

# Green Marketing and Consumer Awareness: Exploring the Link between Environmental Responsibility and Brand Value

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## Abstract

This study explores how consumers interpret green marketing efforts and how these interpretations shape their perceptions of environmental responsibility and brand value. The topic is important because growing environmental concerns and rising consumer demand for sustainability require companies to communicate their ecological initiatives clearly and authentically. However, issues such as greenwashing and vague environmental claims continue to create skepticism, making it necessary to understand how consumers assess the credibility of such messages. Using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, this research investigates the cognitive, emotional, and social processes involved in consumer evaluations of green marketing. The findings indicate that authenticity, clarity, and evidence-based communication are essential for building consumer awareness and trust. Consumers respond positively to brands that demonstrate transparent, measurable environmental commitments and negatively to those perceived as exaggerating or misrepresenting sustainability claims. The study also reveals that emotional and ethical resonance strengthens brand loyalty, while social media discourse influences perceptions of credibility. These results highlight the importance of integrating environmental responsibility into brand strategy and ensuring transparent communication to enhance brand value. Overall, the research emphasizes that authentic sustainability practices are crucial for shaping informed, trusting, and loyal consumers.

**Keywords:** Brand Value, Consumer Awareness, Environmental Responsibility, Green Marketing, Greenwashing, Sustainability Communication

## 1. Introduction

Green marketing has gained increasing relevance as firms respond to heightened environmental concerns and the rising global demand for sustainable business operations. While early conceptualizations of green marketing largely focused on promoting environmentally friendly product attributes, contemporary perspectives advance a broader, strategic understanding of the concept, in which sustainability is embedded across the entire value chain and organizational decision-making structure (Dennis et al., 2005). This evolution indicates a paradigm shift: from tactical environmental claims toward strategic environmental responsibility that contributes not only to ecological preservation but also to long-term brand competitiveness and differentiation (Leonidou & Leonidou, 2011).

At the same time, growing concerns about climate change, natural resource depletion, and environmental degradation have strengthened consumer expectations regarding corporate sustainability commitments. Particularly among younger and environmentally attentive consumers, transparency in sourcing, production, packaging, and waste management has



become essential in shaping purchase decisions and brand evaluations. These shifting expectations have repositioned green marketing as a strategic instrument for cultivating brand identity and enhancing value creation (Leonidou et al., 2013).

Consumer awareness plays a pivotal role in determining how sustainability messages are interpreted. As consumers gain broader access to environmental information, their expectations regarding the visibility, consistency, and authenticity of corporate environmental claims intensify (Biswas & Roy, 2015). Consumers increasingly demand verifiable, data-driven information and tend to reject vague, unverifiable, or exaggerated claims (Mohamed Bilal Basha et al., 2015). In this environment, credibility and transparency become fundamental prerequisites for a positive consumer response.

Nevertheless, the rising adoption of sustainability narratives has been accompanied by an increase in deceptive or overstated environmental claims, commonly referred to as greenwashing. Greenwashing has been found to damage consumer trust, undermine perceived authenticity, and weaken brand equity, particularly among consumers with high environmental awareness who are more adept at detecting inconsistencies in marketing communications (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Nyilasy et al., 2014).

Although prior research indicates that environmental responsibility can enhance brand value, the relationship between green marketing, consumer awareness, and perceived brand value remains complex and dynamic. Consumers interpret environmental signals differently depending on their knowledge, beliefs, and ability to process sustainability information (Nguyen et al., 2016). Thus, empirical and interpretive insights are needed to understand how consumers make meaning of green marketing messages and how these meanings translate into judgments about brand value.

To address this gap, the present study employs a qualitative approach to explore how consumers interpret environmental responsibility within brand communication and how these interpretations influence perceptions of brand value. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the research seeks to uncover the cognitive, emotional, and evaluative processes underlying consumer responses to sustainability messaging, providing nuanced insights that contribute both theoretically and practically to sustainable marketing discourse.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Green Marketing

Green marketing encompasses organizational efforts to design, communicate, and deliver value in ways that reduce environmental impact. Early views focused mainly on eco-friendly product features or promotional claims, but later scholarship positions green marketing as a strategic, enterprise-wide approach embedded across supply chains, product development, stakeholder engagement, and corporate decision-making (Dennis et al., 2005). This evolution reflects growing recognition that sustainability must be integrated holistically rather than treated as a peripheral marketing add-on.

