



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Unlocking Business Sustainability: Investigating the Influence of Humanic Clues in Nigeria Agricultural Industry

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: Jun 17, 2024</p> <p>Accepted: Aug 19, 2024</p> <p>Keywords</p> <p>Customer experience management Humanic clues Social Economic Enviromental sustainability Agriculture</p> <p>*Corresponding Author: fisayo.aremupgs@stu.cu.edu.ng</p>	<p>This study examines the significance of human factors in the sustainability of indigenous agricultural enterprises in Nigeria, specifically in terms of customer experience management. The research used a mixed-method methodology, gathering comprehensive data from both clients and workers through surveys and interviews. A structured online questionnaire was made available to 103 workers of certain local agricultural enterprises using a multi-stage sampling approach. The study utilises Structural Equation Modelling (SEM-Smart-PLS) to ascertain the significant roles of mechanical and human inputs in sustainability. The findings underscore the imperative of prioritising employee training to ensure effective customer engagement, with a focus on key aspects such as authentic greetings, pleasant demeanour, and addressing customer needs. This study provides valuable insights into the interplay between sustainability, customer experience management, and the agriculture industry, as well as practical recommendations for enhancing company operations.</p>

INTRODUCTION

The market sector has experienced substantial growth due to the increasing number of individuals worldwide who prioritise sustainability and organic products, with a particular emphasis on women and young people in sub-Saharan Africa. This trend has led to the establishment of a significant number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that specialise in organic agriculture. Consequently, the agriculture industry has seen significant transformation, highlighting the crucial importance of customer experience in establishing a lasting competitive edge (Edet & Effiom, 2018).

Co-creation between the experience provider and the customer in a retail context leads to the formation of the customer experience (CE). The consumer's entire customer experience (CE) in retail outlets that offer organic food is influenced by their connection with the items (experience with organic foods) as well as the store ambiance, personnel, policies, and processes (retail outlet shopping experience). Furthermore, when a consumer actively uses and consumes a product, such as when they consume organic food, they are participating in customer engagement (CE). Consumers

are influenced by all aspects of a retail company, including the choice of products and the customer experiences that follow a purchase (Chatzoglou et al., 2022; Terblanche, 2018; Mouri et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2012).

The customer experience is a crucial factor in determining the success of an organisation in today's market, which is characterised by the widespread availability of similar products or services. Humanic cues encompass several factors like as language choice, tone of voice, body language, appearance, and dress, which have an impact on the relationship between businesses and clients. Service providers comprehend these signs on an emotional level. These signals have a crucial role in shaping customers' emotions and creating the visual representations that occur throughout these interactions. When selecting services, it is crucial to bear in mind that consumers often seek and take into account additional information that managers and service providers may not be aware of.

Consumers meticulously analyse cues and the emotions they evoke during the process of obtaining, utilising, and evaluating a product or service; this process may be likened to detective work (Borishade, Worlu, Ogunnaike, Aka & Dirisu, 2021). This research seeks to examine the impact of human signals on the long-term viability of organisations in Nigeria's organic agriculture industry, recognising the importance of these signals. Through the analysis of these signals as crucial components of the customer experience, the research seeks to elucidate the influence of these cues on the longevity and prosperity of firms.

The organic agricultural sector in Nigeria has several obstacles, including inadequate service provision, consumer mistrust about organic food products, mounting debt, and intense competition from existing enterprises. These challenges underscore the need of possessing a comprehensive comprehension of customer experience management. Consumer expectations have undergone a considerable shift due to the anticipation that companies will adapt their products and services to match environmental trends and advancements. This alteration underscores the imperative for the sector to undergo transformation and adjust in order to meet the evolving demands and preferences of its customers. The advent of the "new normal" culture brought about by the pandemic has significantly transformed customer preferences, behaviours, and merchant strategies, leading to a notable surge in online sales. Given that retailing revolves around delivering a comprehensive shopping experience to customers (Bascur & Rusu, 2020; Berry et al., 2002), it is logical to assume that the ability of retailers to offer exceptional retail outlet experiences in the post-pandemic era will significantly impact the success of retail operations. Retailers face a quandary as contemporary consumers possess greater knowledge about a brand's products, rivals' services, and pricing strategies. Individuals that have a preference for innovation generally have more demanding criteria for the products, services, and systems offered by the organisation (Bascur & Rusu, 2020).

