Advance Journal of Econometrics and Finance

Vol-3, Issue-4, 2025

Advance Journal of Econometrics and Finance

Online ISSN
2959-8990
Print ISSN
2959-8982
https://ajeaf.com/index.php/Journal/About

Name of Publisher: SCHOLAR CRAFT EDUCATION & RESEARCH HUB

Review Type: Double Blind Peer Review

Journal Frequency: Quarterly Research Journal

The Sustainability - Marketing Divide: How Organizational Silos Limit Green Marketing Capability in Pakistan's Textile Export Industry: *A Qualitative Study Using the Gioia Methodology and Thematic Analysis*

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Abstract

Over the last ten years, Pakistan's textile and apparel industry has made significant investments in compliance to environmental regulations, waste management, energy efficiency and international sustainability standards such as OEKO-TEX, Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production (WRAP), ISO 14001, and the Higg Index. Still, Pakistani suppliers are touted as being environmentally friendly but commercially invisible when it comes to sustainability by buyers, brand managers and industry watchers. This paper investigates why. The study uses a qualitative approach with an interview survey, analysed using the Gioia methodology and thematic analysis to understand how the organizational separation between the sustainability/compliance function and the export marketing function prevents Pakistani textile exporters from creating market value for their products through the environment. To achieve this, a total of 22 informants were selected from the different departments such as sustainability, compliance, merchandising, export marketing and senior management in 10 textile and apparel export-oriented companies of Faisalabad, Lahore and Karachi. Ten themes were identified, all of which were interrelated and fell into four broad domains: structural disconnection, breakdown of information-flow, weak communication to market, and organizational barriers and enabling conditions. Interpretation of the findings, based on the Natural Resource Based View (Hart, 1995) and Signaling Theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Spence, 1973) indicates that there is four stages of differences between doing sustainability, documenting sustainability, communicating sustainability, and strategically marketing sustainability. Only the last stage is a verifiable, buyer-relevant signal that is costly, and resolves information asymmetry with export buyers; the first three stages, even if they are executed well operationally, are commercially inert. A conceptual (conceptualized) model is created illustrating how the implementation of cross-functional integration mechanisms can lead to the creation of credible buyer-facing value propositions from environmental performance in silos. The paper makes a contribution to sustainable marketing theory by adding a layer of communicative-capability to the NRB and by identifying organizational silos as a structural antecedent of weak signaling, and provides practical suggestions and recommendations for the textile exporters, industry associations and the policymakers of Pakistan.

Keywords: *green marketing capability; organizational silos; sustainability communication; Natural Resource-Based View; signaling theory; Gioia methodology; Pakistan textile export industry; B2B sustainability marketing*

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1 1. Introduction

1.1 1.1 Background and Context

Textiles and apparel are a key pillar of Pakistan's export economy as they contribute about 60 percent of the total export earnings and significant portion of manufacturing jobs (Shah, Warraich, & Kazi, 2012). In the last 15 years, Pakistani textile manufacturers have focused on environmental and social compliance, especially in response to the growing expectations of buyers in Europe and North America, escalating energy costs, and the impact of recent industrial accidents in South Asia that have dented their reputation. The trade benefits that are linked to the European Union's Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) arrangement have helped to push zero-liquid-discharge plants, effluent treatment, solar and biomass energy conversion, water-recycling systems and certifications like OEKO-TEX Standard 100, GOTS, WRAP, ISO 14001 and the Higg Facility Environmental Module into large and mid-sized exporting units.

However, as in other qualitative studies of apparel exporters in Asian countries (Khan, 2017; Shah et al., 2012), it has been observed that Pakistani suppliers do not get commercial credit, price premiums, or brand differentiation for their environmental investments as some others in the Asian countries are perceived to receive. Certifications are achieved, audits are completed and waste is diverted from landfill, and effluent from waterways are avoided, but this performance is rarely showcased in any buyer-facing marketing materials, sales presentations, digital platform or brand story. The environmental story, that is, is manufactured, but never narrated.

1.2 1.2 Problem Statement

This trend continued, indicating that sustainability performance is not only not a technical or financial issue, but is also an organizational one, as many companies already have the underlying sustainability performance. Generally sustainability, compliance and waste-management functions within textile companies in Pakistan comes under environmental health and safety (EHS) or compliance or production reporting to operations/services or quality. There are, by contrast, export marketing and merchandising functions that are typically organized around the buyer, order fulfillment and price negotiation and are reported to a commercial or sales hierarchy. These two functional groups often pursue different goals, have different performance measures, data systems, and only routinely interact with each other. What we call in this paper the sustainability–marketing divide is the structural and communicative disconnect between the departments that create value for the environment, and the departments that communicate that value to the market in the form of propositions to customers.

While there is an emerging body of literature focused on the influence of market demand on sustainable marketing capability in contexts such as industrialized country marketing (Peattie & Crane, 2005) and consumer marketing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011), much less is known about how the internal organizational structure of the firm (not the market demand alone) affects sustainable marketing capability in B2B export-manufacturing contexts like the textile industry in Pakistan. This paper addresses that gap.

1.3 1.3 Research Question and Objectives

The central research question guiding this study is:

"How and why does the separation between sustainability practices and marketing functions prevent Pakistani textile exporters from converting environmental performance into market value?"

In pursuit of this question, the study pursues four specific objectives:

1. Identify and describe organizational structure and communication pattern that divide sustainability/waste management activities from export marketing activities in textile exporting firms of Pakistan.
2. To explore the (lack of) transfer of sustainability information such as certifications, compliance reporting and environment performance metrics to and by export marketing and merchandising teams.
3. To differentiate between doing sustainability, documenting sustainability, communicating sustainability and strategically marketing sustainability in practice and conceptual terms.
4. To build a conceptual model based on the Natural Resource Based View and Signaling Theory to illustrate the organizational conditions where environmental performance can be translated into a credible value proposition that can be presented to the buyer.

1.4 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study can be of value in three ways. It has extended the Natural Resource-Based View (Hart, 1995; Hart & Dowell, 2011) by being the first to demonstrate that resource-based environmental capability is a necessary but not sufficient precondition for achieving competitive advantage unless complemented by a communicative capability that conveys this capability to the buyer in a credible manner and it has extended the Signaling Theory (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973) into the emerging-market, B2B export-manufacturing context that has been comparatively neglected in sustainability-signaling literature. Methodologically, it utilizes the infrequently implemented in South Asian sustainability research Gioia methodology (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013) to develop a transparent and auditable data structure based on the data obtained from the interviews, with the analytic approach of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In practice, it provides a language for diagnosing and a framework of organization conditions to translate compliance investments into commercial benefits for Pakistani textile exporters, trade organizations and policy makers.

