

DOES GREEN MARKETING WORK? CONSUMER REACTIONS TOWARD GREEN APPROACHES

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Abstract. This article examines green marketing approaches and effects on consumers in various societies. Currently green marketing notion spreads faster than before, even in developing countries and this tendencies prove the importance of sustainable and green approaches in markets. People have been becoming more environmental conscious because of the results surrounded them. Disposition against over-consumption, criticizing careless actions of companies made firms modify company policies and cultures. Now, changing behaviors of customers force companies to produce more sustainable, green products and services. However, there are organizations and people argue that green marketing just a new marketing method for making situation legitimate. This article explores the consequences of greenwashing deceptions.

Keywords: *Green marketing, green economy, green consumer behavior, green purchasing behavior.*

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1. Introduction

In recent times, there has been a notable increase in both business initiatives and scientific explorations focused on the environment. This shift in focus has moved away from localized problems towards broader global issues, driven by the ecological disturbances caused by human overconsumption and activities (Nagar & Rana, 2015).

Environmentalism has emerged as a significant societal and corporate concern in the twenty-first century. With an increasing awareness of environmental issues, consumers are becoming more conscious of their environmental impact and are advocating for green products from manufacturers (Nath *et al.*, 2013).

In the 1990s, environmentalism became a prominent global movement, characterized by the rise of collective environmental awareness. Throughout this era, researchers endeavored to investigate and understand people's reactions to environmental challenges (Verma, 2002). As consumers become more conscious of the environmental impact of their purchases, businesses and corporations are acknowledging their environmental responsibilities to a greater extent. A key indicator supporting the rise of environmentally friendly consumer behavior is the growing number of individuals who are paying closer attention to green product offerings and solutions (Laroche *et al.*, 2001). Businesses are increasingly promoting green advertising to promote comprehensive

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sustainability efforts, rather than solely focusing on marketing green products aimed at environmentally conscious consumer segments (Nagar & Rana, 2015). Rising awareness of environmental concerns has prompted policymakers to encourage “green behavior”, which entails actions that significantly benefit the environment, potentially leading to reductions in waste and the promotion of ethical conduct (Ogiemwonyi *et al.*, 2020).

Green marketing communication refers to the marketer’s attempts to appeal to the target market audience with persuasive pro environmental messages (Alsmadi, 2007). The luxury sector has seen a surge in efforts to promote sustainable consumption and green products, leading to the pervasive integration of sustainability issues. More luxury brands are now prioritizing environmental concerns and incorporating sustainability practices across various business aspects, including sourcing, manufacturing and marketing (Athwal *et al.*, 2019).

2. Literature Review

Benefits of Green Approaches

As population density surges and incomes ascend, coupled with escalating health risks and shifting societal habits, our nation confronts a cascade of emerging consumption-related dilemmas, notably concerning packaged food and water. In response to these pressing concerns, the burgeoning popularity of organic food stands as a compelling beacon of proactive action and conscientious consumerism (Rana & Paul, 2017).

Both green behavior and a green culture can effectively contribute to mitigating environmental and climate challenges simultaneously (Ogiemwonyi *et al.*, 2020). Green behavior typically refers to actions that become routine or habitual due to specific circumstances or social influences. In contrast, green culture encompasses conscious behaviors undertaken by individuals based on their own intentions and values (Ahmad & Ariffin, 2018).

Although it is important to foresee the reaction of consumers to green communication, it is also important to find means that would enable to affect their attitudes towards such green communications more positively. With the help of the green communication initiatives, companies hope to positively affect the brand associations by Nagar and Rana (2015).

Consumers are often observed purchasing eco-friendly products (Alamsyah *et al.*, 2020). Chen and Chang (2012) discovered that consumers generally hold positive attitudes towards brands that demonstrate environmental consciousness. Due to concerns over environmental pollution and the effects of global warming, numerous corporations have begun manufacturing green products, prioritizing environmental issues within their organizations (Sugandini *et al.*, 2018).

By the latter years of the twentieth century, environmentalism had developed into a notable societal preoccupation (Scott & David, 2000). In response to critiques of the traditional marketing concept, which neglected the impact of individual consumption on both society and the environment, environmentally conscious consumption and green marketing have surfaced (Scott & David, 2000).

