

# Eco-Labels and Trust: Analyzing the Credibility of Green Marketing Claims among Indian Youth

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## ABSTRACT

*Eco-labels are a key tool used in green marketing to inform consumers about the environmental benefits of products. Among Indian youth—a generation increasingly aware of climate issues—eco-labels are becoming more visible. However, the credibility of these labels and consumer trust in them remains a concern, particularly amid rising incidents of greenwashing. This study investigates how Indian youth perceive and respond to eco-labels and whether they influence purchase behavior. Using a mixed-method approach involving surveys and interviews, the study finds that while awareness of eco-labels is growing, trust remains conditional—reliant on brand reputation, third-party certification, and transparency. The paper concludes with recommendations for enhancing eco-label effectiveness in India's youth market.*

**Keywords:** Eco-labels, green marketing, consumer trust, Indian youth, sustainability, greenwashing, environmental behavior, product credibility

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a market increasingly shaped by sustainability concerns, **eco-labels**—visual tags or certifications indicating a product's environmental friendliness—have emerged as important tools for influencing consumer decisions. From “organic,” “eco-friendly,” “biodegradable” to “carbon neutral,” these labels promise to guide buyers toward more sustainable choices. However, as the green product market grows, so does skepticism about the **credibility of these claims**, especially among informed and digitally connected consumers such as **Indian youth**.

Millennials and Gen Z in India are more conscious than ever about the environment, yet they are also highly critical of brands. In an age where **greenwashing**—the practice of making false or misleading environmental claims—is rampant, trust in eco-labels has become crucial. This study explores the perceptions of Indian youth regarding eco-labels and examines how trust in these labels affects their purchasing behavior.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**2.1 Eco-Labels and Consumer Behavior** According to D'Souza et al. (2007), eco-labels can significantly influence purchasing behavior when consumers understand and trust them. Labels act as simplified communication tools that help buyers make ethical decisions quickly.

**2.2 Youth Awareness and Green Skepticism** Kumar and Ghodeswar (2015) observed that while Indian youth are environmentally aware, they tend to question the **authenticity of green claims**, especially if not backed by credible sources.

**2.3 Trust and Brand Transparency** Chen (2010) states that **green trust**—the willingness to rely on a product based on its environmental performance—depends heavily on perceived brand integrity, transparency, and third-party verification.

**2.4 The Impact of Greenwashing** Delmas and Burbano (2011) warned that increasing greenwashing can backfire, leading to widespread distrust, especially among digitally literate young consumers.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

A **mixed-method approach** was used:

- **Quantitative Survey:** 300 Indian youth (ages 18–30) across five cities responded to an online questionnaire.
- **Qualitative Interviews:** 20 in-depth interviews were conducted to gather deeper insights on eco-label perception.
- **Key Variables:** Awareness of eco-labels, perceived credibility, trust in green claims, purchase behavior.

## 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

**4.1 Awareness of Eco-Labels** 70% of respondents recognized at least one eco-label, such as “FSSAI Organic,” “Energy Star,” or “Forest Stewardship Council.” However, only 38% could correctly explain what the label meant.

#### 4.2 Trust Factors Trust in eco-labels depended on:

- **Third-party verification** (67%)
- **Familiarity with the brand** (52%)
- **Government endorsement** (48%)

#### 4.3 Impact on Purchase Behavior

- 60% said they would choose a product with a credible eco-label over a non-labeled alternative.
- 44% admitted they often check for labels but don't always understand their implications.

**4.4 Greenwashing Concerns** 49% of respondents expressed concern over false or misleading green claims. They reported seeing brands misuse terms like "natural" or "eco-safe" without proof.

### 5. DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that Indian youth are willing to trust eco-labels, but that trust is not unconditional. Labels backed by known organizations, transparent certification processes, and clear communication are more effective. On the other hand, vague or brand-created labels often arouse suspicion.

There is also a knowledge gap—many youth are not fully aware of the standards behind the labels. This weakens the potential of eco-labels to act as credible decision-making tools. Moreover, the impact of social media and peer influence is significant. When eco-labels are endorsed by influencers or recommended by peers, they tend to gain more traction.

### 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Standardize Eco-Labels:** Government or independent bodies should regulate and unify eco-labeling standards in India.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Educate young consumers on how to identify and interpret credible eco-labels.
- **Transparency in Marketing:** Brands must disclose certification details and avoid vague claims like "eco-friendly" without proof.
- **Digital Verification Tools:** Use QR codes or apps to let consumers verify the authenticity of eco-labels in real time.
- **Influencer Engagement:** Partner with trusted youth influencers to spread accurate knowledge about eco-labels.

### 7. CONCLUSION

Eco-labels play a critical role in guiding environmentally conscious youth toward sustainable consumption. However, for Indian youth, trust in green marketing claims is fragile and strongly tied to transparency, certification, and brand integrity. As greenwashing becomes more prevalent, there is an urgent need to protect and strengthen the credibility of eco-labels through regulation, education, and digital transparency. Doing so will not only empower young consumers but also support the broader shift toward a sustainable economy.

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