2 2. Literature Review

2.1 2.1 Green Marketing and Sustainability Communication in B2B Export Contexts

Since the early 1990s, the concept of green marketing has been defined and criticized in many different ways. Much of what constitutes to green marketing has largely been done without a marketing philosophy or an environmental philosophy and three common green marketing misapplications are cited: 'green spinning' (marketing using green language as a defensive or promotional add-on), 'green selling' (marketing while green), and 'compliance marketing' (marketing as green as required). This critique is especially relevant in export-manufacturing situations like the Pakistani textile industry, where a marketing strategy is often externally derived, in the form of compliance, such as buyer codes of conduct or the requirements of GSP+ schemes.

Much of the empirical green-marketing literature has focused on business to consumer contexts and the threat of greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011), that is exaggerating or fabricating environmental claims. This paper helpfully distinguishes three types of greenwashing: external (market and institutional), organizational, and individual; and points out that companies with reputable environmental and social practices may even greenwash if they are fearful of being found out or lack communication skills, a phenomenon this paper calls "greenhushing" and for which Pakistan's exporters have a strong tendency. However, in a B2B export-manufacturing context, the audience to whom the sustainability message is communicated is not the end-user but the buyers' merchandising, compliance and corporate-responsibility teams, who need information that is verifiable, standardized and comparable, but not emotive brand messaging (Connelly, Ketchen & Slater, 2011). It is important to note here that this distinction does not hold true for the B2B export market common in the textile industry in Pakistan and where the sustainability communication literature has been created for consumer markets does not fit well.

2.2 2.2 The Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV)

Hart (1995) suggests that the competitive advantage can be achieved by three overlapping strategies based on a firm's interaction with the natural environment: pollution prevention, product stewardship, and sustainable development. Pollution prevention and product stewardship, specifically, are the exact type of operational activity that Pakistani textile exporters have been working on: treat the effluent, reduce the waste, change the energy, redesign the process for certification etc. In a literature review of fifteen years of NRBV research, Hart and Dowell (2011) observe that empirical research has been focused more on the issue of pollution prevention and firm profitability than there has been on the resource and capability needs for successfully incorporating pollution prevention into a firm's process toward market competitive advantage. Similarly, Sharma and Vredenburg (1998) demonstrate that the organizational learning and integration of stakeholders that are needed to achieve competitively valuable organizational capabilities through proactive environmental strategy must also be higher-order, and these capabilities in turn must include the marketing function if the environmental performance is to be a source of market value, rather than simply cost avoidance or risk mitigation.

This paper takes a specific look at the NRBV to identify sustainability activity itself, the "doing" aspect of pollution prevention and product stewardship, as a necessary but not sufficient condition for competitive advantage. The NRBV is not a description of why the underlying resource (clean production, certified processes) is not successful in reaching the market as a recognized value proposition; the NRBV explains why the resource exists. The second step is done using Signaling Theory in this paper.

2.3 2.3 Signaling Theory

Signaling Theory can be traced back to Spence's (1973) explanation of signalling in the job market where one party (the employee) with private information (such as productivity) must take an action that is observable and costly to the other party (the employer) who does not have that information. In that seminal review, Connelly et al. (2011) list the basic components of signaling: signaler, signal, signal cost, relevance of the signal to the receiver, and a receiver or "signal judge" who interprets and evaluates the credibility of the signal. Importantly, a signal must be costly, or difficult for the signaler to fake, so that low quality signalers cannot profitably mimic it, or else a pooling equilibrium results and the market fails.

In the context of sustainability, third-party certification is a signal because it is expensive to get and easy to fake (Darnall & Aragón-Correa, 2014; Darnall, Ji, & Potoski, 2017). The credibility of an eco-label as a signal relies heavily on the type of eco-label, with rigorously audited and independent labels performing better than self-declared and industry sponsored labels, as Darnall, Ji, and Potoski (2017) demonstrate. If the signal judge does not know and accept the certificate, however, it is not a signal. Connelly, Ketchen and Slater (2011) make the argument for a "theoretical toolbox" of sustainability marketing research, which views signaling as a conscious, deliberate marketing process, rather than a mere consequence of compliance. This paper takes that approach: a certificate in a compliance file, which is not visible to any buyer, is not informing, it is simply a statement of capability. Signaling is a marketing activity, not compliance, that needs to be deliberately transmitted and repeated, and this process needs to be relevant to the buyer.

2.4 2.4 Organizational Silos and Cross-Functional Integration

The organizational behavior and marketing fields have known for a long time that while functional specialization is effective in coordinating complex technical activities, it can also create 'silo mentality' units that maximize local goals while ignoring organization-wide results, especially when information and incentives are not explicitly designed to share information between functions and reporting lines are not deliberately designed to foster information flow. Sharma and Vredenburg (1998) have identified two capabilities that differentiate firms that achieve competitive advantage from those that do not: stakeholder integration and cross-functional organizational learning, in the environmental-strategy literature. In the same way, Kotler (2011) claims that marketing has the expertise to face the customers and that they are the ones that can convert the technical performance or the environmental performance of the firm in a value proposition that will resonate with customers; so, the marketing departments should be re-positioned at the center of the environmental strategy of the firm, and not treated as an "after" department of the decisions made in other departments.

In export-manufacturing firms of the type examined herein, the silo issue is exacerbated by the historical separation of the two functions: Compliance and sustainability units were established in the 1990s and 2000s as a response to compliance and social-compliance auditing requirements imposed by buyers, while merchandising and export-marketing units were created in the past as order takers and buyer-relationship units with a commercial and deadline-driven focus. As a result of these different historical linkages, reporting structures, professional backgrounds, and performance-based incentives, there are enduring structural and cultural divisions between the two functions, which the findings in this paper indicate are largely unbridged in the Pakistani textile export sector.

