

Impact of Trust in Eco-Friendly Brands on Consumer Behavior and Sustainable Buying Decisions

Annu (Ph. D Research Scholar), Dr. Harish Purohit (Associate Professor)
Department – Commerce, Shri Jagdish Prasad Jhabarmal Tibrewala University, Chudela, Jhunjhunu

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ABSTRACT

The transition from conventional consumption to environmentally responsible buying depends not only on ecological concern but also on the level of trust consumers place in green brands. In recent years, eco-friendly products have entered mainstream markets in categories such as food, clothing, personal care, appliances, and household goods. Yet the growth of such products has been uneven because consumers often doubt whether environmental claims are genuine, measurable, and worth paying for. Trust therefore becomes a central variable connecting green communication with actual consumer response. When consumers believe that a brand's ecological commitments are credible, transparent, and consistent with product performance, they are more likely to form favorable attitudes, stronger purchase intentions, and long-term loyalty. When trust is weak, even highly visible sustainability messages may produce skepticism rather than commitment.

This article examines the impact of trust in eco-friendly brands on consumer behavior and sustainable buying decisions, with particular attention to how trust influences perceived value, risk reduction, attitude formation, and purchase intention. The paper adopts a conceptual and analytical approach based on secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, and research reports on green marketing, consumer trust, sustainable consumption, and brand credibility. The discussion argues that trust is not a peripheral element but a foundational determinant of green consumer behavior because it transforms environmental claims into believable purchase motivations. The article concludes that trust grows when eco-friendly brands demonstrate authenticity, product quality, transparency, credible certification, and consistent communication, and that such trust significantly strengthens sustainable buying decisions.

Keywords-Eco-friendly brands; Consumer trust; Green consumer behavior; Sustainable buying decisions; Brand credibility; Green marketing; Purchase intention

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing ecological crisis has altered the language of markets and consumption across the world. Consumers now encounter terms such as sustainable, recyclable, organic, carbon-neutral, cruelty-free, and environmentally responsible in everyday purchase situations. This shift reflects an important transformation in public awareness: buying is no longer viewed solely as a personal economic choice but also as a social and environmental act. As a result, firms increasingly attempt to position themselves as green brands and to communicate environmental responsibility through packaging, advertising, product design, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. However, the mere presence of eco-friendly claims does not automatically lead to sustainable purchasing. A decisive question remains: do consumers trust such claims enough to translate them into actual buying decisions? This question is especially important because green markets operate in an atmosphere where information asymmetry is common. Many environmental attributes of products cannot be easily verified by buyers at the point of purchase. A consumer can directly evaluate taste, appearance, or size, but cannot always confirm whether a product was ethically sourced, manufactured with lower emissions, or packaged in a truly sustainable manner. In such contexts, trust works as a bridge between brand claims and consumer action. It reduces uncertainty, shapes perceptions of authenticity, and influences whether a customer sees a green product as a sincere solution or merely as a marketing strategy. Thus, trust becomes a crucial condition for sustainable consumer behavior.

Consumer behavior toward eco-friendly brands is shaped by a combination of rational, emotional, and ethical factors. Consumers assess not only price and utility but also social meaning, product risk, environmental impact, and brand reputation. For many buyers, especially younger and educated segments, environmental values matter; yet values alone may not be sufficient if green claims appear vague or opportunistic. This is where trust becomes powerful. A trusted brand can reassure consumers that higher prices, behavioral effort, or product switching are justified. A distrusted brand, by contrast, can undermine sustainable demand even among environmentally aware consumers.

The present article investigates how trust in eco-friendly brands influences consumer behavior and sustainable buying decisions. It explores the conceptual meaning of trust in green marketing, the relationship between trust and purchase intention, and the mechanisms through which credibility, transparency, consistency, and certification

shape consumer response. It also examines major barriers such as greenwashing, information overload, price concerns, and inconsistent product performance. By doing so, the paper seeks to show that trust is not merely a supportive variable in the green marketplace; it is one of the primary forces that determine whether sustainable consumption remains a desirable ideal or becomes a practical pattern of behavior.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on green consumer behavior has steadily expanded from general concerns about environmental attitudes to more focused inquiries into purchase intention, ethical consumption, and brand-level influences. Early work in the field emphasized the role of environmental concern, social responsibility, and personal values in shaping pro-environmental behavior. Researchers found that many consumers expressed positive attitudes toward ecological protection, but those attitudes did not always result in actual green purchasing. This discrepancy directed attention toward mediating variables such as perceived risk, product availability, social norms, and trust. Brand trust has long been recognized as an important variable in marketing because it reduces uncertainty and supports long-term exchange relationships. In green marketing, however, trust takes on even greater importance because environmental promises are often difficult for consumers to verify directly. Studies by Chen and Chang, Peattie, and other scholars suggest that trust in green brands depends on credibility, clarity of communication, and perceived sincerity of environmental commitment. Green trust has been linked with favorable brand attitudes, higher willingness to buy, and lower skepticism toward sustainability claims.

