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Navjot Kaur Gill1
Assistant Professor, Guru
Nanak Dev Engineering
College, Ludhiana, Punjab,
India

Harneet Kaur
Assistant Professor, Guru
Nanak Dev Engineering
College, Ludhiana, Punjab,
India

Parampal Singh
Professor, Guru Nanak Dev
Engineering College,
Ludhiana, Punjab, India

Perception vs reality: How greenwashing shapes consumer trust in S-commerce environments

Navjot Kaur Gill, Harneet Kaur and Parampal Singh

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Abstract
Brands are using sustainability promises to draw in morally motivated customers in a market that is becoming more digital and environmentally sensitive. However, a serious threat to brand authenticity and trust is the emergence of greenwashing, which is the practice of deceiving customers about a company's environmental policies. This study investigates how greenwashing affects customer perception. Green Illusions in the Digital Marketplace: How Greenwashing Affects Brand Trust in the Context of Social Commerce (S-commerce) Platforms, where influencer involvement, user-generated content, and reviews enhance brand-customer interactions. This study examines how customers react to sustainability promises in online social purchasing contexts by synthesizing data from industry reports, case studies, and contemporary academic literature using secondary research. Although customers are becoming more conscious of greenwashing practices, the informal and peer-influenced character of S-commerce sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish between true sustainability and dishonest advertising, according to the report. In order to preserve customer confidence and guarantee genuine sustainability communication in the dynamic world of social commerce, the study emphasizes the necessity of more transparency, regulatory monitoring, and digital literacy.

Keywords: Greenwashing, consumer perception, brand trust, social commerce (s-commerce), sustainable marketing

Introduction
Sustainability has emerged as a key consumer concern in recent years, impacting both brand identities and purchase decisions. As environmental concerns have gained more attention, several firms have made sustainability a central part of their marketing plans. However, a concerning phenomena known as greenwashing has surfaced alongside sincere attempts to promote eco-friendly goods and methods. The dishonest practice of deceiving customers by exaggerating or making up a brand's environmental initiatives in order to profit from the rising demand for sustainable products without really implementing significant operational changes is known as greenwashing.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how greenwashing affects customer perception and brand trust, particularly in relation to social commerce (S-commerce). S-commerce platforms have taken over the internet retail scene by allowing customers to base their purchases on reviews, influencer recommendations, and social media interactions. These platforms offer a special setting where greenwashing practices may either be easily revealed or, on the other hand, go unnoticed since they magnify the power of brand messaging and peer opinions.

This study will examine how consumers in S-commerce environments perceive greenwashing tactics and how these impressions impact their trust in the companies they come across by combining previous research, industry reports, and case studies. In addition, the study will look at how customer reactions to sustainability promises in the era of social commerce are influenced by transparency, brand legitimacy, and digital literacy.

The purpose of this study is to provide light on how customer behavior and brand trust are changing in the digital era. Additionally, it will provide useful advice for marketers looking to create authentic, long-lasting brand identities that appeal to customers who are growing more dubious.

Studies show that greenwashing has complicated implications on sustainability activities and purchasing decisions, and it has a substantial impact on consumer behavior and brand trust in social commerce.

Corresponding Author:
Navjot Kaur Gill1
Assistant Professor, Guru
Nanak Dev Engineering
College, Ludhiana, Punjab,
India

According to research, greenwashing has a negative impact on green brand associations and believability, which in turn has an indirect impact on green brand equity and purchase intention. This dishonest technique manipulates customer behavior and obstructs real sustainable progress by distorting the "truth gap" between claimed and actual behaviors (Singh & Manoharan, 2024) [3].

It's interesting to note that some research shows conflicting results. According to one research, greenwashing paradoxically helps to promote sustainability by favorably influencing customers' environmental worries and inclination to seek out sustainable information, despite the fact that it is typically seen negatively (Lopes *et al*., 2023) [4]. This is in contrast to previous studies, which indicate that greenwashing reduces consumers' intentions to buy sustainable goods. In conclusion, there are several ways that greenwashing affects the legitimacy of brands in social commerce. Although it often undermines trust and impedes sustainable development, its impacts might differ according on the attitudes and actions of consumers. Blockchain information systems are more successful than certification systems in protecting customers from perceived greenwashing, according to study, and should be used to counteract it (Nygaard & Silkoset, 2022) [1].

