

A STUDY ON IMPACT OF RESPONSIBLE MARKETING PRACTICES AND GREENWASHING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT:

The increasing use of sustainability-related claims has made green marketing an important strategic tool for firms. However, the rising occurrence of greenwashing has created serious concerns about its long-term effects on consumer behaviour. Although earlier studies have mainly examined the short-term impact of greenwashing on consumer trust and purchase intention, relatively little academic attention has been paid to its cumulative psychological effects on consumers. To address this gap, the present study seeks to conceptualise consumer fatigue as a significant outcome of repeated exposure to greenwashing and to analyse its influence on ethical consumption behaviour. Using a systematic review methodology, this study integrates existing literature on greenwashing, consumer cynicism, and ethical consumption in order to identify key themes, theoretical perspectives, and research gaps. Grounded in signalling theory and the literature on consumer cynicism, the paper proposes a conceptual framework that explains how continuous exposure to misleading environmental claims contributes to consumer fatigue, which in turn alters ethical consumption behaviour. This study advances the green marketing literature by introducing consumer fatigue as a distinct theoretical construct and by emphasising the long-term behavioural effects of greenwashing that go beyond the erosion of consumer trust. The findings provide important implications for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners who aim to encourage genuine sustainability communication and to rebuild ethical engagement among consumers.

Keywords: Greenwashing, Consumer Fatigue, Ethical Consumption, Sustainability Communication, Green Marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has become a central theme in contemporary marketing discussions, as firms increasingly present themselves as environmentally responsible in response to growing consumer awareness and ethical concerns. Environmental claims, eco-labels, and sustainability narratives are now widely used by organisations to signal their commitment to sustainable practices. However, along with the expansion of green communication, concerns have grown regarding the credibility and authenticity of these claims, particularly in relation to greenwashing, which refers to the practice of misleading consumers about the environmental benefits of products, services, or corporate activities (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). Previous research on greenwashing has mainly examined its immediate outcomes, including reduced consumer trust, negative attitudes towards brands, and lower purchase intention (Chen & Chang, 2013). While these studies offer valuable insights, they largely view greenwashing as a one-time or short-term issue. In practice, consumers are continuously exposed to sustainability claims across different brands, industries, and communication channels. This ongoing exposure raises an important but underexplored question: what occurs when greenwashing is experienced repeatedly rather than as an occasional instance of deception? Recent evidence indicates that continuous exposure to misleading environmental claims may lead to a deeper psychological reaction

among consumers that goes beyond scepticism or distrust (Eppler & Mengis, 2004). Consumers may start to feel fatigued, experiencing emotional exhaustion, a decline in motivation to process sustainability-related information, and withdrawal from ethical consumption decisions. Although highly relevant, this response—defined in this study as consumer fatigue—has not been adequately conceptualised within the green marketing and ethical consumption literature. Ethical consumption depends largely on consumers' willingness to process information, make value-based evaluations, and align their purchasing behaviour with moral principles (Carrington et al., 2010). When repeated greenwashing weakens this willingness, the impact may extend beyond a mere loss of trust, potentially transforming how consumers understand and engage in ethical consumption. However, the cumulative behavioural effects of fatigue caused by greenwashing have not yet been systematically explored. To address this research gap, the present study employs a systematic review approach to integrate existing literature on greenwashing, consumer cynicism, and ethical consumption. Drawing on signalling theory and related psychological perspectives, the study conceptualises consumer fatigue as a key mechanism through which repeated greenwashing influences ethical consumption behaviour. By proposing a new conceptual framework, this paper aims to advance theoretical understanding of the long-term effects of greenwashing and to provide a foundation for future empirical research in sustainable marketing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Greenwashing in Sustainability Communication

The growing emphasis on sustainability has led organisations to actively communicate their environmental commitments through marketing messages, corporate disclosures, and digital platforms. In this context, greenwashing has become an important concern, referring to practices in which firms misrepresent, exaggerate, or selectively disclose environmental information to create a misleading impression of sustainability (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Previous studies have framed greenwashing not only as deceptive advertising but as a broader issue of strategic sustainability communication connected to organisational legitimacy (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). Researchers suggest that greenwashing is largely driven by information asymmetry, where firms have greater control over environmental information than consumers (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). According to signalling theory, sustainability claims serve as signals meant to communicate environmental performance that consumers cannot directly observe (Spence, 1973). However, when these signals are not supported by real practices, they reduce the credibility of sustainability communication and distort market transparency (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). While earlier research mainly focused on identifying the types and drivers of greenwashing (Peattie & Crane, 2005), more recent studies have examined its effects on consumer perceptions and market outcomes. Nonetheless, much of the literature still treats greenwashing as a one-time or isolated event, providing limited understanding of its long-term and cumulative impact on consumer behaviour.

