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GREEN MARKETING AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

In recent decades, environmental issues such as climate change, pollution, and the depletion of natural resources have become global concerns. These challenges have forced both governments and businesses to take responsibility for protecting the environment. As a result, the concept of green marketing has emerged as an important strategy in modern business. Green marketing focuses on promoting products and services that are environmentally friendly and sustainable. In the modern business environment, sustainability has become a central concern for organizations and consumers. Environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, and resource depletion have encouraged businesses to adopt environmentally responsible practices. This has led to the emergence of green marketing, which focuses on promoting products and services that are environmentally friendly. At the same time, consumer behaviour has evolved, with increasing demand for sustainable products. At the same time, consumer behaviour has also changed significantly. Modern consumers are becoming more aware of environmental issues and are increasingly interested in purchasing eco-friendly products. This shift in consumer preferences has encouraged companies to adopt green practices. Therefore, understanding the relationship between green marketing and consumer behaviour is essential for businesses aiming to succeed in a competitive and environmentally conscious market

Keywords: Green economy, Concept of green economy, consumer behavior, environmental challenges, adopting, climate change

1. Introduction

The global marketplace is undergoing a profound transformation driven by mounting awareness of climate change, resource depletion, and social inequity. Consumers, governments, and corporations are increasingly called upon to adopt sustainable practices, and marketing — as the interface between organisations and their customers — occupies a pivotal role in this transition. Green marketing, broadly defined as the promotion of products and services on the basis of their environmental benefits, has attracted substantial scholarly and practitioner attention over the past two decades.

Despite significant growth in consumer environmental consciousness, a persistent gap exists between stated pro-environmental intentions and actual purchase behaviour. This so-called "intention–behaviour gap" presents both a challenge and an opportunity for marketers and researchers. Understanding the psychological, social, and contextual factors that moderate this gap is essential for designing effective green marketing strategies.

This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on green marketing and consumer behaviour by: (i) reviewing key theoretical frameworks that explain green purchasing decisions; (ii) examining the influence of green marketing instruments — including eco-labels, green advertising, and sustainable packaging — on consumer attitudes and behaviour; (iii) investigating the moderating role of greenwashing scepticism, price sensitivity, and demographics; and (iv) proposing an integrated conceptual framework with practical implications for sustainable business strategy.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour remains one of the most widely applied frameworks in green consumer research. TPB posits that behavioural intention — the immediate precursor to action — is shaped by three constructs: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms (social pressure), and perceived behavioural control (self-efficacy). In the green marketing context, a consumer who holds a positive attitude toward eco-friendly products, perceives social approval for sustainable purchasing, and believes they have the financial and cognitive resources to act, is significantly more likely to engage in green purchase behaviour.

Empirical studies across multiple product categories — from organic food to electric vehicles — broadly support the predictive validity of TPB for green purchasing. However, scholars have noted that even strong intentions do not always translate into behaviour, particularly when situational constraints such as limited product availability or price premiums are present.

2.2 Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory

Stern et al.'s (1999) Value-Belief-Norm theory extends the understanding of pro-environmental behaviour by grounding it in personal values. The VBN model proposes that altruistic and biospheric values activate ecological worldview beliefs (New Ecological Paradigm), which in turn generate awareness of adverse environmental consequences and a sense of personal obligation to act. This cascading structure suggests that green marketing communications should appeal not merely to functional product benefits, but to consumers' deeper value systems.

2.3 The Attitude–Behaviour Gap

A recurring theme in the literature is the disparity between what consumers say and what they do. While surveys consistently show high levels of environmental concern, actual market shares for green products often remain modest. Researchers have attributed this gap to factors including: higher perceived price of green alternatives, insufficient trust in environmental claims, habitual purchasing patterns, the social invisibility of sustainable consumption, and information overload. Effective green marketing must therefore address not only awareness and attitude formation but also the behavioural barriers that prevent attitude-consistent action.

3.Green Marketing Instruments and Their Influence on Consumer Behaviour

3.1 Eco-Labelling

Eco-labels — standardised symbols or certifications communicating a product's environmental credentials — serve as important heuristics for consumers navigating complex sustainability trade-offs. Labels such as the EU Ecolabel, Fairtrade, Energy Star, and FSC certification have been shown to positively influence purchase intention, particularly among environmentally conscious consumers. However, the proliferation of green labels has created confusion and label fatigue, with consumers struggling to distinguish credible third-party certifications from manufacturer-generated claims.

Research indicates that eco-label effectiveness is moderated by label familiarity, perceived credibility of the certifying body, and the congruence between the label and the product category. Marketers should prioritise internationally recognised, third-party-verified labels and invest in consumer education to maximise label impact.

3.2 Green Advertising and Environmental Claims

Green advertising encompasses a wide spectrum of communications — from specific attribute claims ("contains 30% recycled content") to broad image-based appeals ("we care about the planet"). The persuasive effectiveness of these messages depends on their specificity, credibility, and relevance to the target audience's values.

Studies have found that concrete, verifiable claims outperform vague imagery in building consumer trust and purchase intent. Emotional appeals — particularly those invoking nature, future generations, or community responsibility — can be highly effective but risk backlash if perceived as manipulative. The framing of environmental benefits also matters: loss-framed messages ("help stop deforestation") tend to

generate stronger emotional responses, while gain-framed messages ("choose a healthier planet") may be more persuasive for low-involvement consumers.

3.3 Sustainable Packaging

Packaging is a visible and tangible signal of a brand's environmental commitment. Consumers increasingly associate sustainable packaging — including minimalist design, recycled materials, and biodegradable formats — with product quality and corporate integrity. Research in the FMCG sector indicates that sustainable packaging can justify a moderate price premium and serve as a point of differentiation at the shelf.