Furthermore, encouraging accountability, openness, and moral corporate conduct can support the development of true brand credibility in the sustainable economy (Singh & Manoharan, 2024) [3].

Literature Review

The impact of certification procedures and information accessibility on the perception of greenwashing in the market for environmentally friendly food products is examined by Nygaard and Silkoset (2022) [1]. Their research shows how important it is for consumers to have access to clear, traceable, and unchangeable product information in order to lessen their impressions of greenwashing. When it came to protecting customers from deceptive sustainability claims, blockchain-based information outperformed conventional certification systems among the techniques examined. Although certification programs also helped to reduce the perception of greenwashing, their influence was less significant. The authors also stress how consumer monitoring initiatives serve as an additional check on greenwashing tactics.

These results have important ramifications for markets' sustainable growth, indicating that combining blockchain technology with certification programs can empower customers and increase the marketability of truly sustainable goods. By changing the emphasis from only pointing out instances of greenwashing to providing workable answers, the study offers insightful factual data that support both scholarly discussions and real-world strategies in the sustainable business space.

P. More (2019) [2] study highlights the negative consequences of false environmental claims on brand image by examining how greenwashing affects green brand trust from the viewpoint of Indian customers. The authors examine how greenwashing affects green brand image, green brand loyalty, and eventually green brand trust using structural equation modeling and a survey of 248 Indian consumers. The results show that customers' faith in brands that make unsupported green claims is undermined by greenwashing, which significantly harms all three dimensions. On the other hand, it was discovered that green

brand loyalty and image positively influenced the growth of green brand trust, highlighting their mediating functions in the connection between greenwashing and trust. Interestingly, the study also notes that Indian consumers are not very alert of greenwashing, particularly when presented with ambiguous or comparable environmental claims. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on greenwashing by concentrating on an emerging economy and providing empirical insights into how consumers' opinions change in response to misleading marketing. Furthermore, it offers insightful ramifications for companies and legislators, highlighting the necessity of openness and genuineness in green branding tactics to build enduring customer confidence.

This essay offers a thorough analysis of the wider social and environmental repercussions of corporate greenwashing, highlighting how it undermines sustainability efforts and undermines customer confidence. The authors draw attention to how a company's environmental statements and its actual practices are distorted, or the "truth gap," and show how this kind of deception affects customer behavior and impedes real progress toward sustainability. The paper highlights the issue's ubiquity by citing data showing that over half of worldwide consumer's suspect deliberate corporate deceit and that over 90% of consumer items have features of greenwashing. It also examines the ways in which greenwashing affects consumer choices, frequently causing them to pay a "greenwashing premium" for goods that are promoted as ecologically friendly while also undermining confidence in really sustainable items.

The study also shows how greenwashing distracts from important environmental improvements and promotes flimsy fixes, undermining systemic sustainability initiatives. Along with the difficulties in confirming environmental authenticity, a number of misleading strategies are described, including confusing statements, lack of evidence, and hidden trade-offs. In order to improve supply chain transparency and give customers more influence, the report recommends integrating technologies like block chain, data analytics, and mobile applications. It ends with a list of practical suggestions, such as multi-stakeholder cooperation, independent certifications, improved regulatory frameworks, and consumer education. This research provides important insights for promoting company sustainability, ethical marketing, and knowledgeable consumer participation by outlining the dangers of greenwashing as well as potential solutions (Singh, S., & Manoharan, S. 2024) [3].

Lopes, J. M., Trancoso, T., & Gomes, S. (2023) [4] offers a novel viewpoint on how deceptive environmental claims may unintentionally affect pro-sustainability behaviors by examining the complex interaction between corporate greenwashing and consumers' desire to practice circular consumption. The results show that consumers' perceptions of pervasive greenwashing have a favorable effect on their intention to engage in circular consumption, as well as increasing their environmental worries and motivation to seek out sustainable information. Notably, the link between greenwashing and the intention to consume in a circular manner is mediated by both environmental concerns and the act of searching out information that promotes sustainability.

