

How Greenwashing Influences Purchase Intentions For Eco-Friendly Products

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Abstract

In the evolving landscape of environmental consciousness, consumers increasingly favor eco-friendly products, prompting firms to integrate sustainability into their branding. However, this rise in green demand has also led to the proliferation of greenwashing—the practice of conveying misleading or unsubstantiated environmental claims. This conceptual study examines how greenwashing undermines critical psychological variables such as consumer trust, perceived risk, and skepticism, thereby negatively influencing the intention to purchase eco-friendly products. Drawing from an extensive literature review, the study highlights the mediating and moderating roles of environmental involvement, green brand loyalty, and third-party certifications in shaping consumer response to deceptive environmental claims. The findings suggest that while greenwashing erodes credibility and deters sustainable consumption, the extent of its impact is contingent on consumer characteristics and contextual factors. The study underscores the need for transparent marketing, credible eco-labeling, and regulatory oversight to foster trust and ensure the integrity of green markets. It contributes to the growing body of knowledge on ethical consumption and provides a conceptual framework for future empirical inquiry in sustainability marketing.

Keywords: Greenwashing, Purchase Intention, Eco-friendly Products, Consumer Trust, Perceived Risk, Environmental Involvement.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rising international discourse on climate change, resource depletion, and ecological deterioration has had a substantial impact on the attitude of the end users, as they tend to consume more environmentally friendly products. Due to the growing concern about eco-friendly activities, individuals tend to align their consumer choices with their moral and environmental values, and the market is expanding at an impressive pace to accommodate eco-friendly products in numerous industries. However, this transition has also created another complex marketing problem called greenwashing. Greenwashing is a form of window dressing which sees businesses promote false, exaggerated or unsubstantiated environmental messages to greenwash their products or corporate actions in a bid to make them appear more sustainable than they really are. Some companies are being driven by the alluring potential of appealing to eco-conscious customers by making superficial or deceptive moves such as the use of generic eco labels to tug at green images in the absence of any tangible improvement of the environment. Though such approaches would attract consumers concerned about the environment, they risk long-term credibility. Theoretically, greenwashing influences customers to have an intention to purchase and this interaction is related to a complex psychology. Customers who hold environmental beliefs are attracted to items that reflect their

images and moral principles. These wants are preyed upon by environmental claims, whether accurate or not, that shape attitudes and purchase intentions. The skepticism can however, be amplified as consumers get into cases when consumers are promised a well-natured environment but this has failed to be delivered. The damage of this trust may affect not only single brands, but it may also result in people being less excited about a whole category of eco-friendly products. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehend how greenwashing influences the choices made by consumers. This includes the examination of issues like perceived reliability of the green claims, the level of environmental interest expressed by consumers and availability of credible third-party certification that can certify the green claims as well. Furthermore, it also involves the introduction of ways through which obvious repetition of greenwashing instances can make consumers cynical to the point where they will move away from even legitimate green products, as they fear being duped. The given conceptual analysis underlines the necessity of the clear and original messages on the issue of sustainability. It shows not only the responsibility of the marketers to advertise honest environmentally friendly practices but also the importance of the regulators who formulate guidelines that put off false advertisements on environmentally friendly initiatives. This study contributes to the general understanding of ethical consumption behavior by analyzing the impact of greenwashing on purchase intentions and offers critical findings that can help build consumer trust in sustainability-related products and can continue to support the trend of sustainability across the globe.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An increasing body of literature has been exploring the basic consequences of greenwashing behavior on the psychological mechanisms that shape consumer behavior towards the purchase of green goods. Conceptually, Akturan (2018) relates the problem of greenwashing with reduced green brand equity, of course the attitude which implies that when environmental promises presented by products or services obviously turn out to be untrue, it damages brand associations and reduces intention to purchase. Along the same lines, Zhang et al. (2018) mention that the presence of perceptions of greenwashing is a detriment to constructing green purchasing behavior along the lines of trust depreciation and negatively stimulates green word-of-mouth, which tends to play the role of a powerful variable in socially inclined purchasing. Vilkaite-Vaitone (2024) adds a further elaboration of the fact that although the dire effects of the greenwashing may not necessarily be directly linked to immediate purchasing intentions, but undermines the critical aspect of green trust thus compromising long-term sustainable choices. Tarabieh (2021) claims that perceived risk increases through greenwashing and it makes consumers confused thus the perception of value reduction and the final effect of purchasing intentions decline. In parallel, Adnan Zaid and Bawaqnee (2024) investigate the influence of greenwashing on the relationships with the brand, which shows that betrayal brought by greenwashing decreases brand love and brand loyalty intensifying the negative impact on the purchase intention. Chen and Chang (2012, 2013) provide the background structures to place green trust, green perceived risk, and green satisfaction as the necessary mediators that even mere introductions of uncertainty brought on by greenwashing can disturb these factors. Ferreira et al. (2019) complement this conceptual framework by demonstrating how recognizing greenwashing decreases levels of satisfaction and trust, which results in decreasing consumer evaluation of green claims. However, More and Vijay (2019) also argue continuously in the perspective of the Indian perspective that due to greenwashing, the image of brand trust and loyalty is also affected, which makes the process of green marketing ineffective. Wang et al. (2020) note that, similarly to the case of the physical setting, the quality of service and green psychology have affirmative impacts on purchase intentions in the digital setting; nonetheless, the existence of the perceptions of greenwashing is disruptive of the relationships between these variables. Cumulatively, these studies depict a common conceptual trend: greenwashing is a distractor that lowers trust, perceived risk and doubts, destroys brand loyalty, and constrains consumer intent to engage in the true sustainable consumption process, regardless of geographical or product specificities.