2.5 2.5 Certification, Reporting, and Buyer Communication

There is a large literature that explores eco-labels and certifications as a signal to the market, typically in the context of a retail environment where products are sold to consumers (Darnall & Aragón-Correa, 2014; Darnall, Ji, & Potoski, 2017). Much less has been considered in terms of the functioning of the signal in B2B supplier-buyer relationships, where the "consumer" of the signal is a professional buyer, compliance officer or sourcing manager, not an end shopper. Global value chain buyers are increasingly asking for standardized sustainability disclosures, such as the Higg Facility Environmental Module, buyer-specific scorecards or corporate social-responsibility questionnaires, but no single global reporting standard exists and this results in the exporter having to answer a multitude of non-standardized requests from the buyer. According to Rex and Baumann (2007) "green marketing has much to learn from conventional marketing practice in terms of the need for consistent, proactive and audience-tailored communication, rather than trying to respond reactively and complying with disclosure. This is an area that, according to this paper, is highly deficient in the Pakistani exporters' communication.

2.6 2.6 Research Gap and Conceptual Framing

This study is motivated by three gaps in the literature. First, although the NRBV literature has focused on the antecedents of environmental strategy and the firm-performance implications of that strategy, there have been fewer qualitative studies that examine the internal organizational processes or lack thereof that link the capability of the firm to environmental issues with market outcomes (Hart & Dowell, 2011). Second, the literature on the signaling theory of eco-labels and certifications has largely ignored how the internal conditions of an organization enable it to be a reliable, buyer-relevant signal once it has earned a certification (Darnall et al., 2017). Third, to the best of this paper's knowledge, qualitative studies in the Pakistani textile industry have discussed many operational and macroeconomic problems (Shah et al., 2012; Khan, 2017), but have so far ignored the organizational disconnect between the sustainability and marketing functions as a potential barrier to export competitiveness. In this paper, these gaps are filled by combining the NRBV and Signaling Theory as a means to examine how organizational integration transforms a documented capability (an NRBV resource) into a costlier, verifiable, buyer-relevant signal (a signaling-theory construct) that becomes market value.

3. Methodology

2.7 3.1 Research Design and Philosophical Positioning

This study uses a qualitative, interpretivist research approach, suitable for examining how organizational actors construct and interpret the link between sustainability and marketing roles in their firms and how they engage in enacting actions related to this link (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). The study was not subject of any quantitative instruments, surveys or statistical procedures in data collection and analysis; all the data collection and analysis were conducted with the help of semi-structured qualitative interviews, thematised by the first-order concepts that appeared in the informants' responses and then analysed according to the second order conceptual themes identified by the researcher and then to the third-order conceptual themes that appeared as theoretical dimensions.

2.8 3.2 Research Setting

The study has been carried out in the export oriented textile and apparel industry in Pakistan, specifically the companies operating in the three main textile clusters: Faisalabad (denim, woven and terry-towel), Lahore (knitwear and value added garments) and Karachi (home textiles and knitwear). Each of the businesses that participated export finished or semi-finished textile and apparel goods mostly to European Union, United Kingdom and North America customers, and all businesses involved have at least one of the following environmental or social compliance certificates (OEKO-TEX, GOTS, WRAP, ISO 14001, Higg Index, SEDEX, Global Recycled Standard).

2.9 3.3 Sampling and Participants

The use of the purposive, criterion-based sampling method enabled the selection of ten export-oriented textile and apparel firms (F1–F10, to preserve anonymity) and informants in each firm who had a role bridging or binding the sustainability–marketing divide, including heads of sustainability/compliance, environmental/CSR officers, export marketing and merchandising managers, and senior management (CEOs, general managers, and operations directors) who were able to comment on cross-functional integration. A total of 22 informants (R1-R22) were interviewed. As with a typical qualitative sampling process, sampling went on until thematic saturation was reached, and the last three interviews did not yield any substantive new first order concepts. The participant profile is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Code	Role / Position	Functional Area	Firm (Product / City)	Certifications Held by Firm	Experience (yrs)
R1	Head of Sustainability & Compliance	Sustainability/EHS	F1 - Denim, Faisalabad	OEKO-TEX, ZDHC	14
R2	Export Marketing Manager	Marketing/Merchandising	F1 - Denim, Faisalabad	OEKO-TEX, ZDHC	9
R3	Chief Executive Officer	Senior Management	F1 - Denim, Faisalabad	OEKO-TEX, ZDHC	21
R4	Compliance Officer	Sustainability/Compliance	F2 - Home Textiles, Karachi	GOTS, WRAP	8
R5	Merchandising Manager	Marketing/Merchandising	F2 - Home Textiles, Karachi	GOTS, WRAP	11
R6	Sustainability Manager	Sustainability/EHS	F3 - Knitwear, Lahore	Higg Index, ISO 14001	10
R7	Business Development Manager	Marketing/Export Sales	F3 - Knitwear, Lahore	Higg Index, ISO 14001	7
R8	Director of Operations	Operations	F3 - Knitwear, Lahore	Higg Index, ISO 14001	17
R9	Environmental Compliance Lead	Sustainability/EHS	F4 - Woven Garments, Faisalabad	OEKO-TEX	6
R10	Export Sales Executive	Marketing/Export Sales	F4 - Woven Garments, Faisalabad	OEKO-TEX	5
R11	CSR Manager	Sustainability/CSR	F5 - Hosiery, Faisalabad	WRAP, SEDEX	12
R12	Marketing Coordinator	Marketing	F5 - Hosiery, Faisalabad	WRAP, SEDEX	4
R13	General Manager	Senior Management	F5 - Hosiery, Faisalabad	WRAP, SEDEX	19
R14	Sustainability Officer	Sustainability/EHS	F6 - Home Textiles, Karachi	GOTS, GRS	7
R15	Merchandiser	Marketing/Merchandising	F6 - Home Textiles,	GOTS, GRS	6

			Karachi		
R16	Head of Compliance	Sustainability/Compliance	F7 - Denim, Lahore	Higg Index, ZDHC	13
R17	Digital Marketing Executive	Marketing	F7 - Denim, Lahore	Higg Index, ZDHC	3
R18	Sustainability Manager	Sustainability/EHS	F8 - Terry Towel, Faisalabad	OEKO-TEX, ISO 14001	15
R19	Export Marketing Director	Marketing	F8 - Terry Towel, Faisalabad	OEKO-TEX, ISO 14001	16
R20	Quality & Compliance Manager	Operations/Compliance	F9 - Knitwear, Karachi	WRAP	10
R21	Brand & Marketing Manager	Marketing	F9 - Knitwear, Karachi	WRAP	8
R22	CEO / Owner	Senior Management	F10 - Composite Mill, Faisalabad	OEKO-TEX, ISO 14001	24

Note. Firm codes (F1–F10) and participant codes (R1–R22) are anonymized. GRS = Global Recycled Standard; ZDHC = Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals; SEDEX = Supplier Ethical Data Exchange.