Additionally, a clear positive correlation between these mediators and circular consumption is discovered, indicating that, despite its ethical issues, being exposed to

greenwashing may paradoxically increase environmental consciousness and encourage more sustainable consumer behavior. This casts doubt on the widely held belief that greenwashing is wholly detrimental and suggests that it may encourage consumers to become more critical thinkers and activists. In order to promote the circular economy and direct customers toward knowledgeable, ecologically conscious decisions, the study highlights the significance of open corporate communication, reliable sustainability information, and strong regulatory monitoring.

Sharma, P., Manoj, S., & Rekha, H. N. (2024) [5] The study demonstrates a significant knowledge gap on greenwashing among college students, indicating that this group's understanding of dishonest environmental marketing techniques is still quite poor. The researchers emphasize the pressing need for government-led programs that increase public awareness and put safeguards in place to protect customers from deceptive business practices. The report emphasizes the need for ongoing education and regulatory monitoring; highlighting the fact that greenwashing is a dynamic practice rather than a static problem. It makes the case that businesses who want to succeed in the long run and have a solid reputation should put an emphasis on moral behavior by providing socially and ecologically conscious goods that don't endanger the environment or public health.

Furthermore, the results of the study's survey support open communication and the broad distribution of knowledge on greenwashing and how to avoid it, especially in educational settings. These observations add to the expanding corpus of research advocating for systemic fixes that uplift customers and promote honesty in environmental marketing.

This study investigates how followers' pro-environmental attitudes and the efficacy of green advertising are influenced by parasocial relationships (PSRs) with social media influencers (SMIs). The results show that followers who build strong PSRs with SMIs are more likely to believe the influencer is reliable and to ascribe their green messaging to emotive (as opposed to strategic or calculative) motivations. When compared to individuals without such ties, followers who experience this emotional attribution are more likely to have positive brand views and make more purchases, which strengthen the persuasive power of green advertising. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that PSRs directly increase followers' intentions to take part in pro-environmental activities, indicating that the influencer-follower dynamic is a key factor in determining environmental participation.

The authors come to the conclusion that SMIs are good communicators for environmental campaigning as well as green product marketing since PSRs build trust, which lessens consumer resistance to green messaging. For marketers and sustainability activists looking to use social media as a platform to encourage real environmental practices, these results provide insightful information. Breves, P., & Liebers, N. (2022) [6].

The negative impacts of excessive product packaging (EPP), greenwashing, and green confusion on green brand equity (GBE) are examined by Qayyum *et al*. (2022) [7], who also look at how brand credibility regulates this relationship. Their results demonstrate how excessive packaging may deceive customers and undermine confidence, showing that EPP plays a substantial role in both greenwashing and green confusion. Importantly, it has been demonstrated that greenwashing has a detrimental impact on GBE, confirming worries that false environmental claims diminish brand

value. But according to the study, a significant moderating element that lessens the detrimental effects of greenwashing on GBE is brand trust.

This implies that customers are less inclined to penalize a brand for alleged greenwashing when they believe it to be reliable and trustworthy. The authors urge companies to authentically address consumer environmental concerns and stress the significance of marketers matching branding and packaging tactics with true environmental ideals. By empirically confirming the relationships between EPP, greenwashing, green confusion, and brand equity, as well as identifying brand credibility as a tactical hedge against the negative consequences of false green claims, this study significantly adds to the body of research on green marketing.

Shi, B. and Sun, Y. (2022) This study examines how customers' perceptions of greenwashing impact their intentions to make green purchases through underlying psychological mechanisms, drawing on the psychological contract theory. Using a moderated mediation model, the authors show that customers' desire to make ecologically responsible purchases is considerably and negatively impacted by their opinion of greenwashing. Perceived betrayal is a significant mediator in this connection and helps to explain why customers are less likely to make green purchases when they believe that a brand's environmental statements are not accurate. Furthermore, the study finds that environmental responsibility is an important moderating element that may reduce the negative impact of perceived greenwashing both directly and indirectly, as well as the mediating effect of felt betrayal.