Recent studies show that firms that implement green marketing authentically can strengthen competitive positioning, build trust, and differentiate themselves in crowded markets (Leonidou & Leonidou, 2011). Effective green marketing helps establish a credible and consistent sustainable brand identity—an outcome that depends on clear alignment

between environmental claims and verifiable organizational practices. When such evidence is lacking, green marketing risks being perceived as superficial, eroding consumer confidence and weakening its strategic value.

## **2.2. Consumer Awareness**

Consumer awareness refers to knowledge of environmental issues, understanding of sustainability attributes, and the ability to evaluate environmental claims. Studies consistently show that higher environmental awareness shapes how consumers interpret sustainability messages and influences their purchasing decisions (Biswas & Roy, 2015). With digital platforms broadening access to environmental information, consumers increasingly demand transparent, accountable, and evidence-backed disclosures. Those with stronger knowledge often seek verifiable data—such as carbon metrics, recycling performance, or third-party certifications—and respond critically to vague or unsupported claims (Mohamed Bilal Basha et al., 2015). Consequently, consumer awareness moderates the effectiveness of green marketing, requiring firms to tailor communication strategies to the expectations of environmentally informed audiences.

## **2.3. Greenwashing**

Greenwashing occurs when companies mislead consumers by overstating or distorting the environmental benefits of their products or practices. As green marketing expands, so do these deceptive claims, raising concerns about their negative impact on consumer trust and brand credibility (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Prior research shows that greenwashing undermines authenticity, a key driver of strong consumer–brand relationships, and triggers negative emotional responses such as disappointment or betrayal. These reactions often translate into unfavorable behaviors, including negative word-of-mouth, brand avoidance, and increased skepticism toward sustainability messages. Its effects are even stronger among environmentally aware consumers, who are more capable of detecting gaps between stated commitments and actual environmental performance (Nyilasy et al., 2014). Consequently, organizations are under growing pressure to communicate sustainability efforts transparently, using claims that are evidence-based and supported by verifiable environmental practices.

## **2.4. Brand Value**

Brand value reflects consumers' judgments of a brand's functional, emotional, and symbolic benefits. Prior work confirms that environmental responsibility enhances brand value by reinforcing trust, satisfaction, and long-term loyalty (Kumar & Christodoulopoulou, 2014). When firms demonstrate genuine sustainability practices, consumers view them as ethically committed and forward-looking, which elevates functional value—such as quality and durability—and deepens emotional value through feelings of moral pride and alignment with personal beliefs.

Environmental responsibility also strengthens symbolic value by enabling consumers to express ethical identities and support organizations perceived as socially responsible. Empirical evidence shows that perceived authenticity is the primary driver linking environmental responsibility to positive brand assessments (Rahman et al., 2015). Authentic communication fosters emotional attachment and loyalty, whereas vague or inconsistent

sustainability claims undermine credibility and diminish brand value. In markets characterized by high environmental awareness, the consistency between sustainability messaging and actual environmental performance becomes even more decisive in determining whether green marketing efforts enhance or erode brand value.

### 3. Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how consumers interpret green marketing messages and how these interpretations influence perceived brand value. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to capture participants' subjective meanings, contextual perceptions, and sense-making processes related to environmental responsibility and brand evaluation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who demonstrated active awareness of environmental issues and familiarity with brands that promote sustainability. A total of 12 participants took part in the research, consisting of young adult consumers aged 20–35, selected for their high exposure to environmental information and digital marketing content.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Interviews allowed participants to share personal experiences and interpretations of green marketing claims, while FGDs enabled the exploration of group dynamics and collective reasoning about environmental responsibility and brand credibility. Each session lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was conducted online via video conferencing platforms to allow flexibility and accessibility. All sessions were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. This method was chosen for its flexibility in identifying patterns across qualitative data while remaining grounded in participants' narratives. Credibility was enhanced through member checking, where preliminary findings were shared with participants for verification, and triangulation between interview and FGD data to ensure consistency and depth (Patton, 2015). Ethical considerations were maintained by ensuring confidentiality, informed consent, and secure storage of all research materials.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The qualitative analysis generated a comprehensive understanding of how consumers interpret green marketing efforts and how such perceptions shape their evaluation of brand value. From the thematic analysis, four major themes emerged: (1) Authenticity as a Prerequisite for Trust, (2) Clarity and Evidence-Based Communication as Catalysts for Consumer Awareness, (3) Emotional and Ethical Resonance as Drivers of Symbolic Value, and (4) The Role of Social Influence and Digital Discourse in Shaping Perceptions of Environmental Responsibility. These themes collectively illustrate the cognitive, emotional, and social processes underlying consumer responses to green marketing messages.

