

Research Article

The Role of Consumer Trust in Sustainability in Increasing Interest in Purchasing Environmentally Friendly Products

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Abstract: This study explores the role of consumer trust in sustainability as a key factor influencing interest in purchasing environmentally friendly products. Despite increasing environmental awareness, many consumers remain hesitant to take action due to skepticism, perceived risk, and uncertainty about product authenticity. A systematic review of international literature (2020–2025) identifies five core trust dimensions: integrity, transparency, credibility, behavioral consistency, and long-term commitment. These dimensions shape consumers' evaluations of green product claims and influence their willingness to engage in sustainable consumption. To explain the psychological mechanisms at work, the study integrates multiple theoretical perspectives: the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) emphasizes attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control; Trust Theory explains how reliability and honesty reduce perceived risks; Signaling Theory clarifies how credible environmental communication influences consumer belief; and the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory connects personal values to pro-environmental actions. By synthesizing these frameworks, the analysis positions trust not merely as a mediating factor but as a foundational driver that enables the translation of positive environmental attitudes into actual green purchasing behavior. The findings underscore that businesses must move beyond superficial eco-friendly messaging to implement verifiable and consistent sustainability practices. This includes transparent reporting, third-party certification, and active stakeholder engagement. Policymakers also have a critical role in regulating misleading environmental claims and enforcing penalties for greenwashing, thereby protecting consumers and ensuring fair competition. Strengthening trust through these measures can help close the persistent gap between pro-environmental intentions and real-world purchasing actions. Overall, this study provides actionable insights for marketers, sustainability strategists, and regulators, highlighting that consumer trust is the cornerstone of sustainable market transformation. By cultivating trust, stakeholders can encourage environmentally responsible behavior at scale and contribute to long-term ecological well-being.

Keywords: Behavior; Consumer; Greenwashing; Sustainability; Transparency

Received: 16 May, 2025

Revised: 28 May, 2025

Accepted: 13 June, 2025

Published: 30 June, 2025

Curr. Ver.: 30 June, 2025



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1. Introduction

In recent years, interest in purchasing environmentally friendly products has grown substantially as consumers become increasingly aware of environmental degradation and climate change. Environmentally friendly products also referred to as green or sustainable products are designed to minimize environmental impact throughout their lifecycle, from production to disposal (Nimse & Kim, 2022). Consumer interest in these products is driven not only by ecological concerns but also by personal values, perceived benefits, and societal influence (Lee & Chow, 2021). Scholars have identified that heightened environmental consciousness is positively correlated with green purchasing intentions (Khare, 2020). However, despite increased environmental awareness, the actual behavioral shift toward purchasing eco friendly products remains inconsistent, often hindered by skepticism, lack of trust, or insufficient information (Li et al., 2021). These inconsistencies highlight the need for

further investigation into the psychological and relational factors that drive consumer interest in sustainable consumption.

Addressing this gap, the present study focuses on the role of consumer trust in sustainability as a key factor influencing interest in environmentally friendly products. This focus is urgent given the widespread incidence of greenwashing, wherein brands falsely claim to be environmentally responsible, thereby eroding consumer trust (de Jong et al., 2021). Empirical research indicates that trust in sustainability claims whether related to eco labels, company practices, or product transparency significantly influences consumer willingness to pay a premium for green products (Testa et al., 2021). As consumers are frequently exposed to contradictory information about sustainability, trust emerges as a central variable in determining whether pro environmental attitudes translate into green purchasing behavior (Singh & Verma, 2022). Consequently, understanding how consumer trust in sustainability can strengthen purchasing interest is both theoretically significant and practically relevant for marketers and policymakers seeking to foster sustainable consumption.