This implies that even in the face of mistrust, customers who have a greater sense of environmental responsibility would be more able to continue sustainable practices. By using psychological contract theory to customer behavior, highlighting the importance of personal values in influencing reactions to greenwashing, and adding felt betrayal as a crucial mediating element, the study makes a significant contribution to the body of research on green marketing. These observations have useful ramifications for businesses looking to win back customer confidence as well as for legislators hoping to promote sustainable consumption habits through legislation and educational initiatives.

Seberíni, Izáková, and Tokovská (2024) [9] use focus group interviews and an inductive qualitative research technique to investigate Slovak consumers' opinions of greenwashing in the context of environmental health policy. Four theme domains are identified by their investigation as influencing consumer understanding: national environmental and health policy, brand-level marketing and organizational practices, individual and interpersonal variables, and general ecological protection concerns.

According to the report, a large number of Slovak customers find it difficult to identify greenwashing practices, and others only learn about corporate deceit from media exposure. This highlights a general lack of knowledge and the difficulties in differentiating between true and false green claims. Through focused training programs meant to increase green literacy and equip people to recognize and react to greenwashing more skillfully, the authors promote consumer empowerment. They also advise using social media and the general public to disseminate clear, easily comprehensible information on confirming the veracity of promises made for environmentally friendly products. By

emphasizing the importance of national policy, consumer education, and the media in reducing the effects of greenwashing and encouraging knowledgeable, sustainable purchase, the study adds to the conversation on consumer protection and sustainability.

With an emphasis on the mediating functions of green trust, consumer brand engagement, and green word-of-mouth, Guerreiro and Pacheco (2021) [10] examine how consumers' expectations and perceptions of greenwashing impact their green purchasing decisions. According to the study, negative green word-of-mouth and a decline in green trust are the main ways that greenwashing perceptions influence green purchase intentions rather than directly lowering them. Additionally, via trust, greenwashing has an indirect effect on customer brand engagement.

These results demonstrate how important trust is in influencing how consumers react to green marketing initiatives and imply that even mild impressions of dishonesty might undermine the credibility required to encourage consumer advocacy and purchase behavior. The authors stress that businesses must make sure that their sustainability claims and their actions are in line if they want to keep customers engaged and encourage green shopping. Brands may lessen the negative effects of greenwashing views and improve their standing in the sustainable market by fostering genuine, positive green word-of-mouth and establishing green trust.

Objectives of the Paper
1. To investigate how customer trust and buying intentions are affected by greenwashing.
2. To investigate how user content and influencers affect how people perceive green brands.
3. To examine how psychological variables influence how greenwashing affects consumer behavior.
4. To determine methods for encouraging openness in digital marketing and minimizing greenwashing.

Research Methodology
In order to investigate the effects of greenwashing on customer perception and brand trust in social commerce (S-commerce) platforms, this study takes a conceptual and literature review approach, combining insights from previous academic research, industry reports, and case studies. The research seeks to develop a thorough knowledge of how deceptive sustainability claims affect consumer behavior in digital settings by referencing a variety of multidisciplinary sources. Since the study was conceptual in nature, no primary data gathering was done. In order to ensure relevance to current trends in sustainability, green marketing, and S-commerce dynamics, secondary data was instead collected through a thorough assessment of recent literature.

Results
The review of literature yielded the following key findings across the three primary research objectives:

Greenwashing Decreases Purchase Intentions and Consumer Trust

Consumer trust, brand credibility, and green buying behavior are all severely damaged by greenwashing. This degradation is especially important in social commerce, because dependence on digital cues and reputations is increased due to the lack of in-person product engagement. Perceived betrayal and other psychological impacts serve as