Several studies have shown that perceived greenwashing weakens trust and damages brand reputation. When consumers suspect that an environmental claim is exaggerated, symbolic, or unsupported by action, they become less willing to pay premium prices or to switch from familiar conventional products. Research also indicates that trust interacts with product quality. Eco-friendly positioning alone is not enough; consumers expect green products to perform effectively in addition to being sustainable. If performance falls short, trust erodes quickly, and sustainable buying decisions become less likely.

Another important stream of literature examines the relationship between trust and purchase intention through the lens of perceived value and risk. Trust lowers psychological and functional uncertainty by making consumers feel more confident that the product will deliver both environmental and personal benefits. This is particularly relevant in categories such as organic food, skincare products, sustainable fashion, and green household cleaners, where consumers may worry about quality, safety, or hidden trade-offs. The literature suggests that when trust is high, consumers are more receptive to premium pricing and more willing to integrate sustainable products into routine consumption.

Recent scholarship also highlights the role of transparency, traceability, third-party certification, and digital communication in building trust. Brands that disclose sourcing practices, carbon footprints, ingredient details, labor conditions, or recyclable content tend to appear more credible than those relying on vague slogans. Social media has further intensified this dynamic. While it allows brands to communicate sustainability narratives more effectively, it also gives consumers and watchdog groups the tools to challenge misleading claims. Thus, the literature increasingly treats trust as a dynamic outcome of ongoing verification, reputation, and consumer-brand interaction rather than a static image variable.

Overall, prior studies support the view that trust is central to green purchase behavior, but they also show that trust is fragile and context-dependent. It can be strengthened by authenticity, consistency, product performance, and evidence-based communication, and weakened by opportunism, poor transparency, and credibility gaps. The present article builds on this literature by organizing these insights into a focused discussion of how trust in eco-friendly brands influences consumer behavior and sustainable buying decisions in contemporary markets.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study has been undertaken with the following objectives. First, it aims to examine the conceptual significance of trust in the context of eco-friendly brands and green consumer behavior. Second, it seeks to analyze how trust influences sustainable buying decisions by shaping consumer attitudes, perceptions of value, and willingness to purchase green products. Third, it aims to identify the major factors that build or weaken trust in eco-friendly brands, including brand credibility, transparency, certification, consistency, and product performance. Fourth, the study examines the barriers that prevent consumers from translating trust into regular sustainable purchasing. Finally, it attempts to suggest practical implications for marketers, policymakers, and green businesses interested in strengthening consumer confidence in sustainable products and brands.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article is based on a conceptual, analytical, and descriptive research design. It does not rely on primary field data; instead, it uses secondary sources to interpret how trust in eco-friendly brands shapes consumer behavior and sustainable buying decisions. The conceptual orientation of the study is appropriate because the topic involves theoretical relationships among trust, credibility, environmental claims, purchase intention, perceived risk, and

sustainable consumption behavior. Such variables require careful synthesis of marketing theory, green consumer research, and brand management literature.

Secondary data for the study have been drawn from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, conference papers, and relevant academic discussions in the fields of green marketing, consumer behavior, branding, and sustainability studies. The method of analysis is interpretive and comparative. Key concepts have been examined thematically in order to understand how trust develops, how it interacts with consumer decision-making, and why it matters for sustainable buying. The study also pays attention to recurrent barriers identified in the literature, such as green skepticism, information asymmetry, inconsistent quality, and premium pricing. Through this approach, the article develops a coherent explanation of trust as a foundational driver of sustainable consumption decisions.

Trust in Eco-Friendly Brands: A Conceptual Overview

Trust may be understood as the consumer's confident expectation that a brand will act in a reliable, honest, and beneficial manner. In the specific context of eco-friendly brands, trust refers to the belief that a company's environmental claims are genuine, its sustainability promises are meaningful, and its products are aligned with ecological responsibility beyond superficial image creation. Trust is therefore both cognitive and affective. Cognitively, consumers assess evidence, consistency, and competence; affectively, they develop confidence, comfort, and moral approval toward the brand.