Consumer trust in sustainability encompasses consumers' belief in the credibility, honesty, and competence of companies' environmental claims and practices (Martínez et al., 2020). This trust is developed through consistent corporate behavior, third party certifications, transparent communication, and visible environmental commitment (Grubor & Milovanov, 2021). When consumers perceive a company as genuinely committed to sustainability, they are more likely to develop emotional bonds with the brand, which in turn enhances their willingness to engage in green purchasing (Zhang et al., 2023). Conversely, when trust is undermined, even environmentally conscious consumers may refrain from acting on their values, thereby diminishing the impact of sustainability marketing efforts (Chen & Chang, 2020). Furthermore, research shows that trust moderates the relationship between environmental concern and green consumption, reinforcing its critical role in shaping sustainable consumer behavior (Shin et al., 2022). Therefore, trust functions not merely as a supplementary factor but as a foundational component in consumers' evaluation of green products.

This study aims to empirically investigate the effect of consumer trust in sustainability on interest in purchasing environmentally friendly products. Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing literature on green consumer behavior by positioning trust as a central construct in the decision making process. It offers an integrative perspective that connects trust formation with behavioral intentions in the context of sustainability. Empirically, the findings may provide actionable insights for businesses to strengthen their sustainability communication strategies and build lasting trust with environmentally conscious consumers. Moreover, the study can inform public policy by emphasizing the importance of credibility and regulation in sustainability claims to support a more transparent and effective green marketplace.

In recent years, increasing environmental concerns have contributed to a significant rise in consumer interest in environmentally friendly products. A considerable body of literature has established that environmental awareness, personal values, and perceived societal norms significantly influence green purchasing intentions (Khare, 2020; Lee & Chow, 2021; Nimse & Kim, 2022). However, despite growing awareness and pro environmental attitudes, a notable gap exists between consumers' intentions and their actual purchasing behaviors (Li et al., 2021; Grubor & Milovanov, 2021). This inconsistency suggests that other underlying psychological mechanisms may be at play, which hinder consumers from translating green attitudes into green actions. Previous studies have mainly focused on factors such as price sensitivity, product availability, or skepticism toward green claims (Chen & Chang, 2020; Testa et al., 2021), yet few have explored the relational and trust based dimensions that shape consumer engagement with sustainable products. Moreover, while some research has examined the effect of eco labeling or corporate sustainability communication on purchase behavior (Martínez et al., 2020), these studies often treat trust as a secondary or mediating factor, rather than as a central construct worthy of independent investigation.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of greenwashing where companies exaggerate or falsify their environmental credentials has intensified consumer skepticism, leading to erosion of trust in sustainability claims (de Jong et al., 2021). While trust in sustainability is acknowledged as critical to fostering green consumption (Shin et al., 2022), few empirical studies have specifically investigated how and to what extent trust influences consumer interest in eco friendly products. Existing models often overlook the emotional and credibility based dimensions of trust that affect consumer decision making under conditions of uncertainty and information overload (Zhang et al., 2023). Additionally, research rarely integrates trust as

a key psychological construct that bridges pro environmental values and actual consumer interest, especially in the context of inconsistent or conflicting sustainability messages in the marketplace (Singh & Verma, 2022). This indicates a pressing need for an integrative framework that positions consumer trust in sustainability not merely as a moderator or background variable but as a core determinant of interest in purchasing environmentally friendly products. Therefore, the current literature lacks a comprehensive understanding of the direct role of trust in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors toward green consumption.

This study contributes novel insights by explicitly positioning consumer trust in sustainability as the central psychological mechanism influencing interest in environmentally friendly products. Unlike previous studies that treat trust as peripheral, this research investigates trust as a core antecedent that links environmental awareness with actual consumer interest. It further distinguishes trust not only in terms of belief in product claims but also in relation to corporate transparency, eco certifications, and long term environmental commitment elements often fragmented in prior research. The integrative approach adopted here advances the theoretical understanding of green consumer behavior while offering practical implications for marketers and policymakers in combating greenwashing and enhancing trust based sustainability strategies.