mediators, lowering long-term loyalty and green brand equity. In digital platforms, where consumers base their decisions more on perceived authenticity than on actual experience, the total effect is amplified. Perceptions of sustainability are shaped by influencers and user-generated content User-generated content (UGC) and influencer marketing are crucial in either promoting or hiding false green claims. Research shows that even when environmental signals are unconfirmed, consumers may be more receptive to them if they have parasocial interactions with influencers, particularly those who are seen as genuine. At the same time, disinformation might go unnoticed due to limited knowledge of greenwashing and trouble spotting ambiguous statements, making it harder to distinguish between manipulation and true sustainability. Behavioral and Psychological Mediators Affect Responses to Greenwashing Emotional and cognitive elements including green trust, environmental concern, perceived betrayal, and green perplexity influence consumer behavior, which is not only a logical reaction to environmental claims. Important moderating factors that lessen or amplify the impact of greenwashing on customer perceptions and behavior include brand reputation and environmental responsibility (Qayyum et al., 2022) [7]. Observation of Paradox and Green Skepticism it's interesting to note that some research indicates that greenwashing may inadvertently provoke skepticism and critical thinking, leading some customers to actively seek out information and develop a greater awareness of environmental issues. In some circumstances, this paradox could promote responsible consumption, but the major effect is still the harm done to sustainability message and customer confidence. Mitigation Techniques in Technology, Regulation, and Education

Numerous studies highlight how blockchain-based transparency solutions are more successful than traditional certifications in lowering consumer mistrust in order to combat the pervasive problem of greenwashing (Nygaard & Silkoset, 2022) [1]. Public awareness efforts, regulatory enforcement, and educational programs are also crucial in preparing consumers to spot and react to false green promises. Building brand trust via open and constant environmental initiatives can help lessen the harm that greenwashing does to brand equity.

Discussions
The findings reflect the complex and multi-layered effects of greenwashing in social commerce environments:

Brand Trust in Digital Commerce Is Declining Greenwashing immediately damages trust, which is a crucial component of consumer-brand partnerships. Customers mostly rely on peer ratings, digital reviews, and brand reputation in social commerce platforms as there is no physical product evaluation available. The examined literature repeatedly demonstrates that false environmental statements undermine public trust in green marketing as a whole as well as the credibility of specific businesses. Research (e.g., Qayyum et al., 2022) [7] shows how sentiments of betrayal and diminished brand equity result from perceptions of deceit. Although some customers react cautiously and skeptically, many completely withdraw, which reduces the impact of sincere ecological initiatives. Perception Shaping Driven by Influencers

Green marketing messages are greatly influenced by social media influencers (SMIs). Customers' parasocial connections can strengthen the veracity of green claims or,

on the other hand, spread false information if influencers unintentionally endorse greenwashed goods. SMIs can either support the dissemination of genuine sustainability messages or justify misleading environmental narratives. Because influencers' endorsements have the power to build or destroy consumer trust in sustainable branding, this emphasizes the necessity of influencer education and ethical content control. The Function of Behavioral and Psychological Mediators.

Greenwashing has a nonlinear effect that is influenced by a variety of mediating and moderating psychological variables. Consumer responses to greenwashing have been found to be mediated by variables including perceived betrayal, environmental concern, and green trust (e.g., Qayyum *et al*., 2022 [7]; Psychological Contract Theory research). In the meanwhile, brand reputation and environmental responsibility serve as buffers; reducing the harm that greenwashing does to customer loyalty and intent. This intricacy emphasizes that consumers actively evaluate and filter signals depending on their ideas, levels of trust, and cognitive engagement—they are not passive receivers of green claims. The Paradoxical Awareness Effect it's interesting to note that some research (such as the most current studies on circular consumption) contends that being exposed to greenwashing might actually increase environmental consciousness. Customers may critically assess sustainability promises when they notice discrepancies, which promotes skepticism and information-seeking and, in the end, results in better-informed choices. This "green skepticism" needs to be handled carefully, though, because the wider and more predictable result is still detrimental—eroding confidence, undermining the significance of real green marketing, and stalling the progress toward true sustainability.

Accountability and Mitigation Techniques recurring issue in the literature is the need for a multifaceted strategy to counteract greenwashing. It has been demonstrated that technological technologies, especially blockchain, improve traceability and lessen ambiguity in sustainability claims (Nygaard & Silkoset, 2022) [1]. Education programs may improve environmental and digital literacy, empowering customers to assess green promises more accurately. Standardizing environmental message also requires bolstering regulatory monitoring and public policy. In the end, consistent moral behavior—not performance marketing—must be used to establish brand credibility. Verifiable, open methods that meet societal norms and customer expectations are essential for establishing long-term trust.