Importantly, sustainable packaging must be accompanied by clear usage and disposal instructions to translate environmental intent into actual behaviour. Poorly communicated recyclability, for instance, can result in consumer confusion and unintended environmental harm, undermining the brand's green credentials.

3.4 Green Pricing and Accessibility

Price remains one of the most significant barriers to green purchasing, particularly among price-sensitive segments. While a growing body of evidence supports willingness-to-pay premiums for certified green products among affluent and highly educated consumers, this willingness does not uniformly extend across demographic groups. Marketers and policymakers must work collaboratively to reduce the cost differential between green and conventional products through economies of scale, government incentives, and supply chain innovation.

4. Greenwashing: The Trust Paradox

Greenwashing — the practice of making misleading or unsubstantiated environmental claims — poses one of the gravest threats to the credibility of green marketing and the development of sustainable consumer markets. High-profile greenwashing cases involving global brands have eroded consumer trust, increased scepticism toward environmental messaging, and contributed to the intention–behaviour gap.

Empirical research identifies several dimensions of greenwashing scepticism: scepticism toward specific product claims, scepticism toward corporate environmental commitments, and generalised distrust of marketing communications. Sceptical consumers are less likely to respond positively to green marketing stimuli, even when the claims are legitimate, highlighting the collective cost of greenwashing for the industry as a whole.

To counter greenwashing scepticism, organisations are advised to:

- Obtain and prominently display credible third-party certifications
- Provide transparent, quantified sustainability data (e.g., carbon footprints, water savings)
- Publish independently verified sustainability reports aligned with GRI or CDP standards
- Avoid absolute claims ("100% sustainable") in favour of specific, bounded ones
- Engage in consistent and long-term sustainability communication rather than episodic campaigns

5. Consumer Segmentation and Green Purchasing

Green consumers are not a monolithic group. Research consistently identifies distinct segments based on values, demographics, and purchasing motivations. A widely adopted segmentation model distinguishes five consumer archetypes:

True Greens: Intrinsically motivated, high environmental concern, willing to pay a premium and change habits

Light Greens: Environmentally aware but primarily motivated by co-benefits such as health, quality, or cost savings

Greens by Circumstance: Adopt green behaviours due to financial incentives or social norms, not deep conviction

Sceptics: Distrust green claims and are resistant to environmental messaging

Disengaged: Low environmental concern and low green purchase behaviour

Effective green marketing requires tailored messaging for each segment. True Greens respond to values-based appeals and in-depth sustainability information. Light Greens are better engaged through co-benefit messaging that links environmental attributes to personal health or financial savings. Sceptics require credibility-building strategies such as third-party endorsements and transparent data.

Generational differences also warrant attention. Millennials and Generation Z exhibit higher environmental concern, greater digital engagement, and stronger preference for brands with authentic sustainability commitments compared to Baby Boomers. Social media plays an increasingly important role in transmitting environmental norms and influencing green purchase behaviour among younger cohorts.

6. An Integrated Conceptual Framework

Synthesising the theoretical and empirical insights reviewed above, this paper proposes an integrated framework for understanding green consumer behaviour that encompasses four levels of analysis:

Level 1 — Value and Belief System:

Individual environmental values (altruistic, biospheric) and ecological beliefs (New Ecological Paradigm) form the foundational layer, shaping the consumer's general orientation toward environmental issues.

Level 2 — Attitudinal Formation:

Green marketing stimuli — including eco-labels, advertising, packaging, and brand reputation — interact with the consumer's value system to form attitudes toward green products and green brands. The credibility and specificity of environmental claims significantly moderate this process.

Level 3 — Intention Moderation:

Subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, price sensitivity, and greenwashing scepticism moderate the translation of positive attitudes into purchase intentions. Social influence and peer behaviour are particularly influential for younger demographics.

Level 4 — Behavioural Execution:

Contextual factors — including product availability, retail environment, convenience, and habitual purchasing — mediate the conversion of intentions into actual green purchase behaviour. Structural interventions such as green default options and point-of-sale sustainability information can reduce behavioural friction.

7. Managerial and Policy Implications

The findings reviewed in this paper carry significant implications for marketing practitioners, corporate strategists, and policymakers:

For marketers, the evidence suggests the importance of building authenticity and trust as prerequisites for effective green communication. Green claims must be specific, verifiable, and consistently upheld across all brand touchpoints. Investment in genuine product and process sustainability — not merely communication — is foundational.

For corporate strategists, integrating sustainability into the core value proposition rather than treating it as a peripheral brand attribute is likely to yield more durable competitive advantage. The growing consumer demand for transparency calls for integrated reporting, stakeholder engagement, and supply chain visibility.

For policymakers, the evidence supports the case for stronger regulation of environmental claims, mandatory eco-disclosure requirements, and financial incentives (tax relief, subsidies) to reduce the green price premium and make sustainable choices accessible across income groups.

8. Conclusion

Green marketing occupies a critical role in the transition toward sustainable consumption. While significant progress has been made in understanding the drivers of green consumer

behaviour, the persistent intention–behaviour gap underscores the complexity of this field and the limitations of marketing communication alone as an instrument of change.

This paper has argued that effective green marketing must be grounded in authentic sustainability commitment, communicated through credible and specific environmental claims, tailored to diverse consumer segments, and supported by structural conditions that make green choices the convenient and affordable default.

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies of green behaviour change, the role of digital platforms and social influence in scaling pro-environmental consumption, the psychological mechanisms underlying greenwashing scepticism, and the intersectionality of sustainability with social equity and access.

As environmental challenges intensify, the alignment of commercial incentives with ecological imperatives is not merely a strategic opportunity — it is an organisational and societal imperative.

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