Raising awareness about environmental issues and its influence on promoting eco-friendly behavior is of utmost importance, as it is crucial for individuals to understand ecological concerns in order to adopt and exhibit environmentally conscious actions (Ogiemwonyi *et al.*, 2020). An increasing number of businesses are embracing green

marketing strategies to incorporate environmental principles into their operations, aiming to reduce waste (Nagar & Rana, 2015). The emergence of environmentally conscious consumers undeniably impacts how products are manufactured and services are delivered. As environmental awareness grows, consumer preferences increasingly favor products and services that adhere to sustainable principles Ali et al. (2010). This change in consumer behavior incentivizes manufacturers and service providers to embrace eco-friendly approaches, including the utilization of sustainable materials and the minimization of waste Ali et al. (2010).

By the conclusion of 2017, the expenditure of U.S. firms on green initiatives is projected to reach \$44 billion (<https://www.verdantix.com/>, 2013). For instance, the soft drink industry has transitioned towards fully recyclable plant-based polyethylene terephthalate bottles (Euromonitor International, 2012). Additionally, numerous major U.S. consumer packaged goods companies such as Coca-Cola, Colgate-Palmolive, General Mills, Procter & Gamble and PepsiCo have collaborated to advocate for more environmentally friendly product packaging (Olsen *et al.*, 2014).

Challenges in Green Marketing

As Gleim et al. (2013) posit, the lack of consumer acceptance of EF products implies that many barriers to green consumption continue to exist.

Yet, ensuring that consumers genuinely opt for sustainable products poses a significant challenge. While some consumers actively embrace eco-friendly practices, others remain hesitant (Ogiemwonyi *et al.*, 2020). This is because ethical standards for sustainability differ across product types and markets, complicating the process (e.g., fast-fashion brands vs. luxury fashion brands/mass products vs. luxury products) (Joy *et al.*, 2012).

The core issue at the heart of these problems is how to make the world sustain given the pressure the mother earth is burdened with (Verma, 2002)

Since Jay Westerveld first proposed the term “greenwashing” in 1986, there have been many academic definitions of the concept. One of most important definitions is that greenwashing is an act that misleads consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service (Guo *et al.*, 2018). A key definition of greenwashing involves the deceptive practice of providing misleading information to consumers about a company's environmental practices or the environmental benefits of its products or services (Guo *et al.*, 2018).

Identifying greenwashing is challenging, yet certain consumers are inclined to give companies the benefit of the doubt, especially regarding initiatives integral to their core business activities or when they are seen as pioneers (Lauchlan & Roberts, 2020).

Greenwashing is characterized by the fusion of two corporate behaviors: first, environmental misbehavior or poor environmental performance and second, deceptive communication regarding this environmental performance.

This study defines greenwashing as the act where companies fail to uphold their environmental commitments, leading to deception of customers about their environmental practices or the benefits of their products or services. When this leads to a loss of trust between the company and its stakeholders, especially in China where such loss is significant, companies must employ suitable brand strategies to regain trust (Guo *et al.*, 2018). Greenwashing can damage company trust and credibility. The research findings suggest that consumers do not universally agree on the authenticity of these

initiatives, with many granting them the benefit of the doubt. However, companies perceived as more sustainable tend to alter their fundamental operations.

Third-party certifications fail to substantiate assertions that a company has lessened its environmental impact. Embracing an excessively narrow interpretation of “green” to endorse only specific products or services with minimal environmental drawbacks can be observed. McDonald’s transition to paper straws serves as a prime example of this phenomenon within the fast-food sector. While initially praised by environmentally conscious consumers, it soon became evident that these straws were not recyclable. Promoting a sustainable element of the business, while overlooking the company’s wider environmental impact, is considered the lesser of two evils (<https://www.givz.com/blog/green-marketing-research>).

Consumers seek to align themselves with green products as companies increasingly aim to adopt eco-friendly practices (Zainab & Misbah, 2015). Many consumers may believe that their individual actions have little impact on achieving goals related to green consumption. They might perceive that a single product purchase or the buying behavior of any one person does not significantly affect the environment.