The study acknowledges that physical signals, especially those arising from face-to-face interactions, are the main source from which customers form their perceptions and expectations of a service. Despite the high need in the agriculture industry, it is well recognised that relying only on CRM has not produced the intended outcomes. The study examines the potential for the agriculture business to utilise a "customer experience management strategy" as a means to enhance sustainability and prioritise customer satisfaction. This method aims to fulfil consumers' immediate requirements and preferences, as well as the broader experiential aspects that influence their attitudes and loyalty towards a retail organic farming firm. Implementing this technique may enhance consumer satisfaction, foster brand loyalty, and ultimately gain a competitive edge in the market.

Objectives of the Study

The research objectives were aimed at filling the intellectual gap:

- i, Investigate the influence of humanic clues on sustainability of the agriculture industry (i.e. economic sustainability, social sustainability and environmental sustainability)

The objectives were hypothesized in null form as:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Humanic clues do not significantly influence the sustainability of the agriculture industry*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Customer Experience Management

The perspectives of both enterprises and customers have been examined in regards to the customer experience (Kranzbühler et al., 2018). Voorhees et al. (2017) argue that comprehending the customer experience necessitates a thorough examination of the whole customer journey, including every interaction with a firm, whether it is for assistance or a transaction. Consumers exhibit varying responses to each of these interactions, and the amalgamation of these individual encounters influences their entire experience. To fully know and effectively manage the customer experience, it is essential to have a thorough awareness of these touchpoints and the emotions they elicit.

In order to efficiently oversee the customer experience, organisations must closely monitor various points of contact and pinpoint significant encounters, referred to as "moments of truth," which greatly influence customers' perception of their brand (Homburg et al., 2017; Voorhees et al., 2017). It is crucial to acknowledge that the customer experience is impacted by both external variables and the company's intended customer journey (Kandampully, Zhang, & Jaakkola, 2018). Prior comprehension of the company's perception by consumers and its broader ecosystem is essential for successful customer experience management (Meyer & Schwager, 2007).

Effectively managing customer experience involves more than just monitoring interactions at different touchpoints. It also involves identifying crucial occasions that have a big impact on a business's reputation among clients. These significant contacts, also known as "moments of truth," can occur at any stage of the customer journey and have the ability to greatly impact overall perceptions. Moreover, it is important for companies to comprehend that, apart from their own endeavours, external factors such as competitors, industry trends, and cultural influences may significantly affect the customer experience. In order to achieve the desired objectives, organisations must possess a comprehensive understanding of both their internal operations and the broader external environment in which they operate, for effective customer experience management. Subsequently, they would possess the capability to customise their strategies and services in order to align with the evolving tastes and requirements of their clients

2.1.1 Customer Experience Management Clues

The factors that impact the customer experience may be classified into three main categories: humanic signals, functional cues, and mechanic cues. Carbone and Haeckel (1994) introduced the concepts of "mechanic clues" and "humanic clues" during their address. These concepts were further developed by Borishade et al. (2019) through the use of functional signals. According to Johye and Soobin (2016), individuals engage in intentional and unconscious evaluation of several indicators throughout their contacts with businesses, which results in a variety of perceptions. Perceptions can be influenced by stimuli that are observed or sensed, and these stimuli can vary in emotional intensity from neutral to highly charged. Irrespective of their presence, specific stimuli might provide valuable information or ideas that enhance the overall customer experience. It is essential to bear in mind that this study exclusively examines humanic cues.

2.1.2. Humanic clues

Humanic signals encompass a range of nonverbal signs, vocal intonations, levels of friendliness and enthusiasm, and observable behaviours and interactions exhibited by individuals in an organisational setting. In the agriculture industry, these cues are most accurately demonstrated by

the behaviours of customer service agents and workers who exhibit compassion and generosity, hence reflecting a hospitable and positive work atmosphere. Establishing human connection may demonstrate to clients that they are highly valued and cared for by surpassing their expectations, fostering loyalty, and cultivating trust. Service providers that possess exceptional attributes such as empathy, compassion, and resourcefulness are more likely to achieve success in delivering good service. The significance of humanic cues in agriculture has gained increasing recognition in recent times (Bain, 2018).