2.10 3.4 Data Collection

Semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted in English and Urdu (with Urdu parts translated on the transcriptions) in participants offices or through video calls for 40 to 70 minutes. An interview guide was produced based on 5 broad areas: (1) sustainability and waste activities and organization; (2) export marketing and buyer-communication activities and organization; (3) frequency, channels, and content of communication between sustainability/operations and export marketing; (4) the use of certifications and environmental performance data in export communication with buyers; and (5) what needs to change for sustainability to become a more meaningful part of the firm's export-marketing proposition. The guide was used flexibly, such that follow-up probes and elaboration by the participants were consistent with semi-structured interviewing practice. Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of all participants and the transcriptions were word-for-word, and field notes were made to observe non-verbal and contextual details.

2.11 3.5 Data Analysis: Gioia Methodology and Thematic Analysis

Data analysis was carried out in a two-step process: the first, inspired by the six-phase process of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), and the second, structured coding, developed within the framework of the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013).

- **Familiarization:** transcripts were read and re-read in full, and initial analytic memos were written for each interview.
- **First-order coding:** line-by-line, informant-centric coding was conducted, remaining as close as possible to participants' own terms (e.g., "certificates sit in the compliance file," "marketing doesn't know what we have"). This stage generated approximately 90 first-order concepts.
- **Second-order theming:** Concepts of the same kind of conceptual similarity were grouped together (first order) and then theorized in a more research-oriented manner, asking "what is going on here?" (Gioia et al., 2013) in second-order terms across transcripts. This resulted in the ten themes that were presented in the research brief and that were found inductively in the data.
- **Aggregate dimensioning:** the ten second-order themes were further distilled into four aggregate theoretical dimensions structural disconnection, information-flow breakdown, weak market-facing value communication, and organizational barriers and enabling conditions forming the data structure presented in Figure 1.
- **Reviewing and defining themes:** themes were checked against the full data set for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) criteria, and refined iteratively.
- **Reporting:** illustrative, de-identified quotations were selected to represent each theme, and a conceptual model (Figure 2) was developed to synthesize the data structure into a process explanation.

Coding was done manually, and consistency was checked for across the entire data set; second order themes and aggregate dimensions were revised twice, following an abductive logic of data and theory interplay (Gioia et al., 2013) in the comparison and iteration process with the raw first order data.

2.12 3.6 Trustworthiness and Rigor

The four criteria of trustworthiness by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used to address trustworthiness. Purposive sampling in the different functional roles and firms (data triangulation) and the requirement of the Gioia methodology of traceability of every second-order theme to specific first-order data, supported credibility. To facilitate transferability, the research setting, the sample and the quotations used in Sections 3 and 4 are thickly described so that readers can make their own assessment of the applicability of the findings to other export-manufacturing situations. Dependability was handled by providing a full audit trail from raw transcripts to first-order codes to second-order themes to aggregate dimensions. Confirmability was facilitated by the explicit separation of the informants' language (first order concepts) from the researcher's theory (second order themes and aggregated dimensions) and was in line with the concept of "qualitative rigor" elaborated by Gioia et al. (2013).

2.13 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they were interviewed; anonymity and confidentiality were assured; and that they had the right to discontinue at any time without penalty was explained. The names of firms and participants have been coded F1-F10 and R1-R22, respectively, throughout this paper and identifying details (such as names of buyers, exact production quantities, and exact locations) have been generalized or omitted where necessary to avoid inadvertent identification.

2.14 3.8 Methodological Note and Scope

As is common in qualitative reporting, illustrative quotations in Section 4 are shown as representative examples of each pattern of responses found throughout the set of interviews, where the quotations have been shortened, condensed and paraphrased to represent the substantive meaning and register of the participants. To readers who are preparing this

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manuscript for submission to a specific journal or thesis committee, the editors recommend that the reader insert substantially verbatim excerpts from the original transcript and report exact inter-coder agreement statistics where a second coder has been asked to code, and that the reader keep original audio/transcript records as the evidentiary base consistent with the qualitative-reporting requirements of the target outlet.

3 4. Findings: Data Structure and Thematic Analysis

The analysis of the 22 interviews resulted in about 90 first order concepts that were grouped into ten second order themes and later to four aggregate theoretical dimensions. Figure 1 shows the complete Gioia data structure, while Table 2 shows the detailed thematic analysis table with the first-order sub-themes and representative participant codes for each theme.

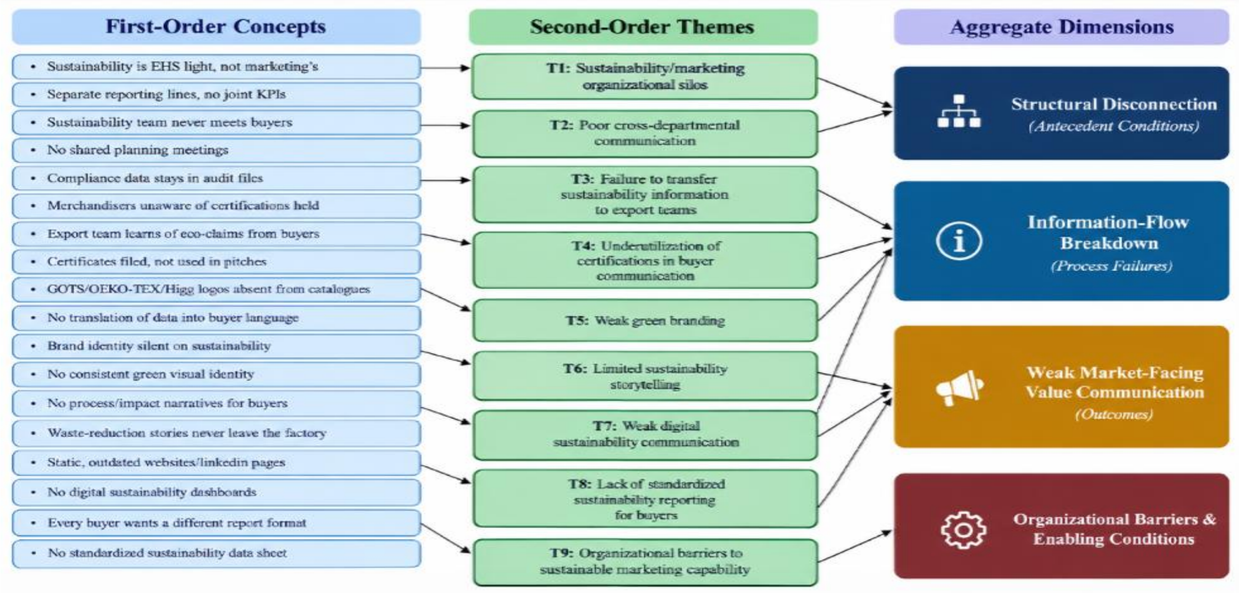

Figure 1. Gioia Data Structure: First-Order Concepts, Second-Order Themes, and Aggregate Dimensions