#### 4.1. Authenticity as a Prerequisite for Trust

Participants consistently emphasized that authenticity is the most important factor in evaluating green marketing claims. Consumers expressed skepticism toward brands that use sustainability as a promotional label without demonstrating concrete initiatives consistent with concerns about greenwashing documented in prior research (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Nyilasy et al., 2014). Many participants scrutinized the consistency between brand claims, product ingredients, packaging materials, and long-term commitments.

One participant stated:

“I don’t trust brands that suddenly highlight ‘eco-friendly’ in their ads but have no detailed explanation. It feels like they are just riding the sustainability trend”.

This reflects a broader pattern: consumers do not evaluate green claims in isolation but examine alignment across all brand touchpoints. Transparency, third-party certifications, and measurable sustainability indicators were seen as differentiators that strengthen perceived authenticity, supporting findings by Leonidou et al. (2013), who argue that credibility is built through demonstrable environmental performance. When brands successfully display authenticity, participants reported higher trust, willingness to pay premium prices, and long-term loyalty. Conversely, any indication of exaggeration or inconsistency leads to loss of credibility, weakening brand value despite intensive marketing efforts.

#### 4.2. Clarity and Evidence-Based Communication as Catalysts for Awareness

The second theme emphasizes that consumer awareness is significantly shaped by the quality and clarity of sustainability information provided. Participants expressed appreciation for brands that communicate specifics, such as carbon footprint data, recycled material percentages, responsible sourcing locations, and waste reduction strategies. This aligns with Dennis et al. (2005) argument that effective green marketing requires clear, verifiable information rather than abstract claims.

One participant explained:

“When brands show real numbers or simple visuals explaining how their process reduces waste, I feel more educated and I trust them more”.

Clarity reduces cognitive effort, increases perceived competence, and strengthens consumers’ ability to differentiate genuine sustainability from empty rhetoric. Several participants described instances in which detailed explanations influenced their final purchase decisions, suggesting that information quality contributes to both cognitive awareness and evaluative judgment. This theme also highlights the educational function of green marketing. Many consumers reported that they learned about new environmental concepts, such as biodegradable packaging, carbon-neutral shipping, or water-saving production, from brand communication. Thus, informative green marketing not only influences brand value but also strengthens environmental literacy.

#### 4.3. Emotional and Ethical Resonance as Drivers of Symbolic Value

Beyond cognitive awareness, participants expressed strong emotional responses to brands perceived as environmentally responsible. These emotions, pride, moral satisfaction, and personal alignment, directly enhanced the symbolic and emotional dimensions of brand value. Participants reported feeling a sense of identity reinforcement when supporting

sustainable brands, consistent with theories of ethical and identity-driven consumption (Rahman et al., 2015; Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014).

A participant shared:

“Supporting a green brand makes me feel like I’m contributing, even in a small way. It’s meaningful to me”.

This sense of ethical engagement transforms sustainability from a functional attribute into a source of emotional connection and symbolic meaning. Consumers begin to associate the brand with positive values, which increases loyalty and strengthens long-term brand equity. Several participants indicated that even when sustainable products were priced higher, the emotional and ethical benefits justified the premium. This finding supports studies highlighting that moral satisfaction can outweigh price sensitivity in ethically oriented markets (Leonidou et al., 2020).

#### **4.4. Social Influence and Digital Discourse in Evaluating Green Claims**

Another significant theme is the role of digital platforms, particularly social media, in shaping consumer judgments about environmental responsibility. Participants often cross-check green claims through online reviews, influencer commentary, sustainability bloggers, and user-generated content. This mirrors the argument by Wang and Kim (2022) that social media acts as a reinforcement mechanism for brand credibility by facilitating public evaluation.