2.2. Business Sustainability

Business sustainability refers to the capacity of a company to maintain its operations without compromising the well-being of present and future generations. The agriculture industry has recognised the growing significance of sustainability due to its potential negative impacts on society and the environment. Key sustainability initiatives encompass the use of environmentally friendly goods, the advocacy for equitable employment practices, and the mitigation of waste and emissions. Adopting ethical labour norms, such as circular economic frameworks, and procuring sustainable resources are essential for achieving sustainable agriculture.

Implementing a comprehensive system that places sustainability as the top priority across all aspects of the agriculture industry is crucial in attaining this goal. The primary objective of this system should be to manufacture products that are socially and ecologically conscientious (Berg, Hedrich, Ibanez, Kappelmark, Magnus, & Seeger, 2019). In essence, achieving sustainability in agriculture requires a significant shift in both mindset and approach. Transparency is crucial for cultivating a culture of trust and accountability inside businesses, since it allows them to openly discuss their processes and outcomes. Ensuring that holding firms are held accountable ensures that they acknowledge responsibility for their actions and make efforts to minimise negative effects on the environment and society. Moreover, innovation plays a crucial role in promoting sustainability by facilitating the development of new materials, technologies, and business strategies that prioritise sustainability. Overall, the agriculture business has the ability to take the lead in promoting a more sustainable future via prioritising accountability, transparency, and innovation.

The agriculture business is increasingly adopting sustainability reporting as a means to promote transparency. However, critics argue that the primary objective often revolves on enhancing brand reputation. Regulation is considered crucial for promoting ethical conduct. Despite the promises made by corporate leaders to promote sustainability during the 2021 COP26 climate summit, little tangible progress has been achieved. Activists stress the necessity of fundamental alterations in corporate structures and industrial infrastructure in order to make a significant impact. Agricultural activity has a global influence, benefiting not just rural inhabitants but also creating job opportunities both directly and indirectly. This impact extends beyond local communities in European nations. Recognising the environmental significance of agriculture's contribution to ecosystem preservation and biodiversity, as well as its role in promoting the development of farming practices that enhance livelihoods and create employment opportunities, is crucial.

2.3. Theoretical Justification

The investigation of customer experience management, market orientation, and business sustainability in local agricultural firms is grounded in Howard and Sheth's (1969) theory of consumer behaviour. This theory elucidates the process by which customers evaluate their purchasing decisions, considering many factors such as marketing stimuli, societal and cultural impacts, and individual traits. Understanding these elements is crucial for developing effective marketing strategies that cater to consumer needs and preferences, hence increasing revenue and fostering customer loyalty.

Furthermore, according to the concept of dynamic capabilities, organisations may maintain a competitive advantage by continuously acquiring new skills to adapt to environmental changes. The creation of experience learning theory was driven by the realisation that dynamic capabilities, although providing a valuable framework, are insufficient in understanding market dynamics. This theory enhances the concept of dynamic capabilities by offering further insights into how organisations may adjust to evolving market conditions and thrive.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a contemporaneous mixed-method research design to gather data, utilising both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Interviews were employed to gather qualitative data, whilst questionnaires were utilised to get quantitative data. The quantitative method employed a conclusive research strategy with a focus on explanation, whereas the qualitative methodology utilised an exploratory research design to uncover distinctive customer insights. The quantitative component of the study included a total of 103 workers from MiddleBrook Farms and Honey Flow Africa. The qualitative component, however, consisted of a vast and limitless sample population. In the quantitative investigation, all employees were enumerated using the census approach. A total of thirty customers were interviewed for the qualitative study, with five consumers selected as representatives from each branch and business. The data collection process involved the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as the implementation of focussed and conveniently accessible sample strategies. The questionnaire for the quantitative study consisted of four components, each utilising a five-point Likert scale. The parts included the participants' market orientation, sustainability, customer experience management, and demographics. Interview approaches were employed to collect qualitative information from clients of MiddleBrook Farms and Honey Flow Africa. In order to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the research instruments, experienced supervisors in the field reviewed the questionnaire and interview guides. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 25 and the Structural Equation Model (SEM) - SMART-PLS 4, using regression and correlation analyses. The qualitative data underwent theme analysis. The results were presented using descriptive statistics. Ensuring ethical considerations were meticulously addressed throughout the whole process was imperative to safeguard the rights and well-being of research participants, as well as maintain the integrity and transparency of the study.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: Humanic clues do not significantly influence the sustainability of the agricultural industry