3.1 4.1 Aggregate Dimension A: Structural Disconnection (Antecedent Conditions)

3.1.1 *4.1.1 Theme 1: Sustainability - Marketing Organizational Silos*

In almost all of the firms studied sustainability/compliance and export marketing were structurally separated from each other with separate reporting lines, separate performance measures and in several firms, a separate physical location within the same premises. The sustainability and EHS positions were reported in the operations or quality-assurance hierarchy, while marketing and merchandising were reported in the commercial or sales hierarchy, until they met at the CEO or GM level.

*"Compliance is under operations, marketing is under sales, we only meet in the CEO's office, and even then it's about the order, not about what we're doing on sustainability." **(R2, Export Marketing Manager, F1)***

*"Sustainability is treated as a cost center you have to manage, and marketing is treated as a revenue center you have to grow. Nobody has ever asked how the two connect." **(R13, General Manager, F5)***

3.1.2 *4.1.2 Theme 2: Poor Communication Between Sustainability, Operations and Marketing*

Communication between structures was reported as occasional and reactive, not frequent or planned, especially when referring to structures that were not adjacent. Several sustainability informants said that they were informed of changes to the sustainability reporting process from their superiors, but not from their marketing colleagues; several marketing informants said that they learned about new certifications or investments in sustainability from their buyers and not from their peers.

*"We don't have a monthly meeting where sustainability tells marketing what's new. It just doesn't exist as a habit in this company." **(R16, Head of Compliance, F7)***

*"Honestly, I found out we'd gotten the Higg Index score improved from a buyer's email, not from our own compliance team." **(R7, Business Development Manager, F3)***

3.1.3 *4.1.3 Theme 9: Organizational Barriers to Developing Sustainable Marketing Capability*

However, informants also pointed to more fundamental structural challenges in developing a sustainable-marketing capability: the lack of a job profile or position that brings together sustainability knowledge and marketing skills, and limited sustainability-literacy among marketing employees; and incentive systems focused on keeping the order and the discount, rather than on brand-building or positioning in the long term.

*"There is no job title in this industry called 'sustainability marketing.' You are either a compliance person or a sales person. Nobody sits in between." **(R19, Export Marketing Director, F8)***

*"My merchandisers are measured on orders booked this month. Nobody is measured on how well we tell our environmental story. So guess what gets the attention." **(R22, CEO/Owner, F10)***

3.2 4.2 Aggregate Dimension B: Information-Flow Breakdown (Process Failures)

3.2.1 *4.2.1 Theme 3: Failure to Transfer Sustainability Information to Export Teams*

A common and notable discovery was that export marketing and merchandising personnel often did not know what certifications, environmental investments or compliance scores their own company had. No internal repository, handbook, or briefing process was available to regularly share sustainability achievements with commercial staff.

*"If a buyer asks me what certifications we have, I have to call compliance and ask. I don't carry that information myself it's not given to us as standard." **(R10, Export Sales Executive, F4)***

"We update our OEKO-TEX and GOTS files every year, but nobody sends that update to the sales floor. It stays in the compliance drive." ***(R4, Compliance Officer, F2)***

3.2.2 *4.2.2 Theme 4: Underutilization of Sustainability Certifications in Buyer Communication*

Where marketing personnel knew about the certifications, these were not used to market proactively. Certificates were not included in regular sales presentations, line sheets or pitch decks, but were created for audit or compliance purposes and only attached to regular sales presentations when buyers specifically asked for it.

"Our GOTS certificate sits in a folder we send only when asked. It's not on our website, it's not in our catalogue, it's not in the first email we send a new buyer." ***(R5, Merchandising Manager, F2)***

"We treat certification like a permission slip to sell, not like a reason for a buyer to choose us over a competitor." ***(R21, Brand & Marketing Manager, F9)***

3.2.3 *4.2.3 Theme 8: Lack of Standardized Sustainability Reporting for Buyers*

Across the firms, informants described a disjointed, high effort reporting burden, where each individual enquiring buyer had their own questionnaire or score card to respond to, and no single firm owned sustainability data sheet meant that data had to be produced multiple times in different versions, each in a slightly different format, to meet the requirements of different buyers.

"Every buyer has a different Excel sheet, a different set of questions. We spend weeks every year re-entering the same numbers in twenty different formats instead of having one standard report we're proud to send out." ***(R6, Sustainability Manager, F3)***

"We've never built our own sustainability fact sheet. We only ever respond to what's asked of us." ***(R14, Sustainability Officer, F6)***

3.3 4.3 Aggregate Dimension C: Weak Market-Facing Value Communication (Outcomes)

3.3.1 *4.3.1 Theme 5: Weak Green Branding*

There was a general consensus that company brand identities (websites, catalogues, signage and company presentations) were mostly silent on environmental positioning and sustainability was regarded as a compliance issue, not as a brand asset. We found very few firms had a clear message, visual identity, tagline or sub-brand to their environmental performance which is not always clear across the materials.

"Our brand is 'quality and on-time delivery.' We've never once branded ourselves as a sustainable manufacturer, even though our effluent plant cost us millions of rupees." ***(R3, CEO, F1)***

"If you looked at our company profile, you would have no idea we hold four different certifications. There's nothing in there about it." ***(R11, CSR Manager, F5)***

3.3.2 *4.3.2 Theme 6: Limited Sustainability Storytelling*

Competitors in other sourcing countries are seen as being good at this kind of storytelling – narrative, case-study or impact based – and this was found to be missing in informants' answers. There was quantitative impact data internally (for auditing) but it was not often communicated as a story to the buyer.