Concerns over the credibility of such products have arisen. Therefore, marketers of green products must prioritize transparency to maintain consumer confidence while adhering to legal and industry standards (Zainab & Misbah, 2015). According to Berger and Kanetkar (1995), the trust placed in the organization providing an environmentally friendly product is believed to directly influence consumers' perceptions of that product. It is found that only 5% of the marketing messages from Green campaigns are entirely true and there is a lack of standardization to authenticate these claims (Lal, 2010). Moreover, the purported cost savings associated with recycling practices are frequently met with skepticism?” (Kinoti, 2011). Of the 53 studies reviewed by the authors, 6 observed the influence of trust on consumer green purchase intention and behavior (Joshi & Rahman, 2015).

Research indicates that while a substantial portion of consumers (67%) maintain a favorable attitude towards purchasing organic food products, only a minority (4%) of them actually follow through with such purchases (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008).

Among respondents, a significant portion (10.71%) cited a lack of expertise as a common obstacle, with many expressing a general ignorance of the subject matter. Trust was also highlighted as a prevalent barrier (10.46%) in their responses (Gleim *et al.*, 2013). Rana and Paul (2015) also indicates in their research, certification is another important factor which encourages consumers to buy organic food. In order to gain consumer trust, it is important for farmers to authenticate and validate their products through government's certification. According to the Hartman Group, around 52% of consumers have shown interest in purchasing “earth-sustainable” foods (Robinson & Smith, 2002). Trust emerges as an important factor in deciding where to buy organic food and our results suggest that consumers have less trust in supermarkets and large corporations (Padel & Foster, 2005).

Research consistently demonstrates that attitude is the foremost predictor of the intention to purchase green products, with a positive and significant relationship consistently observed between attitude and intention (Kozup *et al.*, 2003).

In particular, the perceived high price of green products was the barrier noted most frequently (42.09%). Perceptions of poor product quality were another important obstacle noted by participants (14.11%). A miscellaneous category contains consumers that did not purchase green products for reasons such as they did not believe in climate change

(1.46%), did not recognize green products (1.46%) or perceived there to be a shortage of green product options (0.97%) (Gleim *et al.*, 2013).

Alwitt and Pitts (1996) indicates that consumer attitudes towards the outcomes of product usage are intricately linked to their individual needs and values. This encompasses a conscious understanding of potential actions that could be undertaken concerning the product. In developing countries, demand may arise primarily to satisfy safety needs (Rana & Paul, 2015).

With the decline in sales of green products in recent years, retailers are likely becoming increasingly frustrated by the lack of turnover and wasted shelf space (Clifford & Martin, 2011). In light of the prevailing dominance of non-green purchasing habits in the retail sector, it is crucial for firms to grasp the underlying motivations behind such behaviors to enhance sales and fulfill triple-bottom line objectives (Gleam *et al.*, 2013).

Ethical considerations exert a significant influence, shaping human behavior and carrying profound implications for both environmental stewardship and animal welfare (Honkanen *et al.*, 2006).

Numerous research studies have established connections between sustainable or ethical behavior and individuals' personal values (Finegan, 1994; Fritzsche, 1995). With the escalation of these concerns, individuals are showing a growing inclination towards consuming healthy food options, which reflects a steadfast dedication to sustainable and compassionate living (Honkanen *et al.*, 2006). However, a multitude of consumers not only espouse the principles of fair trade but also actively pursue products crafted through ethical means by conscientious producers. These ethical imperatives wield substantial influence over suppliers, dictating both the breadth of their market reach and the specific segments they target (Moore, 2004). Key factors driving ethical consumption include social status, embrace of fair trade principles, environmental consciousness and a cohesive religious perspective (Doran & Natale, 2011).

Additionally, major world religions are particularly effective in promoting ethical behavior compared to other ethical influences and demonstrate distinct patterns of consumption, with products perceived and valued differently across religious beliefs (Doran & Natale, 2011). The findings give considerable support for viewing religion as an important construct in the study of consumer behavior (Essoo & Dibb, 2004). Hirschman (1983) highlights that religious denominational affiliations can be perceived as “cognitive systems”. This viewpoint suggests that individuals belonging to a specific religion may share common cognitive frameworks, which in turn can influence the behavior of that group. As a result, the shopping and purchasing behaviors of adherents vary significantly based on their religious affiliations (Doran & Natale, 2011).