The theory includes one exogenous variable, humanic recommendations, and one endogenous variable, sustainability. a structured survey with a five-point Likert scale for assessing study factors. As can be shown in Table 1, sustainability which includes social, cultural, and environmental dimensions was evaluated using seven questions, while an unobservable variable known as "humanic clues" was evaluated using three queries.

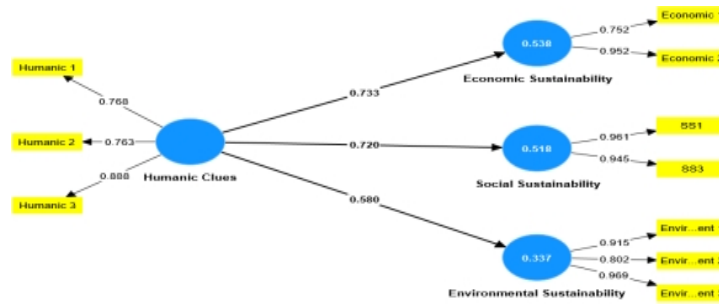


Figure 1: Path Algorithm of Humanic Clues on Sustainability

Table 1: Factor Loading for Humanic Clues and Sustainability (Economic, Social and Environmental Sustainability)

	factor loading	error variance	VIF	Composite Reliability	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Indicators
Indicator	> 0.7	< 0.5	< 3.5	≥ 0.7	≥ 0.5	≥ 0.7	
Humanic Clues							
HC1	0.768	0.232	1.289	0.770	0.654	0.748	3
HC2	0.763	0.237	3.815				
HC3	0.888	0.112	4.361				
Economic Sustainability							
ES1	0.752	0.248	1.359	0.967	0.736	0.779	2
ES2	0.952	0.048	1.359				
Social Sustainability							
SS1	0.961	0.039	3.020	0.917	0.908	0.900	2
SS3	0.945	0.055	3.020				
Environmental Sustainability							
ES1	0.915	0.085	7.435	0.902	0.806	0.877	3
ES2	0.802	0.198	1.954				
ES3	0.969	0.031	9.587				

The construct's average variance extracted (AVE) must exceed 0.50, and the composite reliability must exceed 0.70. A Cronbach Alpha value of 0.70 or above indicates that an instrument is considered dependable. The table 1 reveals that all the mechanic signals and structures associated with sustainability in a specific Nigerian agricultural company exhibit satisfactory levels of composite internal consistency and Cronbach Alpha reliability. The factor loadings for each structure ranged from 0.708 to 0.912. Given that the instrument fulfils the necessary criteria for suitability, it can be considered valid and reliable. Sarstedt et al. (2019) found that the measurements of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) consistently remain below the stringent threshold of 3. This suggests that the measurement model is not affected by collinearity. The framework described by Osibanjo, Adeniji, Salau, Atolagbe, Osoko, Edewor, & Olowu (2020) is used for the bootstrapping investigation that follows. Bootstrapping, in combination with Partial Least Squares (PLS), employs 5000 subsamples to ascertain statistical significance. By employing bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples, it is possible to calculate route coefficient values and evaluate the impacts of sustainability, market orientation, and customer experience management.