Eco-friendly brands differ from conventional brands because they make claims that extend beyond direct product utility. They often communicate reduced harm, ethical sourcing, waste minimization, recyclable packaging, renewable materials, or low-impact production methods. These claims involve what can be called invisible attributes, since they are not always apparent from immediate consumption. As a result, trust becomes indispensable. Without trust, the consumer may perceive environmental claims as uncertain, manipulative, or irrelevant. With trust, those same claims become meaningful signals that influence evaluation and purchase.

Green trust is also closely linked with perceived authenticity. Consumers today are exposed to extensive sustainability messaging, but not all of it generates confidence. Brands that appear to adopt ecological themes only when profitable are often treated with suspicion. By contrast, brands whose values, operations, communication, and product design appear internally consistent are more likely to inspire trust. Trust therefore emerges not from isolated claims but from an integrated brand experience. It is built through a history of truthful communication, transparent practices, reliable product performance, and visible commitment to sustainability goals.

Conceptually, trust serves several functions in the green marketplace. It reduces perceived risk, simplifies decision-making, supports willingness to try new products, and creates a stronger connection between personal values and market behavior. It can also convert ethical sympathy into actual buying action. Many consumers want to make responsible choices, yet face uncertainty about whether specific products or brands truly deserve their support. Trust resolves part of that uncertainty. In this sense, eco-friendly brand trust is not only an outcome of good marketing; it is a necessary condition for the effectiveness of sustainable branding itself.

Consumer Behavior toward Eco-Friendly Brands

Consumer behavior toward eco-friendly brands is shaped by an interaction of personal values, perceived benefits, social influence, habit, and market cues. Some consumers are motivated by environmental concern and see sustainable purchases as an extension of their ethical identity. Others respond more strongly to health, safety, quality, lifestyle, or prestige-related benefits. Eco-friendly brands often operate at the intersection of these motives. They do not merely offer products; they offer symbolic reassurance that consumption can be aligned with responsibility. Whether consumers accept that reassurance, however, depends heavily on trust.

In many product categories, consumer behavior is influenced by perceived performance trade-offs. Buyers may wonder whether eco-friendly detergents clean effectively, whether sustainable fashion is durable, or whether organic products justify their price. If a brand is trusted, these concerns are softened because the consumer assumes that the brand has the competence and integrity to deliver on both environmental and functional promises. Trust thus improves brand evaluation by increasing confidence in product performance and reducing fears of disappointment. It can also make first-time trial more likely, which is often the most difficult step in changing consumer habits.

Brand familiarity and reputation also affect behavior toward eco-friendly products. Established brands may benefit from pre-existing trust, whereas newer green brands must work harder to communicate legitimacy. Yet established brands also face stricter scrutiny because consumers may question whether sustainability is central to their identity or merely an extension of conventional commercial strategy. Consequently, the relationship between trust and behavior is not automatic; it depends on how successfully a brand aligns its sustainability messaging with its broader reputation and observed conduct.

Social influence further shapes eco-friendly consumer behavior. Recommendations from peers, influencers, experts, or community groups can reinforce trust by validating a brand's green claims. Online reviews,

testimonials, and user-generated content often serve as trust cues, especially for younger consumers. At the same time, negative publicity spreads quickly and can undermine trust more rapidly than in traditional brand settings. Thus, consumer behavior toward eco-friendly brands develops within a networked environment in which trust is continuously strengthened or challenged through public discourse, digital visibility, and social comparison.

Trust as a Determinant of Sustainable Buying Decisions

Sustainable buying decisions involve more than positive attitudes toward the environment. They require consumers to select products that are often associated with higher price points, unfamiliar labels, or behavior change. Trust plays a decisive role in enabling such decisions because it reduces the psychological cost of uncertainty. A consumer who trusts an eco-friendly brand is more willing to believe that the purchase will create real environmental value, personal satisfaction, and acceptable product performance. This confidence can transform abstract environmental concern into concrete market choice.

One important way trust influences sustainable buying is through perceived value. Green products are frequently evaluated not only in terms of utility but also in terms of ethical worth. If the consumer trusts the brand, the added value of sustainability appears real rather than symbolic. The buyer feels that the premium price, extra effort, or switch from a familiar product is justified. In contrast, if trust is low, the same premium may be interpreted as exploitation or image manipulation. Thus, trust affects how consumers weigh costs and benefits in sustainable purchase situations.

Trust also shapes repeat buying and loyalty. A single sustainable purchase may be driven by curiosity or promotional cues, but continued buying usually requires confidence in the brand's promises. When consumers repeatedly observe consistency between claim and experience, trust deepens and sustainable buying becomes habitual. Over time, such habits can normalize eco-friendly consumption and turn sustainable products from niche alternatives into standard choices. This makes trust particularly important not only for attracting first-time buyers but also for retaining them in the long run.