Highly religious individuals tend to behave in a relatively more disciplined and responsible manner. Muslim shoppers were more innovative in their shopping behaviour in that they would try any new product once, did not favour any specific brand and would not wait for other consumers to try a product before they did (Essoo & Dibb, 2004).

The relationship between religion and fair trade consumption is complex in that religious affiliation – group membership – alone is not enough to encourage members to buy fair trade; rather, it is the use of religious beliefs as a criterion in consumption behavior that linked religion to fair trade consumption.

Paul and Rana (2012) developed a theoretical framework that shows the relative importance of factors such as health benefit, ecological awareness, availability and freshness as determinants of the purchase intention for organic food. The desire to

purchase organic food is motivated by concerns about health, the environment, sensory attributes, food safety and ethical considerations (Zakowska-Biemans, 2011).

Organic food is perceived as environmentally friendly because it is produced without the use of pesticides and other chemicals commonly utilized to preserve crops. This progression has facilitated the emergence of “eco-friendly products”, also termed as “green products”, which has subsequently paved the way for the acceptance of organic food in developed markets such as the USA and Germany (Ottman & Terry, 1998). However, consumers often view the health and safety aspects of organic food as compromised due to potential residues of chemicals, hormones and natural toxins (Honkanen *et al.*, 2006).

Our findings confirm the significance of price as a barrier. Other consumer research suggests that, as supermarkets compete to reduce prices for organic products, the overall importance of price as a barrier is decreasing (Padel & Foster, 2015).

Conscious could be considered as consumers searching for quality labels and concerned with information on organic origin included on the label. It is worth noting that consumers allocated to the segment of conscious are less price sensitive than consumers in any other segment (Zakowska-Biemans, 2011).

Most studies showed that limited availability and difficulties in accessing green products were major barriers to purchasing environmentally sustainable products (Padel & Foster, 2005; Young *et al.*, 2009).

Most consumers express more than one motive for buying organic and our results confirm the presence of “food as enjoyment” and also more altruistic concerns; concern for the environment and animal welfare and more “political” motives such as support for the local economy and “fair trade” are other drivers (Padel & Foster, 2005). For many brands, the fact that the use of the green element and green innovations can improve the attitude of consumers toward them is positive news (Olsen *et al.*, 2014; Kouba, 2003; Seyfang, 2006).

High price of organic food are some challenges in the path to develop a positive attitude towards organic food (Greene & Kremen, 2003).

Many consumers believe that green products are generally more expensive than conventional ones (Zainab & Misbah, 2015). He suggests that one way to deal with the high price controversy is to ask the consumer “whether they want to continue buying inexpensive products that damage the environment?” (Kinoti, 2011). However, many of them refrained from purchasing these items due to perceived barriers such as limited availability, inconvenience and high prices (Robinson & Smith, 2002).

Lack of economic resources of consumers was found to magnify the effect of price and act as a barrier to purchase of green products (Connell, 2010).

A number of researchers have identified barriers to green consumption. For instance, Gleim *et al.* (2013) reported price and expertise (lack of) as being barriers to the consumption of green products.

Even with the motivation to purchase environmentally friendly products, individuals may find it impossible to do so if these items are not available for sale in convenient locations (Tanner & Kast, 2003).

However, majority of the studies observed a weak relationship between the expressed positive attitude of consumers toward purchasing green products and their actual purchase behaviour, generally referred to as the attitude–behaviour gap (Tanner & Kast, 2003; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008).

Culture

In specific countries, organic food carries significant importance as a fundamental aspect of tradition and cultural practice. Certain consumers choose to exclusively purchase products from local farmers with the aim of upholding the sanctity of their cultural and heritage values (Thomas & Gunden, 2012). Studies have shown correlations between individuals' values and their preferences for specific product categories, as well as the criteria they use when selecting goods and services (McCarthy & Shrumm 1994)

The sceptical non-consumers who would never consider buying organic, there is a large body of consumers who buy organic food on a more occasional basis, but lack the knowledge, financial resources, conviction or simply the inclination to buy more regularly (Padel & Foster, 2005).