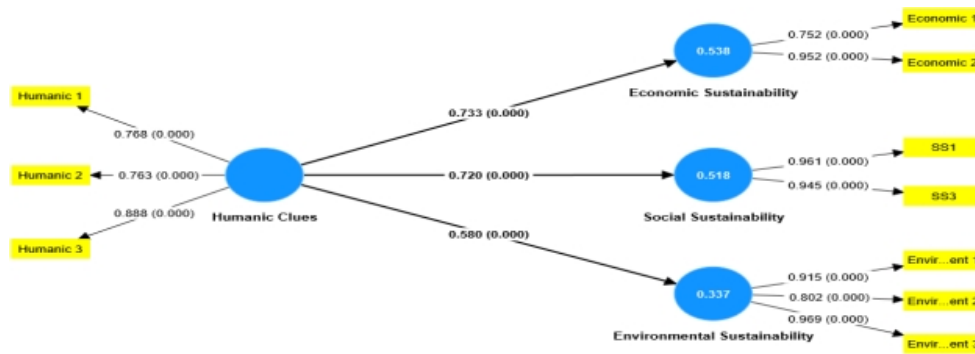


Figure 2: P-coefficient of the value of Humanic clues and sustainability (Economic sustainability, Social sustainability, and Environmental sustainability)

Figure 2 displays the PLS Bootstrapping Model, illustrating the β and P-coefficients for humanic cues and sustainability (including social, environmental, and economic sustainability). The p-value, a statistical measure that quantifies the level of likelihood, is displayed in Figure 2. In order for a probability to be deemed statistically significant, it must be below 0.05. Statistical significance is attained when the p-value is 0.05 for all the variables of the study instrument, including adaptive performance, contextual performance, task performance, job value evaluations, humanic hints, and sustainability culture.

Table 2: Coefficient value of Hypothesis One

Variables	Path Co-efficient	Standard Deviation	T-Statistics	P Value	Hypothesis Decision	r-Square (r ²)	R-Square Adjusted	Effect Size (F ²)	Effect Size description	Q ²
HC → Eco Sus	0.733	0.019	38.420	0.000	Significant	0.538	0.536	1.163	Large	0.532
HC → Env Sus	0.580	0.040	14.623	0.000	Significant	0.337	0.334	0.507	Large	0.331
HC → Soc Sus	0.720	0.031	22.946	0.000	Significant	0.518	0.516	1.075	Large	0.518

Table 2 presents the statistical results obtained from doing an intelligent partial least squares analysis on sustainability and humane suggestions for hypothesis one. Human signals have a direct influence on sustainability. The humanistic signals have a substantial effect on economic sustainability, as indicated by the regression coefficients ($\beta=0.733$), the coefficient of determination ($R^2=0.538$), the t-statistics ($38.420 > 1.96$), and the P-value ($0.000 < 0.05$). The Path coefficient of 0.733 signifies a strong association between humanic cues and economic sustainability. Humanic signals account for 53.8% of the variation in economic sustainability. The impact of a humanic proposal on environmental sustainability is significant, as evidenced by the t-statistics ($14.623 > 1.96$), the beta coefficient ($\beta=0.580$), the coefficient of determination ($R^2=0.337$), and the p-value ($P\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.05$). A minor association has been seen between indicators of human behaviour and the ability to sustain the environment. Based on the R^2 value of 0.337, it may be inferred that human signals could account for 33.7% of the variation in environmental sustainability. The results indicate a strong and substantial positive relationship ($\beta = 0.720$, $R^2 = 0.516$, t-statistics = $22.946 > 1.96$, P-value = $0.000 < 0.05$) between humanic signals and societal sustainability. The path coefficient of 0.720 suggests a strong correlation between social sustainability and humanic stimuli. Within the context of humanism, 51.8% of social sustainability is accounted for. The social and

environmental components of sustainability are less predictable when compared to the economic element, as seen in Table 2.

4.2. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this research are discussed based on the empirical and theoretical review of literature.

Hypothesis 1: Humanic clues do not significantly influence the sustainability of the agricultural industry

The study's findings indicate that of the three components being examined, humanic cues exerted the most impact. The predictability of sustainability in the environment is minimal. This implies that there may not be a significant correlation between promoting a sustainable environment and factors such as communication style, tone of voice, and employee behaviour.