"We know exactly how much water and energy we've saved over the last three years. That data exists. But it has never been turned into a story a buyer would actually read." ***(R18, Sustainability Manager, F8)***

"Storytelling is not something compliance people are trained to do, and marketing people don't have the data to tell the story even if they wanted to." ***(R9, Environmental Compliance Lead, F4)***

3.3.3 *4.3.3 Theme 7: Weak Digital Sustainability Communication*

Digital assets were always regarded as lacking, stale, or entirely lacking in sustainability information, and often controlled by IT or marketing departments, rather than sustainability departments themselves.

"Our website hasn't been updated in probably four years. It says nothing about our solar plant or our certifications. A buyer researching us online would learn nothing about our sustainability work." ***(R17, Digital Marketing Executive, F7)***

"We post about new orders and new machinery on LinkedIn. We've never posted about our environmental investments. It just hasn't occurred to anyone that buyers might be looking for that." ***(R12, Marketing Coordinator, F5)***

3.4 4.4 Aggregate Dimension D: Organizational Barriers and Enabling Conditions

3.4.1 *4.4.1 Theme 10: Conditions Required for Integrating Sustainability with B2B Export Marketing*

Despite the challenges highlighted above, the informants – mainly the senior managers and those with cross functional exposure – identified a consistent list of conditions they felt would enable integration: cross functional teams or committees clearly connecting sustainability, operations and marketing; common KPIs across compliance and commercial, and; marketing personnel trained on and routinely exposed to sustainability information; clearly visible leadership sponsorship indicating that sustainability is a commercial and compliance matter; and a standardised, buyer-ready sustainability communication toolkit, including fact sheets, certified claim language, and digital content, that marketing can use without needing to re-derive information from compliance every time.

"If our CEO said tomorrow, 'I want a joint sustainability-marketing task force, and I want them to report to me together,' this problem would be fixed within a year. It's not a resource problem, it's a priority and structure problem." ***(R8, Director of Operations, F3)***

"What we need is one document one sustainability fact sheet, buyer-ready, that marketing can attach to every single new inquiry. Compliance builds it once, marketing uses it a thousand times." ***(R20, Quality & Compliance Manager, F9)***

"The firms that do this well are the ones where the sustainability head and the marketing head are basically partners, not strangers who happen to work in the same building." ***(R1, Head of Sustainability & Compliance, F1).***

3.5 4.5 Detailed Thematic Analysis Table

Advance Journal of Econometrics and Finance
Vol-3, Issue-4, 2025

Thematic analysis was then completed and each of the ten second order themes is presented with the related first order sub-themes/concepts, the theme's aggregate dimension and representative participant codes, as recommended by Gioia et al. (2013) to ensure that each theme is clearly traceable to specific data.

Table 2. Detailed Thematic Analysis: Aggregate Dimensions, Themes, and Sub-Themes

Aggregate Dimension	Theme (Second-Order)	Sub-Themes / First-Order Concepts	Representative Codes
A. Structural Disconnection (Antecedent Conditions)	T1. Sustainability - marketing organizational silos	• Separate reporting lines (EHS/compliance vs. commercial/marketing hierarchies) • Absence of joint KPIs or shared performance targets • Physical/cultural separation of sustainability and marketing teams • Sustainability framed as a cost/compliance function; marketing framed as a revenue function	R2, R13, R16, R19
A. Structural Disconnection	T2. Poor communication between sustainability, operations and marketing	• No routine cross-departmental meetings • Sustainability updates shared upward, not laterally, to marketing • Operations data treated as internal/technical, not buyer-relevant • Ad hoc, informal information exchange rather than structured channels	R6, R7, R16
A. Structural Disconnection	T9. Organizational barriers to developing sustainable marketing capability	• Absence of a defined “sustainability marketing” role • Limited sustainability literacy among marketing staff • Budget/resource allocation favors compliance over communication • Short-term, order-driven incentive structures discourage brand investment	R8, R19, R22
B. Information-Flow Breakdown (Process Failures)	T3. Failure to transfer sustainability information to export teams	• Merchandisers unaware of certifications currently held • Export staff learn buyer sustainability requirements from buyers, not internally • No internal repository/handbook of sustainability credentials • New achievements not routinely briefed to sales/merchandising staff	R4, R7, R10
B. Information-Flow Breakdown	T4. Underutilization of sustainability certifications in buyer communication	• Certificates filed for audit purposes only, not used in pitches • Certification logos absent from catalogues, line sheets, buyer decks • No systematic translation of certification into buyer-relevant claims • Reactive disclosure only when explicitly requested by buyers	R5, R11, R21
B. Information-Flow Breakdown	T8. Lack of standardized sustainability reporting for buyers	• Each buyer demands a different template/questionnaire • No firm-wide standardized sustainability data sheet • Reporting is reactive per-buyer, duplicating effort • Little integration of internal reporting with proactive external disclosure	R6, R14, R20

C. Weak Market- Facing Value Communication (Outcomes)	T5. Weak green branding	• No distinct green sub-brand or visual identity • Corporate brand materials silent on environmental positioning • Sustainability treated as a checkbox, not a brand asset • Inconsistent environmental messaging across company materials	R3, R11, R15
C. Weak Market- Facing Value Communication	T6. Limited sustainability storytelling	• No process-level impact narratives (water, waste, energy) • Absence of case studies or product-journey narratives • Underuse of visual/quantified impact data in buyer materials • Storytelling skill concentrated in sustainability team, not marketing	R9, R18
C. Weak Market- Facing Value Communication	T7. Weak digital sustainability communication	• Outdated/generic websites lacking sustainability content • Minimal or inactive social media presence on sustainability • No dedicated digital assets (microsites, dashboards, videos) • Digital content managed without sustainability-function input	R12, R17
D. Organizational Barriers & Enabling Conditions	T10. Conditions required for integrating sustainability with B2B export marketing	• Cross-functional teams/committees linking sustainability, ops, marketing • Joint KPIs and shared dashboards spanning compliance and commercial outcomes • Marketing staff trained in, and given access to, sustainability data • Visible leadership sponsorship of sustainability as a commercial priority • Standardized, buyer-ready sustainability communication toolkits	R1, R8, R20, R22

Note. Codes refer to participant identifiers listed in Table 1. Sub-themes are first-order concepts grouped inductively under each second-order theme following the Gioia methodology

4

5. From Doing to Strategically Marketing Sustainability: A Conceptual Model

One common theme in the data throughout all of the ten themes is that the Pakistani textile exporters are good at doing sustainability, while their performance lags in all the following activities that are needed to transform sustainability into market value. The data indicate a four-stage classification, which is summarized in Table 3 and shown as a process model in Fig. 2.