Conclusion

Greenwashing has become a major obstacle to genuine sustainability and customer trust in the digital age, since social commerce platforms mediate consumer-brand interactions more and more. Despite growing awareness of greenwashing, many consumers, especially in emerging economies, still find it difficult to spot false environmental claims, especially in the informal and persuasive environments influenced by user-generated content and influencer marketing, according to this review of recent academic literature.

According to the analyzed studies, greenwashing has a detrimental impact on customer trust, brand loyalty, and intentions to make green purchases. These impacts are further mediated by psychological processes including

disorientation, diminished brand equity, and felt betrayal. It's also interesting to note that some research indicates that greenwashing might paradoxically promote sustainable behavior and increase environmental awareness, although through intricate mediating factors like information seeking and environmental concern. Social media is a double-edged sword in sustainability communication because of the parasocial ties with influencers and the legitimacy of green messaging, which have been demonstrated to greatly affect consumer behavior.

In order to effectively counteract greenwashing, companies need to go beyond hyperbolic statements and make a commitment to sustainable policies that are verifiable, moral, and open. Restoring customer trust requires a combination of independent certification programs, public education, and technological solutions like blockchain and data analytics. Furthermore, safeguarding consumers and the integrity of the sustainable economy depend on promoting green literacy and critical engagement with environmental messages, particularly among younger customers.

In the end, maintaining consistency between brand message and sincere environmental performance is necessary to win over long-term customers. Accountability, transparency, and consumer empowerment methods must change along with the digital commerce environment. Only then can sustainable branding transcend from marketing jargon to practical, significant action.

Limitations of the Study

This study is mostly conceptual in nature and draws from secondary sources including case studies, industry reports, and scholarly literature. Because of this, it lacks primary research and empirical data, which makes it more difficult to make clear causal conclusions about how consumers would react to greenwashing in online sales. Although the report provides a general overview of international studies, it skips over regional or cultural differences in social commerce dynamics, regulatory frameworks, and greenwashing awareness. The reliance on pre-existing literature, which might be prone to methodological flaws, biases in sampling, or cultural uniqueness, is another drawback. The conclusions of several of the evaluated research may not be as broadly applicable as they may be since they are contextually limited to specific markets or populations.

Furthermore, because social commerce platforms and digital marketing methods are dynamic and always changing, certain insights may become out of date as platform algorithms, consumer tastes, and technology advance. Last but not least, the conceptual focus precludes direct observation of how customers respond to greenwashing messaging in real-time social commerce settings. Surveys, experiments, and cross-cultural field studies are examples of empirical approaches that should be used in future study to confirm and build on the findings reported here. The subtleties of greenwashing perception, trust building, and the efficacy of technical or legislative responses across various digital ecosystems should all be better captured by such study.

Future Perspectives

It will become more and more important to fight greenwashing in these digital ecosystems as social commerce develops and changes the nature of consumer-

brand connections. Creating reliable, consistent frameworks for confirming sustainability claims on various internet platforms is the key to the future of this field's study. New technologies that promise to increase supply chain traceability, improve transparency, and reduce customer distrust include blockchain, artificial intelligence, and real-time verification systems.

The cultural and psychological elements that influence how consumers react to greenwashing require more research. Future study should use cross-cultural and localized research approaches to produce practical findings that are suited to a variety of demographic circumstances, since trust, digital literacy, and environmental values differ greatly among locations. Marketers and legislators would have a better understanding of how to genuinely promote sustainability in international markets thanks to our effort.

International rules and ethical standards for online green marketing may also be developed as a result of cooperation between authorities, digital platforms, and sustainability activists. Future studies should examine ways to guarantee responsibility in influencer-brand collaborations and stop the spread of false environmental narratives, given the growing power of social media influencers in influencing public opinion.

Last but not least, fostering an open and reliable sustainable economy will depend heavily on empowering customers via digital literacy, environmental education, and access to validated information. Future studies should examine how customers interact with these technologies in real-time, fast-paced social commerce settings; in addition to examining what tools can support this empowerment.

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