2.2 Consumer Responses to Greenwashing

A substantial body of research has investigated consumer responses to perceived greenwashing, consistently highlighting negative outcomes such as scepticism, confusion, perceived risk, and declining trust (Chen & Chang, 2013; Nyilasy et al., 2014). When consumers view environmental claims as misleading, they often form unfavourable attitudes toward both the brand and its sustainability initiatives, which can result in reduced purchase intentions.

Trust erosion is considered one of the most immediate effects of greenwashing, acting as a mediator between deceptive environmental claims and negative consumer responses (Chen & Chang, 2013). Research on consumer scepticism also suggests that repeated exposure to questionable environmental claims can increase consumers' critical evaluation of sustainability messages (Mohr et al., 1998). However, much of the existing literature frames consumer responses as short-term cognitive or attitudinal reactions, focusing on how consumers assess claim credibility at a single point in time. Far less attention has been given to the emotional and motivational consequences that may result from repeated exposure to greenwashing. As sustainability communication becomes more widespread across multiple platforms, consumers are confronted with larger volumes of complex and often ambiguous information, which may lead to disengagement that extends beyond simple scepticism.

2.3 Ethical Consumption and Behavioural Vulnerability

Ethical consumption is generally defined as purchasing behaviour guided by moral principles, including environmental protection, social responsibility, and fairness (Carrington et al., 2010). Prior research highlights that ethical consumption requires sustained cognitive effort, moral commitment, and access to trustworthy information. Consumers must actively interpret sustainability claims and balance ethical values with practical constraints when making decisions. Despite growing awareness of sustainability issues, studies consistently report a gap between consumers' ethical intentions and their actual purchasing behaviour (Carrington et al., 2010). This gap has been linked to factors such as information overload, reduced trust, and decision fatigue. Notably, ethical consumption is not a fixed or unconditional behaviour; it is sensitive to contextual factors that can weaken consumers' ethical engagement over time. In this context, repeated exposure to greenwashing may further erode ethical consumption by reducing consumers' motivation to engage with sustainability information. When environmental claims are perceived as unreliable or manipulative, consumers may gradually withdraw from ethical decision-making, potentially leading to disengagement from ethical consumption practices altogether.

2.4 Towards Consumer Fatigue: An Emerging Perspective

Although the concept of consumer fatigue has received limited direct attention in greenwashing research, related studies on information overload and psychological exhaustion offer a relevant theoretical foundation. Previous research indicates that prolonged exposure to excessive or ambiguous information can lead to cognitive strain, emotional exhaustion, and decreased motivation for decision-making (Eppler & Mengis, 2004). Applied to sustainability communication, repeated greenwashing may generate a form of ethical fatigue, in which consumers become emotionally drained and increasingly indifferent to environmental claims, regardless of their accuracy. Unlike scepticism—which involves active evaluation—consumer fatigue reflects withdrawal and avoidance, representing a deeper behavioural consequence. The lack of a clear conceptualisation of consumer fatigue in green marketing research represents an important gap. By integrating insights from consumer psychology and sustainability literature, consumer fatigue can be understood as a mediating mechanism that explains how repeated greenwashing gradually reshapes ethical consumption behaviour. This perspective shifts the focus of scholarship from immediate consumer reactions to long-term behavioural change, thereby extending existing frameworks on greenwashing.

3. RESEARCH GAPS

Despite many of research on greenwashing, several important gaps remain in the existing literature:

- **Short-term focus:** Most studies examine greenwashing as a discrete or isolated event and concentrate on its immediate effects, such as trust erosion, changes in brand attitude, or reduced purchase intention. The cumulative and long-term psychological effects of repeated greenwashing on consumers have received limited scholarly attention.
- **Limited conceptualisation of consumer fatigue:** Although related constructs such as consumer scepticism and cynicism have been widely examined, the concept of consumer fatigue—characterised by emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, and disengagement from ethical consumption resulting from repeated exposure to greenwashing—remains insufficiently developed within green marketing research.
- **Behavioural implications for ethical consumption:** Existing studies rarely explore how continuous exposure to misleading environmental claims gradually reshapes ethical consumption behaviour over time. As a result, the long-term consequences of greenwashing for ethical decision-making and consumption patterns remain poorly understood.
- **Secondary data and theoretical synthesis gap:** There is a noticeable lack of research that systematically reviews and synthesises existing literature to develop a conceptual framework linking repeated greenwashing, consumer fatigue, and ethical consumption. In particular, studies adopting a secondary data or systematic review approach to integrate insights from greenwashing and consumer psychology remain limited.

