Emperor Journal of Commerce

ISSN:2582-9815 **Mayas Publication®** www.mayas.info

Volume-VI **Issue-X** **October 2026**

Greenwashing Perception and Consumer Brand Trust in Sustainable Marketing

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Abstract

The growing demand for sustainable products has increased the use of environmental claims in marketing. However, exaggerated or misleading claims may lead to greenwashing and reduce consumer trust. This study examines how perceived greenwashing, lack of transparency, misleading information, and uncertainty about environmental performance affect green brand trust. A quantitative approach using a structured questionnaire is proposed, with data analysed through descriptive statistics, reliability, correlation, and regression analysis. The study highlights the importance of transparent and credible sustainability communication in building consumer trust.

Keywords: Greenwashing perception, green brand trust, Sustainable marketing, Consumer behaviour, green marketing.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has become an important part of modern marketing, with companies using environmental claims in advertisements, packaging, websites, labels, and social media. However, exaggerated or misleading claims can create greenwashing and reduce consumer confidence. Since consumers often cannot easily verify environmental claims, they rely on brand communication to assess sustainability. Perceived greenwashing may increase scepticism and weaken green brand trust, while transparent and credible communication can strengthen consumer

confidence. Therefore, understanding the relationship between greenwashing and green brand trust is important for sustainable marketing.

Review Of Literature

Greenwashing Perception

Greenwashing perception occurs when consumers feel that a brand's environmental claims are exaggerated, unclear, selective, or inconsistent with its actual environmental practices. Consumers may find it difficult to identify greenwashing due to limited or complex sustainability information.

Green Brand Trust

Green brand trust refers to consumers' confidence in a brand's environmental claims and commitments. Transparency, credible information, certifications, brand reputation, and genuine environmental practices can strengthen green brand trust.

Greenwashing and Consumer Trust

Perceived greenwashing can create consumer scepticism and reduce trust in a brand. It may also lead to negative responses such as brand avoidance, negative word-of-mouth, and reduced purchase intention. Therefore, genuine sustainability practices are important for maintaining long-term consumer–brand relationships.

Sustainable Marketing and Transparency

Sustainable marketing requires clear, accurate, and evidence-based environmental communication. Transparency helps consumers evaluate sustainability claims and can reduce greenwashing concerns. Further research is needed across different cultures, consumer groups, and digital marketing environments.

Research Gap

Despite growing research on greenwashing, important gaps remain. Existing studies often focus on corporate and environmental aspects, while consumer perceptions and their effect on green brand trust need further study. Limited research directly examines greenwashing perception and green brand trust within the same framework. More studies are also needed in developing countries, particularly India, using larger consumer samples. Therefore, this study examines how perceived greenwashing influences consumer trust in sustainable brands in the Indian context.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine consumers' perceptions of greenwashing in sustainable marketing.
2. To measure the level of consumer trust in sustainable brands.
3. To examine the relationship between greenwashing perception and green brand trust.
4. To determine whether perceived greenwashing significantly influences consumer brand trust.
5. To provide suggestions for improving transparency and credibility in sustainable marketing communication.

HYPOTHESIS

H_0: Greenwashing perception has no significant relationship with consumer brand trust.

H_1: Greenwashing perception has a significant negative relationship with consumer brand trust.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on consumers who have encountered environmental or sustainability-related marketing claims while purchasing products or services. The research covers consumer perceptions of misleading environmental claims, exaggerated sustainability messages, lack of transparency, and credibility of green claims. The dependent variable is consumer brand trust, while greenwashing perception is treated as the principal independent variable. The study can be applied across product categories such as personal care, food and beverages, clothing, household products, automobiles, and consumer goods. The geographical scope may be restricted to selected consumers in India, making the study manageable and relevant to the developing-market context. The study primarily considers consumers' perceptions rather than independently verifying whether individual companies have actually engaged in greenwashing.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between greenwashing perception and consumer brand trust. Primary data may be collected through a structured questionnaire from consumers who have purchased or considered purchasing products carrying environmental or sustainability claims. A convenient or purposive sampling technique may be used depending on the accessibility of respondents. A sample of approximately 200–400 respondents would provide a practical basis for exploratory statistical analysis, although the final sample should be determined according to the research design and target population. The questionnaire may use a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Greenwashing perception can be measured through statements concerning exaggerated environmental claims, misleading information, unclear sustainability claims, and discrepancies between communication and actual environmental practices. Green brand trust can be measured through consumers' confidence in the credibility, reliability, honesty, and environmental commitments of the brand. Data can be analysed using percentage analysis, mean and standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson correlation, and linear regression. These techniques can assess the reliability of the measurement scale and determine the direction and statistical significance of the relationship between greenwashing perception and consumer brand trust.

Analysis and Results

The descriptive analysis is expected to indicate that consumers demonstrate moderate to high awareness of greenwashing in sustainable marketing. Respondents may particularly recognise greenwashing when brands use broad environmental expressions without providing sufficient supporting information. Reliability analysis should be conducted before hypothesis testing, with Cronbach's alpha used to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. A coefficient of approximately 0.70 or above would generally indicate acceptable internal consistency for an exploratory study. Pearson correlation analysis can then be used to determine the association between greenwashing perception and green brand trust. If the correlation coefficient is negative and statistically significant, the result would indicate that consumers who perceive higher levels of greenwashing tend to report lower levels of trust in sustainable brands. Regression analysis can subsequently be used to determine whether greenwashing perception significantly predicts consumer brand trust. For example, if the actual analysis produces a statistically significant negative regression coefficient ($p < .05$), H_0 would be rejected and H_1 would be supported, indicating that perceived greenwashing has a significant negative influence on consumer brand trust. The explanatory power of the model should be reported using R^2, while the regression coefficient, standard error, t-value, and significance level should be presented in the final article. These results would be consistent with recent literature suggesting that misleading environmental communication can damage consumer trust and produce negative brand-related responses.

Findings

Based on the proposed research framework and existing literature, the study is expected to establish that greenwashing perception is an important factor in consumers' evaluation of sustainable brands. Consumers who perceive environmental claims as exaggerated, unclear, incomplete, or misleading are likely to show lower levels of confidence in the brand's sustainability commitments. The literature also indicates that the consequences of greenwashing can extend beyond reduced trust to brand avoidance, negative word-of-mouth, and weaker purchase intentions. The study is also expected to highlight the importance of transparency in sustainable marketing. Consumers require accessible information that enables them to understand and evaluate environmental claims. Recent research indicates that consumers' ability to identify greenwashing can improve when relevant information and cues are available. Finally, the study reinforces the importance of conducting consumer-focused greenwashing research in developing-market contexts. Recent literature reviews have identified developing countries, including India, as areas where additional empirical research is needed.

II. CONCLUSION

Greenwashing is a major challenge in sustainable marketing because misleading environmental claims can reduce consumer trust and lead to negative responses. This study examines the relationship between perceived greenwashing and consumer brand trust, with a focus on developing-market contexts. It highlights the importance of transparency, credible evidence, and consistency between environmental claims and actual practices. The study also suggests that companies should communicate sustainability honestly to build long-term consumer trust.

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