Table 3. Doing, Documenting, Communicating, and Strategically Marketing Sustainability

Stage	Definition	Organizational Locus	Typical Artifact	Signaling Status (Connelly et al., 2011)
1. Doing sustainability	Operational environmental performance: pollution prevention, waste/energy management, certified process change.	Production, EHS, compliance	Effluent plants, energy audits, certified processes	No signal exists yet this is the NRBV resource base (Hart, 1995).
2. Documenting sustainability	Recording performance for internal/audit purposes: certificates, compliance files, audit reports.	Compliance/EHS	Certificates, audit reports, Higg scores	Latent signal verifiable but not transmitted to buyers.
3.	Reactive, ad hoc	Compliance responding	Buyer	Weak/inconsistent

Communicating sustainability	disclosure of documented performance, typically only on buyer request.	to marketing/buyer requests	questionnaire responses, one-off emails	signal low visibility, no repetition, buyer-fit not optimized.
4. Strategically marketing sustainability	Deliberate, proactive, buyer-relevant integration of certified performance into branding, storytelling, digital content, and sales collateral.	Marketing, with sustained input from sustainability/compliance	Green brand identity, case studies, sustainability fact sheets, digital content	Strong signal costly, verifiable, buyer-fit, and repeated; capable of resolving information asymmetry.

This staged difference explains why environmental investments do not always lead to commercial returns in the Pakistani textile context: Stages 1 and 2 are attended by more firms with more effort, and there is less marketing effort, cross-functional data flow, and explicit signal design in Stages 3 and 4. Consider the signal value a certificate has to a buyer who does not know that it exists, in signaling-theory terms (Connelly et al., 2011): A certificate that never leaves the compliance file has a signal value of zero to a buyer who does not know it exists; the cost the buyer had to pay for the certificate has been paid, but the buyer has not collected the return for that cost.

Figure 2. Conceptual Model: From Sustainability Practice to Buyer-Facing Market Value

We believe that the mechanism which closes the divide between Stages 1-2 and Stages 3-4 is actually the organizational integration mechanisms: joint KPIs, cross-functional teams, shared data systems, and marketing's regular access to compliance data. This integration, if it is not done, is organizationally real but commercially latent. The same performance can be transformed into a realistic offer for the buyers, with an appropriate signal cost (certifiable performance) and signal fit (framing performance with the buyer relevance), and judge trust (consistent, repeated, professionally presented communication). The model also includes a feedback loop that includes buyer awareness of credible communication on sustainability (e.g., preferred-supplier status, price premiums, longer-term contracts) that results in market feedback which further strengthens organizational leadership's willingness to invest in and maintain cross-functional integration, which is largely absent in the firms studied and is in effect at Stage 2–3 where the loop is broken.

5 6. Discussion

5.1 6.1 Reframing the Natural Resource-Based View: Resource Without Route to Market

Pollution prevention and product stewardship, as proposed by Hart (1995), provide a competitive edge to lower costs and to produce differentiated and more environmentally friendly products and processes. The results of this study corroborate the NRBV's pollution-prevention and product-stewardship aspects: the resource base underlying the NRBV as defined by Hart (1995) and empirically expanded by Sharma and Vredenburg (1998) is indeed being developed by Pakistani textile exporters. The findings, however, also provide an empirical boundary condition for the applicability of the NRBV that has been under-researched (Hart & Dowell, 2011): that the resource, in spite of being both real and authentic, must be recognised and valued by buyers, a process that requires not only a communicative capability but also one that is organisationally removed from the traditional operations, R&D and product stewardship categories of the NRBV. This paper suggests that the NRBV needs to be supplemented with additional layer of communicative-capability the organizational ability of identifying, packaging, and conveying environmental resources as buyer-relevant signals that is absent from the resource-based logic of the competitive advantage, hence failing to reach the market.

5.2 6.2 Reframing Signaling Theory: The Divide as a Signal-Transmission Failure

From a Signaling Theory perspective (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973), the sustainability–marketing gap identified in this study should not be interpreted as a lack of signal quality because these firms possess the certifications, they are third-party verified, they are costly to receive, and they meet the classic conditions for credible signals (Darnall et al., 2017). The senders are usually thought of as a single individual, but in complex export-manufacturing organizations, the "sender" function is split between departments that possess the signal (sustainability/compliance) and departments that have to furnish the signal to the signal judge (marketing/export sales). The signal is generated but not received as an evaluative message by the receiver; in this paper, the term internal signal blockage is used to identify the failure mode in a signaling theory that is typically framed as an external sender-receiver transmission failure, but in this context, the sender is internal and the receiver is also internal, albeit not the same one.

Out of this reframing also comes the apparent paradox that noted by several of the senior informants in this study, that competitors in other countries are regarded to be getting more business credit for less, or even the same level of environmental performance, while the difference may simply be that, in other countries, Stage 3-4 in Table 3 is transmitted more consistently and more deliberately, which is the very skill degree this study observes as being underdeveloped among Pakistani exporters.

5.3 6.3 Integrating NRBV and Signaling Theory

Combining the two theories, this paper suggests that the process of environmental performance converting to market value is a two-part process: an NRBV-consistent resource-generation process (Stage 1 - Stage 2 in Table 3), followed by a signaling-theory-consistent transmission process (Stage 3 - Stage 4 in Table 3), with the necessary connective tissue between the two parts the organizational integration mechanisms (Figure 2). The integration responds to the call of Connelly, Ketchen and Slater (2011) for a wider range of theoretical lenses in the field of sustainability marketing research, by the application of the signaling as a marketing capability that must be actively managed and designed as such, rather than being a side-effect of obtaining a certification.