Together, these gaps highlight the need for a comprehensive conceptual synthesis of the existing literature and for the introduction of consumer fatigue as a novel construct that explains the long-term behavioural consequences of repeated greenwashing.

4. OBJECTIVES

Based on the identified research gaps, this study pursues the following objectives:

- To systematically review the existing literature on greenwashing, consumer responses, and ethical consumption in order to identify key themes, core constructs, and underlying theoretical foundations.
- To conceptualise consumer fatigue as a cumulative psychological outcome that emerges from repeated exposure to greenwashing.
- To develop a conceptual framework that explains the relationship between repeated greenwashing, consumer fatigue, and ethical consumption behaviour.
- To identify unresolved research gaps and propose directions for future empirical research in the fields of sustainable marketing and consumer psychology.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) design to examine existing research on greenwashing, consumer responses, and ethical consumption. The systematic review approach is appropriate because it allows for a transparent, replicable, and comprehensive synthesis of prior studies, while reducing selection bias and improving methodological rigour. In contrast to narrative reviews, the SLR method supports the systematic identification of key

themes, theoretical foundations, and research gaps that are directly aligned with the objectives of the study.

5.2 Data collection

For completion of the study, this study used secondary data. To maintain the quality and relevance of the study, the data is collected through various authentic, reputable and valid sources.

5.3 Data Sources

To maintain the quality and relevance of the study, the secondary data is taken from several valid and reputable authentic sources, publications and books. The data sources include:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Studies emphasising on greenwashing, sustainability communication, or ethical consumption
- Articles published in English
- Studies with conceptual, empirical, or review-based contributions

5.4 Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed a multi-stage screening procedure. In the initial stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed to assess their relevance to the research objectives. In the subsequent stage, full-text articles were examined in detail against the established inclusion criteria. Duplicate records were removed, and only studies with clear relevance to greenwashing and consumer behaviour were retained for the final analysis.

5.5 Data Analysis

The selected articles were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Key concepts, theoretical perspectives, and recurring patterns were systematically coded and organised into broader thematic categories. This analytical process facilitated the identification of dominant narratives as well as areas that remain underexplored within the existing literature. Through repetitive comparison and synthesis, themes such as the prevalence of greenwashing, consumer scepticism, erosion of credibility, and behavioural disengagement were identified. These themes guided the development of a conceptual framework that explains the relationship between repeated greenwashing, consumer fatigue, and ethical consumption behaviour.

6. FINDINGS

Based on the systematic review and thematic synthesis of available literature on greenwashing, consumer responses, and ethical consumption, five dominant themes were identified. Together, these themes explain how repeated exposure to greenwashing contributes to consumer fatigue and gradually reshapes ethical consumption behaviour over time.

Increasing Prevalence and Normalisation of Greenwashing: The literature consistently shows an increasing prevalence of greenwashing across industries, particularly as sustainability communication has become a central element of competitive marketing strategies (Peattie & Crane, 2005; Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Environmental claims are widely used to signal corporate responsibility; however, these claims are often vague, selectively disclosed, or lack verifiable supporting evidence. Several studies indicate that the

repeated use of ambiguous or exaggerated sustainability messages has contributed to the normalisation of greenwashing practices, especially in contexts where regulatory oversight is limited (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). Consequently, consumers are frequently exposed to recurring and inconsistent green claims, which creates conditions that foster scepticism and increase psychological strain.

Erosion of Credibility in Sustainability Communication: A key theme identified in the reviewed literature is the erosion of credibility associated with environmental claims. Perceived greenwashing has been found to weaken trust in individual brands as well as in sustainability communication more generally (Chen & Chang, 2013; Nyilasy et al., 2014). Repeated exposure to misleading environmental claims diminishes consumers' confidence in sustainability messaging, even when such claims are made by otherwise reputable organisations. Importantly, this loss of credibility often extends beyond firms engaged in deceptive practices, producing spillover effects that reduce trust in genuinely sustainable brands. These findings demonstrate how repeated greenwashing undermines the broader sustainability communication environment, thereby limiting the overall effectiveness of green marketing initiatives.

