibility. A consumer is more likely to purchase a brand for personal reasons than for social or environmental reasons (Jin 2018). In Singh's (2016) study, respondents rated The Body Shop as one of the most ethically responsible brands. According to this study, consumers purchased its products not because of its ethical responsibility, but rather because they liked them, and the brand's ethically responsible practices may only affect 5% of their purchasing decisions. Another reason consumers may choose not to purchase ethical brands is the "free-rider problem" a consumer who believes that their behaviour will never affect a brand's behaviour (Balmer, 2017). In this instance, consumers believe that their purchase of ethically responsible brands will not necessarily cause other brands to follow suit (Garca-de-Frutos et al. 2018).

Brand loyalty is another extensively researched benefit of ethical branding (Amoako et. al., 2021; Alwi et. al., 2017; Papista and Krystallis, 2013). Ethical branding particularly its social dimension is a key antecedent of brand loyalty (Alwi et. al., 2017). Also, committed consumers tend to recommend the preferred brand to others (Shah et. al., 2020). Furthermore, ethical branding enhances word-of-mouth behaviour (Flores-Hernández et. al., 2020).

As well, ethical branding, particularly the environmental and health dimensions, has a significant impact on consumer acceptance of a price premium. (Payne et al. 2020; Yoganathan et. al. 2019). This means that consumers are willing to continue to buy the brand, even after price increases (Shen et. al., 2012). In addition, ethical branding has a positive and significant impact on consumer ethical choices (Hunt 2019).

Moreover, according to Wegerer (2018), ethical branding is likely to gain support and trust from primary stakeholders, such as employees. Since employee behaviour impacts organizational outcomes, higher job satisfaction is likely to result in greater employee commitment to the organization's goals and values.

The findings of Bertilsson (2014) indicate that ethical branding does not directly contribute to short-term financial performance through enhanced corporate reputation and brand equity. Even so, the study found that ethical branding improved a company's reputation, leading to improved stock performance and long-term profits.

On the other hand, several researchers believe that this relationship cannot be statistically measured in the first place (Escadas et al. 2019; Lee and Jin 2019). The difficulty in measuring the return from ethical branding could be because the benefits from ethical branding are not directly measurable, and at the same time, the related expenses are not always disclosed (Ali et al. 2020; Alwi et. al. 2017). Despite this, researchers continue to question whether ethical branding makes a difference to corporate reputation and customer behaviour. Companies continue to use ethical branding nonetheless (Nadanyiova, Gajanova & Majerova, 2020; Wang & Berens, 2015).

## **Discussion**

As stated in this systematic literature review, academics and practitioners acknowledge the relevance of ethical branding. This research shows ethical branding's multiple definitions and dimensions, as well as the benefits of ethical branding.

Most of the research on ethical branding published in higher-ranked marketing journals has been conducted in certain countries. There is a need for more research on ethical branding in countries outside these countries the US, Hongkong, India and Malaysia which seem to have the most reported results.

There is no agreement on the exact nature of the concept since researchers define ethical branding in many alternative ways. This lack of consensus generates confusion amongst researchers, as they approach the construct using their variations of definitions and conceptual models. Similarities, as well as unique features of the different definitions of ethical branding, were identified to define the construct as a continuous system of production, exchange and management that respects producers, communities, consumers, and the environment, and this system is rooted in people-to-people connections, social justice, and environmental sustainability. This definition views ethical branding as a continuous system that respects all shareholders and stakeholders, in the same research line that Van De Vern (2008) and Bertilsson (2014), and contrary to the research stream that considers ethical branding should consider economic, social, and environmental responsibilities, have integrity, honesty, and accountability, and create added value for the firm, customers, shareholders, and its stakeholders. This definition is aligned with the researchers that focus on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of ethical branding.

Important antecedents and outcomes of ethical branding are highlighted in this paper. A review identified product quality, service quality, and perceived price as the most common antecedents to ethical branding (Fan 2005, Cretu and Brodie 2007, Nnorom and Osibanjo 2008, van de Ven 2008, Story and Hess 2010, Balmer et al. 2011 Parguel et al. 2011, Khayer et. al. 2014, Biraghi and Gambetti 2015, Alwi et. al. 2017). Ethical branding is also a trustful predictor of positive word-of-mouth (Flores-Hernández et. al., 2020) and acceptance of a price premium (Lee and Chen, 2019). This means, from a managerial perspective, that putting efforts into increasing consumers' satisfaction and trust towards the ethical brand impacts positively their level of commitment, which results in increased repurchase intentions and positive word-of-mouth (Newman and Trump, 2017; Klink and Wu, 2017; Kang and Choi, 2016). The consequences for managers are higher sales and improved business growth (Alwi et. al., 2017).

According to the systematic literature review, Forty-Two of the eighty papers included in the review identified 13 benefits of ethical branding. According to Da Silva Tolentino et. al. (2021); Payne et. al.(2021); Lopes et. al. (2020); Javed et. al. (2019); Yoganathan et. al. (2019); Newman and Trump (2017); Klink and Wu (2017); Kang and Choi (2016); White et. al. (2012); Story and Hess (2010); Joergens (2006); Viriyavidhayavongs and Yothmontre (2002), that purchase intention and repurchase are considered the most common benefits of ethical branding. By Newman and Trump (2017), 86% of customers in four countries (Germany, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom) tend to repurchase ethical products. In this regard,

managers can achieve more purchases of their brand as a direct result of investing in ethical branding.

Future research could focus on the relevance of ethical branding in a business-to-business environment. Further studies might also emphasise the importance of ethical branding in business-to-business relationships.

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