3. Objectives of the Study

- ❖ To examine how greenwashing influences consumer trust, perceived risk, skepticism, and their combined effect on the intention to purchase eco-friendly products.

- ❖ To analyze the mediating and moderating roles of environmental involvement, green brand loyalty, and third-party certifications in the relationship between greenwashing perception and sustainable purchase intention.

4. Problem Statement

The generic phenomenon of greenwashing, in which many firms exaggerate their positive environmental effects or offer simply false statements, poses an important challenge to the popularization of actual sustainable consumption despite the growing awareness of the issue of sustainability and a widespread desire of consumers to purchase environmentally friendly products. The studies have always shown that the practice of greenwashing not only hurts crucial psychological elements e.g., consumer trust, perceived value or brand loyalty but also raises the perceived risk and skepticism. This has the effect of ruining individual brand equity and creating a general hesitation to trust the green market place and therefore consumers avoid making a conscientious purchase when the genuine product is at hand. Moreover, despite the fact that the role of different mediators such as green trust or moderators such as environmental involvement or certification schemes have been addressed in the past, their interactions, as increasing or mitigating the negative impact of greenwashing, need a conceptual explanation. It is important to address this challenge to develop effective marketing plans and regulatory initiatives that could secure consumer confidence and promote the long-term development of natural friendly markets.

5. Research Gap

Research has provided robust evidence that greenwashing damages consumer trust and lacks consumer confidence, which boosts the perceived risk and assigns lesser chances to buying environment friendly products, but much of the existing research is scattered- in many studies, researchers tend to focus on certain behavioral or psychological consequences without discussing substantially how these factors interact. Moreover, the previous studies often do not utilize more complex functions of moderators and mediators such as the involvement of the environment, third-party certifications, or varying degrees of brand loyalty that may exert their influence in diminishing the effects of greenwashing or increasing them. This requires an interesting theoretical inquiry: in which circumstances is the greenwashing most powerful in breaking down consumer decisions, and are there possibly certain personal or situational characteristics that could affect the outcome of the intention to purchase eco-friendly products? Filling this gap can be critical on both the theoretical and practical fronts, providing a more profound understanding of how one can renew trust and create high levels of consumer loyalty given the false promises of green marketing.

6. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study revolves around understanding how greenwashing, the dissemination of misleading environmental claims, affects consumers' intention to purchase eco-friendly products. At the core of the model lies the assumption that greenwashing erodes essential psychological variables such as consumer trust, increases perceived risk, and triggers skepticism, all of which diminish consumers' confidence in the authenticity of green products and ultimately lower their purchase intentions. However, this negative relationship is neither uniform nor inevitable. The framework incorporates key mediating and moderating variables to explain variations in consumer responses. Environmental involvement is posited as a moderator, suggesting that consumers with strong eco-conscious values may respond more strongly to greenwashing—either positively or negatively—depending on their level of awareness and personal commitment. Similarly, loyalty to green brands can influence how consumers interpret and react to potentially deceptive claims; loyal consumers may forgive minor discrepancies but may also feel more betrayed by serious deception. Furthermore, the presence of third-party certifications serves as a potential buffer, helping to rebuild trust and mitigate the adverse effects of greenwashing. Thus, the framework integrates both psychological and contextual factors, offering a holistic view of how greenwashing interacts with consumer attitudes and behaviors in the evolving landscape of ethical and sustainable consumption.

7. RESEARCH DISCUSSION

7.1 Discussion on Objective 1

The information obtained during theoretical research and past literature findings evidently shows that greenwashing is essentially a distraction to the psychological aspects of sustainable consumerism. Specifically, the review shows that unethical environmental eco-claims significantly reduce consumer trust, which is crucial to brand-related confidence and also the broader green marketing discourses. Such distrust inspired by the feelings of betrayal or hypocrisy may result in a higher sense of risk, which means that individuals will become cautious concerning the threats of monetary loss or ethical issues related to purchasing green products. Moreover, being exposed to greenwashing multiple times develops a mindset of distrusting further claims related to the environment, as a consumer is likely to carefully assess it or even ignore the future environment-related pronouncements, even by known sustainable brands. Taken together, these undermeasured elements develop as a psychologically harmful cohort to the buying intention of eco-friendly products ensuring its direct impairment. The discussion fits into the conceptual models that emphasize the relevance of trust in consumer purchasing and the implementation of how this breach of trust is intensified by greenwashing and how it critically lowers the tendency in consumers to pay extra or interact regularly with green products. Thus, the study of Objective 1 demonstrates that greenwashing is far more than an attempt to mislead the consumer base about the brand perception: when it comes to cognitive and emotional evaluation of ethical purchases, it spreads like a worm into the very fabric of goal-based ethical behavior, posing serious obstacles on the way to the intended sustainability growth of markets.

7.2 Discussion on Objective 2

This research establishes the influence of various psychological and contextual variables on the connection between greenwashing perceptions and intention to buy environmentally friendly products and looks into quite sophisticated processes. Conceptually, the findings suggest that environmental involvement is a key moderating variable such that unlike consumers with low environmental commitment, positively predisposed consumers that are high on environmental commitment, find green marketing claims more appealing, however, when they unwillingly come across greenwashing, they perceive it as more of a betrayal and distrust, which is associated with a stronger negative impact on their purchase intentions. On the contrary, less involved consumers might not react so strong, and their disappointment may be less intense mostly because their eco-centric values are weaker, which would otherwise increase their negative emotional response. Furthermore, loyalty to green brands seems to be one of the possible prepositive factors as loyal customers tend to excuse or eliminate small differences between green statements either because of their emotional attachment to the brand or because of their loyalty to the brand. However, in case of perceived deception that is very serious, even the loyal consumers may prefer to disassociate, which demonstrates that brand cannot defend itself against the impact of negative factors of greenwashing 100 percent of the time. Additionally, a third-party certificate that can be trusted appears to confound this association by restoring some degree of trust and reducing perceived risk. Certifications are used as some form of external verification that helps to counter the crevices opened up by potential greenwashing in the effort to continue convincing the consumer to engage in sustainable purchase. Such a complex interaction echoes the idea that the adverse effects of greenwashing cannot be equal or inevitable but depend largely on the personal attributes of customers and more widely on the environment with regard to the credibility of green claims. The given findings support the need of brands to do not only the necessary steps towards proper sustainability practices but to also employ effective use of credible endorsements and nurture authentic consumer relations to mitigate the risks of skepticism in the green marketplace.