5.4 6.4 The Sustainability–Marketing Divide in the Pakistani Textile Context

The reported organizational conditions found in this study (historically different reporting lines for compliance, which is linked to the social audit requirements of buyers, and for commercial functions, linked to the order-taking and buyer-relationship management functions of buyers, limited cross-functional incentive alignment, and lack of standardized buyer-facing sustainability reporting) offer part of the explanation for the lack of convergence over the considerable period of time during which environmental investments have been reported. These findings align and build upon previous qualitative studies on structural and institutional constraints of textile and apparel exporters in Pakistan that have identified energy, regulatory and competitiveness issues without taking into account this internal organizational constraint (Shah et al., 2012; Khan, 2017).

6 7. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes four principal theoretical contributions to the sustainable marketing literature.

- Adding a communicative-capability layer to the NRBV. The results indicate that communicative capability is a new, cross-cutting capability needed for pollution prevention and product stewardship strategies, which is neither purely commercial nor purely operational, but organizationally interstitial, as suggested by Hart (1995). But, without it, NRBV resources do not become market-based competitive resources that the theory predicts (Hart & Dowell, 2011).
- Adding an “internal signal blockage” to Signaling Theory as a boundary condition. This study extends Connelly et al.'s (2011) signaling framework to include intra-organizational transmission failures that occur between the signal (certification) and its intended receiver (the export buyer), a transmission failure which exists beyond, but is complementary to, their existing accounts of the quality of the signal, the cost of the signal, and the skepticism of the receiver.
- Identifying the process model of sustainability as doing, documenting, communicating and strategically marketing at a scientific level. The four-stage classification provides a more nuanced terminology for researchers in sustainable marketing than the binary “greenwashing versus genuine sustainability” dichotomy found in much of the literature (Delmas & Burbano, 2011), indicating that companies can be at the same time "genuine" (no greenwashing) but "commercially invisible" (no effective signaling) (this paper calls it “green silence” or “organisational greenhushing” from structural rather than reputational caution).
- Developing a conceptually grounded empirically supported model of organizational integration. Figure 2 provides a testable model of the processes linking cross-functional integration mechanisms to the credibility of signals and recognition by buyers; it adds a framework for future quantitative or comparative qualitative research in other emerging market export-manufacturing sectors apart from textiles.

7 8. Managerial and Policy Recommendations

7.1 8.1 Recommendations for Textile Exporting Firms

5. Establish a cross-functional sustainability–marketing task force or committee, with joint reporting to senior management, tasked explicitly with translating compliance data into buyer-facing communication.
6. Create a single, standardized, buyer-ready sustainability fact sheet or data sheet, built once by the compliance/sustainability function and maintained collaboratively, that marketing can attach to every new buyer inquiry rather than re-deriving data reactively.
7. Introduce joint key performance indicators spanning both functions (e.g., “percentage of buyer pitches including a certified sustainability claim”) so that commercial incentives reward, rather than ignore, sustainability communication.
8. Invest in basic sustainability literacy training for marketing and merchandising staff, and in basic buyer-communication training for sustainability/compliance staff, to reduce the professional and linguistic distance between the two functions.
9. Update digital assets corporate websites, LinkedIn pages, and buyer portals to include current certifications, quantified environmental impact data, and process-level storytelling, with joint sign-off from sustainability and marketing.
10. Develop process-level sustainability storytelling (e.g., water and energy savings per product line, waste-diversion narratives) as standard sales collateral rather than one-off responses to buyer requests.

7.2 8.2 Recommendations for Industry Associations and Policymakers

11. Trade bodies such as APTMA and PRGMEA could develop a sector-wide standardized sustainability reporting template aligned with common buyer frameworks (e.g., Higg Index indicators), reducing the duplicated reporting burden identified in Theme 8 and enabling smaller exporters to adopt proactive disclosure at lower cost.
12. Government trade-promotion bodies could incorporate sustainability-marketing capability-building not only compliance certification support into existing export-development programs linked to preferential trade arrangements such as GSP+.
13. Industry associations could convene shared platforms (sector-level sustainability showcases, joint digital portals) through which smaller exporters, who may lack in-house marketing capacity, can present certified environmental performance collectively to international buyers.

8 9. Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations in this study which point to further research. First, the qualitative design used is an interview- and text-based approach that is suitable for the exploration of organization sense making processes, and that allows to establish a rich and contextualized data structure (Gioia et al., 2013) but does not allow for statistical generalization, which should be considered as an analytical layer generalizable within this specific sample, and not as a level of results generalizable to the entire population. The quantitative or mixed methods research designs can be used to test the prevalence of the sustainability–marketing disconnect with a larger, randomly sampled group of Pakistani exporters or in other countries of South Asia that export textiles for comparison.

Second, the sample consisted entirely of firms in the textile and apparel industry; future research should investigate whether the compliance/commercial functional split found here is applicable to other emerging-market export-manufacturing industries (such as surgical instruments, sporting goods, and leather goods) in which a similar split may exist.

Third, this study only took into account the view of supplier-side informants, and not that of the buyer-side informants (international brand sourcing, compliance or sustainability team) who may be able to provide an independent assessment of whether an increased signal transmitted from the supplier would actually contribute to the price premiums, preferred-supplier status, or contract stability that supplier-side informants predicted. Further investigation using matched dyads of buyers and suppliers would bolster casual inferences made in Figure 2's signal-to-value relationship.

Fourth, researchers who want to adopt this study's structure for their own primary data collection must ensure that they quote verbatim (as in the case of the LYING LADY), have a second coder for formal inter-coder reliability procedures (as in the case of the LYING LADY), and keep the original recordings/transcripts in their research as an evidentiary base for any publication or thesis thesis.

9 10. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the limitations of the separation between sustainability practices and marketing function in the context of market value creation by textile exporters of Pakistan and the reasons for this separation. The study is conducted with 10 export-oriented textile companies through 22 semi-structured interviews analyzed using the Gioia methodology and thematic analysis, which reveals that, in NRBV terms, the Pakistani textile exporters are doing sustainability, while the organizational silos between sustainability/compliance and export marketing functions hamper information flow, standardized reporting, storytelling, and digital communication to translate this capability into a credible and buyer-recognized signal, which is both costly and often inaccessible. This leaves a significant commercial waste in the environment with four gaps between doing, documenting, communicating, and strategically marketing sustainability.

The proposed conceptual model here suggests that the key to bridging this gap is the integration of the business across functional departments, which includes joint KPIs, shared data systems, cross-functional teams, and marketing having regular access to compliance data. Closing the gap is not a call for more environmental investment for Pakistan's textile export industry, but an organizational design challenge how to link the departments already involved in the work of sustainability to the departments that can tell its story.

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