Social marketers should interact with consumers to advocate for the adoption of environmentally friendly alternatives instead of harmful products. This can be accomplished by (a) amplifying awareness of the adverse effects associated with using the product, (b) reinforcing the correlation between environmental consciousness and disapproval of the product, (c) enhancing the relationship between attitudes towards the product's consequences and the intention to purchase it and (d) elevating overall levels of environmental awareness (Alwitt & Pitts, 1996).

Ecologically aware and active consumers can be of immense help in addressing environmental concern. He suggests that one way to deal with the high price controversy is to ask the consumer “whether they want to continue buying inexpensive products that damage the environment?” (Kinoti, 2011).

Green marketing is focusing on customer benefits i.e. the primary reason why consumers buy certain products in the first place. If the green products are priced very high then again it will lose its market acceptability (Lal, 2010).

Implementing green marketing strategies is both costly and challenging in the short term. The advantages of environmental efforts are often intangible, indirect or seemingly insignificant to consumers, making them challenging to assess or quantify (Kinoti, 2011).

Raising awareness about green products can be achieved through labeling, packaging and advertising efforts. Individuals who are knowledgeable about and have utilized green products generally acknowledge their positive contribution to improving the environment.

To enhance environmental-friendly lifestyle, there is the need to create awareness and use of green products which will lead to a shift from conventional products to green products (Ansu-Mensah, 2021).

3. Conclusion

According to Gleim et al. (2013), the reluctance of consumers to adopt eco-friendly products suggests that numerous obstacles to green consumption persist and they are not purchasing environmentally friendly products with the level of consistency that was expected (Carrington *et al.*, 2010).

Nevertheless, the majority of studies have identified a limited correlation between consumers' expressed positive attitudes towards purchasing green products and their actual buying behavior, often described as the attitude-behavior gap (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008).

Finally, our results showed that consumers who hold traditional values (e.g. be humble, devout, respect traditions, no extreme ideas or feelings) are more inclined to buy

sustainable products, while power seekers (influential, preserving image, having authority, respect and power over others) are less inclined (Vermeira & Verbeke, 2008).

According to TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980), individual behaviour is determined by two main factors - individual attitude and social norms. In relation to organic products our research indicates that there is a lack of knowledge about certification and labelling and about the guarantee that organic standards really offer to consumers (Padel & Foster, 2005).

If the industry wants to attract new consumers then they need to pay attention to the body of occasional buyers and communicate clearly the benefits of different categories of organic food to a wider audience (Padel & Foster, 2005). The path between green purchase intention and actual green purchase was found to be weak (Mostafa, 2006).

A significant portion of consumers in this research profess to prioritize environmental concerns, yet the extent to which they are genuinely willing to make purchasing decisions solely based on environmental factors remains ambiguous (Mostafa, 2006).

When examining the results of the current survey, it was found that certain psychosocial factors, including beliefs, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived control, were individually predictive of the intention to purchase sustainably produced foods (Robinson & Smith, 2002). Several studies have demonstrated that a personal norm, characterized by a sense of moral obligation, serves as a potent motivator of environmental behavior (Joshi & Rahman, 2015).

Studies have shown correlations between individuals' values and their preferences for specific product categories, as well as the criteria they use when selecting goods and services (McCarthy & Shrum, 1994).

Moreover, habit has been identified as a notable barrier hindering the acquisition of environmentally friendly products. (Tsakiridou *et al.*, 2008). Habit and past behaviour guide consumer preferences and influence their purchasing behaviour, making it difficult to change.

Gleim *et al.* (2013), surveys indicate that a significant portion, up to 83 percent, of the population is troubled about environmental issues. Despite this widespread concern and the increasing availability of eco-friendly products in retail outlets, consumers aren't embracing these options as strongly as predicted. In reality, the market for environmentally sustainable products represents a mere fraction of overall demand, estimated at less than four percent globally. Consumers often lean towards their preferred brands, showing a preference for them over environmentally conscious brands (Young *et al.*, 2010).

Consumers preferred functional attributes of the product (that fulfill personal needs and desires) over its ethical characteristics (Chen & Lobo, 2012, Tsakiridou *et al.*, 2008). Taste, quality and healthiness of product have been reported as important attributes for consumers who purchase green food products (Tsakiridou *et al.*, 2008).

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