Transition from Consumer Scepticism to Psychological Disengagement: While earlier research has mainly highlighted consumer scepticism and cynicism as primary responses to greenwashing (Mohr et al., 1998), the reviewed literature indicates a shift in consumer reactions under conditions of repeated exposure. Instead of continually assessing the credibility of sustainability claims, consumers may gradually reduce their cognitive involvement, resulting in psychological disengagement. This shift suggests that greenwashing does not only trigger critical evaluation but may also lead consumers to avoid sustainability information altogether. Such disengagement represents a deeper behavioural response and highlights the limitations of existing frameworks that focus primarily on scepticism or distrust.

Increased Vulnerability of Ethical Consumption Behaviour: The reviewed literature further indicates that ethical consumption behaviour is especially vulnerable to repeated greenwashing. Ethical consumption depends on sustained motivation, trust, and cognitive effort, all of which are weakened when sustainability claims are perceived as unreliable (Carrington et al., 2010). As misleading environmental messages accumulate over time, consumers may increasingly question the value of engaging in ethical decision-making. This increased vulnerability contributes to the widely recognised gap between ethical intentions and actual consumption behaviour. Repeated exposure to greenwashing may further widen this gap by discouraging consumers from investing the time and effort required to evaluate environmental attributes, thereby gradually reshaping ethical consumption patterns.

Emergence of Consumer Fatigue as a Cumulative Outcome: Across the reviewed literature, a consistent theme highlights the emergence of consumer fatigue as a cumulative psychological outcome of repeated greenwashing. Although this concept is not always explicitly named, several studies refer to related experiences such as emotional exhaustion, information overload, and reduced motivation arising from excessive or misleading sustainability communication (Eppler & Mengis, 2004). By synthesising these findings, consumer fatigue can be conceptualised as a condition marked by emotional depletion, decreased engagement with sustainability-related information, and withdrawal from ethical consumption practices. This theme emphasises the importance of formally incorporating consumer fatigue into green marketing frameworks in order to better explain the long-term behavioural consequences of repeated greenwashing.

7. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

7.1 Conceptualising Consumer Fatigue

Drawing on insights from green marketing, consumer psychology, and information overload research, this study conceptualises consumer fatigue as a cumulative psychological state marked by emotional exhaustion, reduced cognitive engagement, and decreased motivation to process sustainability-related information. Unlike consumer scepticism, which involves active evaluation and critical judgement, consumer fatigue represents a state of withdrawal and disengagement that develops through prolonged exposure to repetitive or misleading environmental claims. Within sustainability communication, repeated greenwashing increases the cognitive and emotional demands placed on consumers, as they are required to continuously evaluate the credibility of environmental claims. Over time, this ongoing evaluative effort may exceed consumers' psychological capacity, resulting in fatigue and a declining willingness to engage with ethical considerations in consumption decisions.

7.2 Theoretical Foundations of the Framework

The proposed conceptual framework is primarily grounded in signalling theory and is further informed by insights from consumer cynicism and information overload literature.

According to signalling theory, firms use sustainability claims as signals to communicate environmental performance that consumers cannot directly observe (Spence, 1973). When these signals are repeatedly perceived as misleading, their informational value declines, leading to reduced signal credibility. This loss of credibility increases cognitive strain on consumers and contributes to the development of consumer fatigue. In addition, the consumer cynicism literature suggests that repeated exposure to deceptive marketing practices creates negative expectations about firms' motives. While cynicism helps explain consumers' critical evaluation of marketing claims, it does not fully account for the emotional exhaustion that can result from continuous exposure to greenwashing. Information overload theory complements this view by explaining how excessive or ambiguous information can produce psychological exhaustion and disengagement, thereby reinforcing the emergence of consumer fatigue (Eppler & Mengis, 2004).

7.3 Linking Repeated Greenwashing to Consumer Fatigue

Within the proposed framework, repeated greenwashing is positioned as the primary antecedent of consumer fatigue. Continuous exposure to exaggerated or unverifiable environmental claims increases the cognitive effort and emotional investment required from consumers to evaluate sustainability-related information. As misleading claims accumulate over time, consumers may experience frustration, declining trust, and eventual psychological exhaustion, which reduce their motivation to engage with environmental messaging. This relationship highlights the cumulative nature of greenwashing effects, moving beyond explanations based on isolated incidents and emphasising the long-term psychological consequences of repeated exposure.