Moreover, trust strengthens resilience against competing market pressures. Consumers often face lower-priced conventional alternatives, confusing claims from multiple brands, and limited time for product comparison. In such contexts, trust acts as a decision shortcut. A trusted green brand is more likely to remain in the consumer's consideration set and to be chosen even when alternatives are cheaper or more aggressively promoted. Therefore, trust should be seen as a strategic determinant of sustainable buying because it lowers hesitation, supports intention, and stabilizes repeated action.

Impact of Brand Credibility, Transparency, and Certification

Brand credibility is one of the strongest foundations of trust in eco-friendly markets. Credibility refers to the perception that the brand is knowledgeable, capable, and truthful in its communication. When a company makes environmental claims in a clear, specific, and verifiable manner, consumers are more likely to view those claims as believable. Generic slogans such as natural, green, or sustainable often fail to create trust unless supported by concrete information. Credibility therefore depends on both competence and honesty: the brand must appear able to deliver on its promises and willing to communicate them truthfully.

Transparency further deepens trust because it signals openness rather than concealment. Consumers are more confident in eco-friendly brands that disclose material sourcing, production methods, waste practices, emissions data, labor conditions, or packaging choices in understandable terms. Transparency does not mean overwhelming consumers with technical information; it means making the basis of environmental claims accessible and coherent. Brands that explain what they do, why they do it, and how their products differ from conventional alternatives reduce ambiguity and encourage informed buying decisions.

Third-party certification plays a particularly important role where direct verification is difficult. Labels related to organic production, cruelty-free testing, fair trade practices, energy efficiency, or sustainable forestry often function as external trust signals. Their effectiveness depends on consumer awareness and confidence in the certifying body, but in many cases they reduce skepticism by shifting verification from the brand's own advertising to recognized standards. Certification can thus serve as a bridge between eco-claims and consumer acceptance, especially for first-time buyers who lack prior experience with the brand.

Consistency is equally important. Trust is weakened when a brand promotes sustainability in one area while appearing irresponsible in another. For example, recyclable packaging may not convince consumers if the company is simultaneously associated with unethical sourcing or contradictory corporate behavior. Eco-friendly brands must therefore maintain coherence across product quality, corporate conduct, communication style, and environmental performance. Trust thrives when consumers perceive alignment among message, product, and practice. It declines when sustainability appears fragmented, selective, or strategically exaggerated.

Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of the available literature suggests that trust works alongside, but often more decisively than, several other green purchase determinants. Environmental awareness may motivate consumers to care about

sustainability, and positive attitudes may create openness toward green products, but trust determines whether that openness becomes commitment. Many consumers are already aware of climate change, plastic waste, resource depletion, and ethical production concerns. Yet awareness alone does not eliminate uncertainty about individual brands. Trust fills this gap by translating broad environmental concern into brand-specific confidence.

Compared with price, trust operates differently but not less powerfully. Price usually functions as a visible and immediate barrier, whereas trust functions as an interpretive filter. A trusted green brand can justify a higher price because consumers believe that the premium corresponds to real value. An untrusted brand cannot easily command the same premium, even if its environmental claims are stronger on paper. This indicates that price sensitivity and trust are interconnected: trust moderates the negative effect of premium pricing by improving perceived fairness and legitimacy.

Trust can also be compared with product quality as a determinant of sustainable buying. In practice, consumers do not separate quality and trust sharply. A brand that repeatedly delivers good performance tends to be trusted more, while trust encourages consumers to infer competence from past experience or credible signals. Thus, the relationship is reciprocal. However, when environmental claims are central to positioning, trust becomes broader than quality alone because it includes moral confidence in the brand's intentions. Consumers may accept minor imperfections in a green product if they deeply trust the brand's sincerity, but they are unlikely to do so if they suspect deception.

Overall, the comparative picture suggests that trust is a meta-variable in sustainable buying decisions. It influences how consumers interpret awareness, price, quality, certification, and brand communication. Rather than functioning as one factor among many, it often structures the effect of other variables. This is why eco-friendly branding strategies that focus solely on awareness creation or visual green imagery may fail if they neglect trust-building mechanisms.

5. CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Despite growing interest in sustainable consumption, several challenges hinder the development of trust in eco-friendly brands. One of the most serious barriers is greenwashing. When brands exaggerate, oversimplify, or selectively present their environmental credentials, consumers become skeptical not only about the specific brand but also about green claims more generally. Greenwashing damages the credibility of the wider sustainable marketplace by making consumers question whether eco-labels and sustainability narratives are meaningful or merely fashionable promotional devices.