8. Limitations of the Study

In spite of being a valuable study in explaining the conceptual implications of greenwashing on consumer intention to purchase eco-friendly products, there are various limitations to this study. To begin with, the model is most largely based on secondary, both theoretical and empirical studies, which due to recent changing attitudes of consumers, or unnoticeable cultural variations in diverse market environments, may not be wholly accurate; this secondary reliance on secondary insights implies that future research through primary data could be warranted. Second, the article focuses on general psychological phenomena that might be not covered by the research, including personal ethical norms, awareness about the regulations, or peer pressure, which may also influence the response to greenwashing. Thirdly, although it is

conceptually designed to do it, the moderating and mediating effects of the variables like environmental involvement, brand loyalty, and third-party certifications have not been tested in the given study, and thus there is no possibility to determine the definite way of their impact or causality. Moreover, since the realm of sustainability marketing shifts quickly and more consumers are acquiring proficiency when it comes to finding out false claims, the importance of certain conceptual connections might shift with time. Regarding these limitations, a tangible indication of future research activities to perform empirical studies, explore other psychological or socio-cultural determinants, and adopt a longitudinal design to assess how the perceptions of greenwashing and their outcomes evolve as time goes on exists.

9. Future Scope of the Study

Developing upon the theoretical framework provided by this research project, there exists a significant possibility that future research will supplement, enlarge, and empirically verify the implications of greenwashing on the purchase intentions of consumers towards environmentally friendlier products. First of all, experiments with longitudinal designs might be used in the future to conduct the systematic assessment of how deception attributed to greenwashing, depending on the level and type of performances, can influence consumer trust, perceived risk and loyalty in the long-term, providing new insights into the evolving perception of consumers instead of merely cross-sectional measures. Moreover, applications of cross-cultural studies are invaluable since cultural perception of uncertainty, collectivism as well as environmental responsibility can be a unique factor influencing the reaction of consumers to deceptive green claims. Future studies may also examine demographic and psychographic factors including age, income or personal ecological conviction, to determine what category of consumers is more predisposed or less affected by the negative consequences of greenwashing. There is also the potential field of introducing neuroscientific or biometric methods, such as eye-recognition methods or implicit association tests to reveal unconscious responses to greenwashing that would not be captured using standard self-reporting survey approaches. Moreover, given the increasing digital nature of green marketing, a study could be performed to explore the relationship between online mediums, e.g. electronic commerce websites, social network promotions, and the trustworthiness of influencers within them, with perceptions of greenwashing and making of purchase decisions. In a real-world management and policy sense, future research can uncover the degree to which the introduction of some form of reliable third-party certification, a clear disclosure of a company sustainability reporting, or even some traceability technology like a blockchain might restore confidence and drive informed environmentally desirable consumption as long as misrepresentation remains common. Finally, extending this type of probing to a review of industry-specific risks, i.e., fashion, food or electronics, would allow better implementation of anti-greenwashing rules and consumer education tactics. All these possible areas of research can further increase theoretical contribution at the same time offering practical measures to safeguard consumer confidence and maintain the integrity of the green markets.

10. CONCLUSION

This study attempted to study theoretically how the phenomenon of greenwashing influences the intention to buy environmentally friendly products with an emphasis on the medium-level psychological functions of trust, perceived risk, and skepticism, and the moderating and mediating effects of, among others, the involvement in environmental issues, brand loyalty, and third-party certification. Based on the extensive review of the available literature, the results of the study reveal that consumers are increasingly becoming motivated by the aspects of ethical and environmental concern, yet their willingness to purchase genuinely sustainable products is largely hampered in case a firm applies the duplicity of greenwashing. Greenwashing has both bad short-term effects of damaging the trust factors and raising the women's risk but also negatively affects the long-term brand loyalty and leads in general to a distrust of green marketing. Nonetheless, the conceptual framework shows that such negative implications are not consistent or definite; they are highly dependent on the personal consumer characteristics and the rationality of the situation that environmental statements affect. As it is understood not to be the most complete and thorough work (such limitations are observed due to the conceptual nature and the use of secondary insights), the discussion suggests an interesting future research agenda to test, fine-tune, and extend these relationships in such areas as other cultures, market segments, and industry areas. Finally, this piece also

shows the crucial need of businesses to adopt authentic, transparent, and traceable sustainability. In this way, they both safeguard consumer confidence and build the reputability of the green marketplace itself, paving the way toward more robust and knowledgeable sustainable consumption under an ever-more complex and watched world of environmental assertions.

11. Funding Statement: This research received no specific grant or financial support from any funding agency.

12. Conflict of interest: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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