A participant noted:

“Before believing sustainability claims, I usually search reviews or TikTok discussions. People online often expose whether a brand is truly sustainable or not.”

Social proof, peer discussion, and community-based evaluations strengthen or weaken consumer trust. When online discourse validates a brand’s environmental efforts, consumers perceive higher credibility. However, negative discourse, such as allegations of greenwashing, spreads rapidly and can severely damage brand value. This underscores that environmental responsibility is not only a brand-driven narrative but a socially constructed perception influenced by collective dialogue.

#### **4.5. Discussion**

Together, these themes demonstrate that green marketing influences brand value through an interconnected process encompassing authenticity, clarity, emotional engagement, and social validation. Authenticity establishes the foundation for trust; clarity enhances awareness and cognitive understanding; emotional resonance strengthens loyalty and symbolic value; and social discourse further shapes perceptions through external validation. These findings reinforce the conceptual proposition that environmental responsibility enhances brand value only when it is communicated credibly, consistently, and meaningfully. Brands that fail to deliver genuine sustainability risk negative evaluations that reduce credibility and weaken market positioning. Thus, green marketing must be rooted in authentic environmental practices, not merely symbolic communication.

The conceptual model proposes that green marketing influences brand value through a sequential process involving multiple psychological and evaluative mechanisms. First, green marketing actions such as transparent environmental claims, measurable sustainability indicators, and credible eco-labels enhance consumer awareness, enabling individuals to understand and differentiate genuine sustainability efforts from superficial claims. Increased

consumer awareness strengthens perceived authenticity, which represents consumer trust, brand credibility, and the perceived integrity of sustainability initiatives. Authenticity then fosters emotional and ethical resonance, where consumers develop positive feelings, moral alignment, and symbolic attachment to brands that demonstrate genuine environmental responsibility. Finally, this positive emotional and ethical response enhances brand value, both functionally (e.g., perceived quality, reliability) and symbolically (e.g., identity, meaning, loyalty). In summary, brand value increases when environmental responsibility is communicated clearly, perceived as authentic, and resonates emotionally with consumers.

## 5. Conclusion

This study explored how consumers interpret green marketing practices and how these interpretations shape perceptions of environmental responsibility and brand value. The results show that the effectiveness of green marketing depends not on the presence of sustainability messages alone, but on the credibility, transparency, and consistency of a brand's environmental actions. Authenticity emerged as the core driver of trust, with consumers responding more positively when brands provide clear, measurable, and verifiable evidence of environmental performance. Enhanced consumer awareness also strengthens this process by enabling individuals to critically evaluate sustainability claims with greater confidence.

The findings further indicate that sustainability contributes to brand value through both functional and emotional pathways. Consumers feel pride, ethical alignment, and symbolic identification when supporting environmentally responsible brands, demonstrating that environmental responsibility elevates not only perceptions of product quality but also deeper emotional and identity-based connections. Digital discourse—including user reviews, social media discussions, and influencer commentary—plays a decisive role in validating or challenging sustainability claims, acting as a real-time moderator of perceived authenticity.

Overall, the study concludes that environmental responsibility enhances brand value when supported by authentic practices, transparent communication, and emotionally resonant engagement. These insights underline the need for firms to embed sustainability into their strategic identity, rather than treating it as a promotional add-on. Future research may expand this work by examining cross-cultural variations in sustainability perception or by quantitatively testing how authenticity mediates the relationship between green marketing and brand loyalty.

This study also shows that green marketing influences brand value through a multi-stage, interpretation-driven process shaped by consumer awareness, perceived authenticity, and emotional–ethical resonance. The findings refine existing theories on consumer skepticism and greenwashing by illustrating how consumers actively verify claims through digital discourse. Managerially, the results highlight three priorities: ensuring authenticity through verifiable environmental initiatives; communicating sustainability with precision to reduce skepticism; and leveraging emotional and identity-based appeals to strengthen brand connections. Monitoring online conversations remains vital, as digital evaluations significantly influence perceived credibility.

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