Another barrier is information complexity. Environmental performance is often difficult to communicate in simple and relatable terms. Technical language, fragmented labels, and inconsistent standards can confuse buyers rather than reassure them. If consumers feel overwhelmed by information, they may return to familiar decision cues such as price, convenience, and habit. In such situations, trust becomes difficult to establish because the consumer lacks a clear basis for evaluation. The challenge for green brands is therefore not only to disclose information but to do so in a form that is credible, understandable, and decision-relevant.

Price premium remains a practical obstacle. Even when consumers trust a brand's sustainability claims, they may hesitate if products are significantly more expensive than conventional alternatives. This is especially true in markets where disposable income is constrained or where green products are perceived as lifestyle luxuries rather than necessities. Trust can soften price resistance, but it cannot fully eliminate economic limits. Brands must therefore consider affordability, value communication, and product accessibility if they want trust to lead to consistent sustainable buying.

Limited availability, inconsistent quality, and weak post-purchase reinforcement also affect trust. If consumers struggle to find eco-friendly products regularly, or if product performance varies across batches and categories, confidence declines. Sustainable buying depends on repetition, and repetition depends on reliable market presence. Furthermore, brands that fail to sustain communication after purchase may lose the opportunity to deepen trust through education, community engagement, and proof of impact. These barriers show that trust must be managed continuously across the entire consumer journey rather than only at the moment of sale.

Suggestions and Implications

Eco-friendly brands should treat trust-building as a long-term strategic function rather than a short-term promotional tactic. First, sustainability claims must be specific, evidence-based, and aligned with actual business practices. Brands should avoid vague ecological language and instead communicate measurable commitments through plain and credible messaging. If a product uses recycled material, saves water, reduces emissions, or follows ethical sourcing standards, that information should be stated clearly and consistently across packaging, websites, and promotional content.

Second, companies should strengthen transparency and traceability. Consumers increasingly expect to know where products come from, how they are made, and what environmental difference they create. Brands that provide accessible information about sourcing, ingredients, production standards, and disposal guidance are more likely to appear trustworthy. Digital tools such as QR codes, impact dashboards, and traceability platforms can

help communicate this information in a consumer-friendly way, especially to younger buyers who are accustomed to digital verification.

Third, credible third-party endorsements and certifications should be used carefully and honestly. Certifications are powerful when they are recognized, relevant, and easy to understand. However, excessive or poorly explained labels can create confusion. Marketers should therefore accompany certification with consumer education. Public institutions and regulators also have an important role in strengthening standardization and penalizing misleading environmental claims. Better regulation can improve trust not only in individual brands but also in the sustainability marketplace as a whole.

Fourth, green brands must ensure that sustainability is matched by strong product performance and fair value. Consumers may appreciate ethical messaging, but repeated buying depends on usefulness, convenience, design, and quality. Marketers should therefore integrate sustainability into a broader value proposition rather than presenting it as a substitute for performance. Finally, brands should cultivate dialogue with consumers through communities, feedback mechanisms, and responsive communication. Trust deepens when consumers feel that brands are accountable, open to scrutiny, and committed to continuous improvement rather than polished self-presentation.

6. CONCLUSION

The study shows that trust in eco-friendly brands plays a vital role in shaping consumer behavior and sustainable buying decisions. In green markets, consumers often face uncertainty because many environmental attributes cannot be directly verified. Trust reduces this uncertainty by making brand claims believable, lowering perceived risk, and increasing confidence in both product performance and ethical value. It therefore acts as a bridge between environmental concern and actual purchasing behavior. Without trust, sustainability messaging remains weak and vulnerable to skepticism; with trust, it becomes a meaningful basis for consumer commitment.

The analysis further indicates that trust is built through credibility, transparency, certification, consistency, and reliable product performance. It is weakened by greenwashing, vague communication, price barriers, and fragmented market experience. Trust does not operate in isolation; it interacts with awareness, price, quality, and social influence. Yet its role is particularly significant because it shapes how consumers interpret these other factors. A trusted eco-friendly brand can justify premium pricing, encourage product trial, support repeat purchasing, and strengthen long-term loyalty in ways that untrusted brands cannot.

In conclusion, sustainable buying decisions are not driven merely by ecological ideals or promotional visibility. They depend on whether consumers believe that eco-friendly brands genuinely deserve support. For this reason, trust should be placed at the center of green brand strategy, public policy, and sustainable market development. Strengthening trust in eco-friendly brands is essential not only for business success but also for the wider social goal of making responsible consumption a durable and credible part of everyday life.

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