The results of this investigation are consistent with other studies by Suvarchala & Narasimha (2018) and Borishade et al. (2021), which have shown the influence of staff behaviour and communication style on customer purchasing decisions. The current study's findings are consistent with the three primary factors—stimuli (product attributes), the customer's internal state (personality, mood), and the customer's subsequent behavioural reaction to the product—that are proposed by the current theoretical framework as influencing consumer behaviour. The study emphasises that humanic indicators may be found in employee behaviours in firms. These actions might include things like how you use words, how enthusiastic you are, how you speak, how you dress, and how you feel about things overall. Additionally, Berry et al. (2006) highlighted the influence of both mechanical and humanic cues on the customer service experience and provided examples of how businesses show their dedication to meeting the needs and preferences of their customers.

4.2. Presentation of Interview Findings

A total of thirty clients participated in the interview process. The participants were queried about their buying patterns in relation to MiddleBrook Farms and Honey Flow Africa, as well as any other firm that came to mind.

The analysis of this interview was presented in themes and codes as seen in Table 5

Table 3: Interview Analysis

Themes	Code Number	Code Name	Frequency	Percent (%)	Ranking
Humanic clues on sustainability	1	Respect for customers	9	20	1
	2	Quick and timely response from customers	30	6	4
	3	Effective communication	21	8.57	2
	4	Good customer service	28	6.43	3
	5	Employee tone of voice	28	6.43	3

According to the statistics shown in Table 3, a significant proportion (20%) of consumers expressed that customer brand loyalty was of utmost importance. The staff people exhibited exceptional efficiency and promptness, as seen by their response rate of 30 (6%), which was the lowest among all groups. This phenomenon might be attributed to consumers possessing a clear understanding of their desired product or service. Their delay in responding to enquiries may indicate their efforts to establish contact with the appropriate individual to finalise the transaction and achieve satisfaction. Notably, each candidate shown exceptional ability and concentration.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of current research yield the following conclusions;

The findings corroborate the premise that incorporating humanic signals into the agriculture business enhances its ability to sustain profitability. This perspective is substantiated by the replies to the distributed questionnaire. Humanic signals enable the improved sustainability of agricultural enterprises'.

The study's findings and the accompanying data demonstrate the significant role that humanic cues play in enhancing customer experience and promoting sustainability. When seeking new clients, agricultural firms should give priority to humanistic signals as they establish a unique corporate brand and exceed customer expectations. These indications encompass factors such as linguistic preference, facial expression, clothing, and physical characteristics. Human signals serve as the basis for service encounters, and attentively studying them might result in pleasantly unexpected outcomes. The study's findings and the accompanying data demonstrate the significant role that humanic cues play in enhancing customer experience and promoting sustainability. Humanistic cues such as the use of language, facial expressions, clothing, and overall look are employed to establish a unique brand identity and surpass client expectations. The primary focus of these service connections is on human cues, and carefully observing them might pleasantly surprise the recipient. Essentially, the phrase "customer experience" encompasses all the attitudes, emotions, and impressions that arise from encounters at each stage of the purchasing process. A consumer's overall experience can be influenced by their impressions about the firm, the ambiance, the manner in which the service was provided, and their interactions with personnel and fellow customers. This enhances the customer's recollection of the experience by eliciting behavioural, emotional, and cognitive responses in the consumer.

5.1. Contribution to Knowledge

The research examines the ongoing necessity for employees to behave in a manner that is deemed suitable and proper. Furthermore, it serves as a useful contribution to our comprehensive understanding of human communication signals and the concept of sustainability.

5.2. Suggestions for Further Studies

The researcher recommends doing this study in more Nigerian industries to further comprehension of the sustainability and characteristics associated with customer experience management.

Examine potential moderators that might influence the interaction between other factors and customer experience management. Acquiring understanding of these techniques can facilitate the assessment of how customer experience management impacts sustainability.

In order to accurately represent the extent of the nation's geographic coverage, it is necessary to employ a larger sample size.

According to Worlu et al. (2016), customer experience is an essential managerial instrument that has a considerable impact on consumer behaviour. Farmers ought to establish a network of references to facilitate consumers in recommending one other.

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