7.4 Consumer Fatigue and Ethical Consumption Behaviour

Consumer fatigue is proposed to serve a mediating role between repeated greenwashing and ethical consumption behaviour. Ethical consumption requires consumers to actively process information, align purchasing decisions with moral values, and invest cognitive effort in evaluating available alternatives. When consumers experience fatigue, both their capacity and willingness to engage in such effortful decision-making are reduced. As a consequence, fatigued consumers may withdraw from ethical considerations, rely more heavily on habitual

purchasing patterns, or ignore sustainability claims altogether. This process helps explain how repeated greenwashing reshapes ethical consumption behaviour not through immediate persuasion failure, but through gradual psychological withdrawal and disengagement.

7.5 Proposed Conceptual Framework



Based on the synthesis of existing literature, this study proposes a conceptual framework:

- In which, repeated greenwashing serves as the antecedent.
- Consumer fatigue operates as the mediating mechanism.
- Ethical consumption behaviour represents the outcome variable.

8. DISCUSSION

The present study advances understanding of greenwashing by demonstrating that its effects extend beyond consumer scepticism to include consumer fatigue as a cumulative psychological response. The thematic synthesis shows that repeated exposure to misleading or ambiguous sustainability claims gradually weakens the credibility of green marketing and places continuous cognitive and emotional demands on consumers. Over time, this sustained burden encourages psychological disengagement rather than active evaluation, thereby reshaping how consumers respond to ethical information.

By conceptualising consumer fatigue as a mediating mechanism between repeated greenwashing and ethical consumption behaviour, this study provides a more nuanced explanation for the persistent gap between ethical intentions and actual purchasing behaviour. This perspective shifts the focus of green marketing research from short-term persuasion failures to long-term psychological withdrawal, highlighting the unintended consequences of excessive or unreliable sustainability communication. Accordingly, the findings emphasise the importance of credible, transparent, and verifiable environmental claims in maintaining consumer engagement and supporting sustained ethical consumption.

9. IMPLICATIONS

- **Theoretical Implications:** This study contributes to green marketing literature by identifying consumer fatigue as a critical outcome of repeated greenwashing. Moving beyond traditional explanations that focus primarily on scepticism and cynicism, it highlights the cumulative psychological effects of misleading sustainability claims. By positioning consumer fatigue as a mediating mechanism between repeated

greenwashing and ethical consumption behaviour, the study provides a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of how greenwashing gradually reshapes consumer engagement over time.

- **Managerial Implications:** The findings indicate that excessive or misleading sustainability communication can decrease consumer engagement rather than enhance it. Managers should therefore emphasise credible, transparent, and verifiable environmental claims. Prioritising the quality of sustainability messaging over quantity can help maintain consumer trust and support sustained ethical consumption.
- **Policy Implications:** For policymakers, the study highlights the need for stronger regulation and standardisation of environmental claims. Implementing clear guidelines, promoting independent verification, and enforcing stricter compliance can help reduce greenwashing practices and protect consumers from information overload and disengagement.

10. LIMITATIONS

This study relies exclusively on secondary data, which limits its ability to draw empirical conclusions about consumer responses to greenwashing. The proposed conceptual framework is theoretical and has not yet been tested in real-world contexts. Additionally, the review includes only English-language journal articles, potentially excluding relevant research published in other languages or in non-indexed sources. The study does not account for cultural, industry-specific, or demographic differences, all of which may influence how consumers perceive repeated greenwashing and experience fatigue. Finally, the analysis focuses on general patterns across the literature and does not differentiate between types or intensities of greenwashing, which may affect the applicability of the findings in specific contexts.

11. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive review of greenwashing and its impact on consumers, highlighting the emergence of consumer fatigue as a cumulative psychological response to repeated misleading environmental claims. By synthesising existing research, the study shows that repeated greenwashing not only erodes trust in brands but also diminishes consumers' motivation to engage with sustainability information, ultimately influencing ethical consumption behaviour. The proposed conceptual framework positions consumer fatigue as a key mediating mechanism, offering a clearer understanding of how long-term exposure to greenwashing reshapes consumer engagement. Overall, the findings emphasise the importance of credible, transparent, and verifiable sustainability communication to maintain consumer trust and support sustained, meaningful ethical consumption over time.

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