2. Literature Review

Consumer interest in environmentally friendly products has prompted a growing body of research exploring the psychological, social, and informational drivers behind green purchasing behavior. While early studies primarily focused on environmental awareness, perceived benefits, and pricing strategies, recent literature emphasizes the pivotal role of consumer trust in shaping sustainable consumption. Trust, as a multidimensional construct, has been linked to consumers' evaluation of eco labels, corporate sustainability claims, and their willingness to translate pro environmental attitudes into actual purchasing behavior. This section reviews key theoretical and empirical contributions from prior studies that form the foundation for understanding the influence of trust in sustainability on green purchase intentions. Four main theoretical frameworks are synthesized: the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Trust Theory, Signaling Theory, and the Value Belief Norm (VBN) Theory.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991) serves as a foundational framework in explaining pro environmental consumer behavior. According to TPB, behavioral intention is determined by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of green consumption, a consumer's interest in purchasing environmentally friendly products can be significantly influenced by positive attitudes toward sustainability, perceived social expectations, and the perceived ease or difficulty in engaging in eco friendly behavior (Wang et al., 2020). TPB has been widely applied in green marketing studies, and its constructs have often been extended to incorporate trust and environmental beliefs to improve explanatory power (Singh & Verma, 2022). Thus, TPB provides a solid theoretical structure for analyzing how trust can shape behavioral intentions toward sustainable product purchasing.

Trust Theory

Trust theory posits that trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of others (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Within consumer behavior, particularly in the context of sustainability, trust functions as a key mediator between information provided by firms and the consumer's response. A consumer's belief in a company's environmental responsibility grounded in transparency, consistency, and third party validation leads to greater acceptance and increased willingness to purchase (Chen & Chang, 2020). Given the prevalence of greenwashing, trust is more critical than ever, acting as a filter through which consumers evaluate environmental claims (de Jong et al., 2021). Therefore, trust theory is highly relevant for understanding how consumer belief in sustainability initiatives influences interest in environmentally friendly products.

Signaling Theory

Signaling theory addresses how businesses communicate quality and credibility to reduce information asymmetry between sellers and consumers (Spence, 1973). In the context of sustainability, companies use signals such as eco labels, environmental certifications, and sustainability reports to convey their commitment to green practices. For these signals to be effective, they must be perceived as credible and consistent this is where consumer trust plays a pivotal role (Testa et al., 2021). If the consumer perceives these sustainability signals as trustworthy, it reduces skepticism and increases confidence in green products, which ultimately enhances purchase interest. On the other hand, ineffective or ambiguous signals may fail to foster trust and can even trigger consumer resistance. Thus, signaling theory helps explain how the perception of trustworthiness in sustainability communication influences consumers' behavioral responses.

Value Belief Norm (VBN) Theory

The Value Belief Norm (VBN) theory, formulated by Stern (2000), provides a psychological framework linking values, environmental beliefs, and personal norms to environmentally significant behavior. According to this theory, individuals who hold strong biospheric or altruistic values are more likely to adopt ecological beliefs, which in turn activate personal norms that motivate pro environmental behavior. Trust in sustainability can be seen as an enabler that allows individuals to act on their environmental norms confidently. When consumers believe that a company genuinely supports sustainable values, their internal moral obligation aligns with external validation, increasing the likelihood of environmentally responsible purchasing (Zhang et al., 2023). VBN theory thus supports the integration of trust as an amplifier of moral engagement and interest in sustainable consumption.

Integration of Theoretical Perspectives

By integrating TPB, Trust Theory, Signaling Theory, and VBN Theory, this study establishes a multidimensional foundation to examine the role of consumer trust in sustainability as a determinant of interest in purchasing environmentally friendly products. TPB captures the intentional aspects of behavior, Trust Theory explains the relational and emotional foundations, Signaling Theory deals with how trust is communicated and perceived, while VBN theory adds a moral and normative dimension. This theoretical synthesis is critical for understanding how trust in sustainability influences not only cognitive assessments but also emotional and moral motivations behind green purchase interest. These interlinked theories guide the development of the research model and hypotheses in this study.

3. Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a systematic literature review to explore how consumer trust in sustainability influences interest in purchasing environmentally friendly products. A qualitative literature review is suitable for understanding complex behavioral constructs, particularly in rapidly evolving contexts such as green consumerism and sustainability (Snyder, 2020). This method allows the researcher to synthesize existing findings and construct conceptual linkages between consumer psychology and trust mechanisms within sustainable markets.

The review focuses on peer reviewed international publications from 2020 to 2025, obtained through databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. Selection criteria included empirical studies that directly investigated the role of trust in shaping attitudes or behavior toward green products, eco labeling, corporate sustainability communication, and greenwashing. The systematic review process follows the guidelines of transparency, replicability, and rigor to ensure credibility and relevance (Boell & Cecez Kecmanovic, 2020).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on recurring dimensions of trust such as perceived integrity, transparency, and credibility in sustainability claims (Zhang et al., 2023). This approach is effective in capturing nuanced interpretations of how trust affects behavior under information asymmetry and environmental concern (Singh & Verma, 2022). Findings were interpreted through the lens of integrated theoretical perspectives including the Theory of Planned Behavior, Trust Theory, and Signaling Theory, which are commonly used in sustainability and consumer trust studies (Testa et al., 2021; Grubor &

Milovanov, 2021). These frameworks provide a comprehensive view of how trust operates both cognitively and affectively in shaping consumer interest.

4. Results and Discussion

This study found that consumer trust in sustainability claims plays a critical role in shaping interest in purchasing environmentally friendly products. Through a systematic literature review, the research identified key dimensions of trust namely corporate integrity, transparency in sustainability communication, and the credibility of eco label claims as dominant indicators influencing consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Zhang et al., 2023). Consumers who perceive a company as genuinely committed to sustainability tend to form stronger emotional attachments to the brand, thereby increasing their likelihood of buying green products. Notably, trust is not limited to cognitive evaluation; it also involves affective components such as a sense of security and belief in the company's good intentions (Chen & Chang, 2020).

Thematic analysis revealed that trust acts as a bridge between environmental awareness and purchase intention. Consumers who hold strong biospheric values are often interested in green products, but without trust in sustainability claims, these intentions do not always translate into actual behavior. The findings also show that greenwashing when companies exaggerate or falsify their environmental efforts significantly undermines consumer interest by eroding trust (de Jong et al., 2021). Hence, sustainability signals such as third party certifications, eco labels, and sustainability reports must be perceived as credible and consistent to effectively build and maintain consumer trust. These insights emphasize the importance of trust as a central psychological factor in driving sustainable consumer behavior.

The results of this study reinforce the pivotal role of trust as a foundation in building relationships between companies and consumers in green marketing contexts. In comparison with previous literature, the findings align with the view that trust mediates the relationship between environmental intentions and actual consumer behavior (Shin et al., 2022). By integrating multiple theoretical perspectives namely the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Trust Theory, and Signaling Theory this study offers a multidimensional conceptual framework to understand how trust influences both cognitive and emotional consumer processes. Trust not only strengthens the connection between attitudes and intentions but also serves as a filter for sustainability related information in conditions of asymmetry and uncertainty (Testa et al., 2021).

These findings have significant implications for both business practitioners and policymakers. For businesses, developing transparent, consistent, and third party validated sustainability communication strategies is essential for fostering consumer interest in eco friendly products. Companies are encouraged to use internationally recognized environmental certifications and avoid exaggerated sustainability narratives. For policymakers, the results underscore the need to enforce stricter regulations against greenwashing and enhance monitoring of misleading sustainability claims. One limitation of this study is its reliance on qualitative literature review, which, while rich in insight, would benefit from further validation through quantitative or field based empirical research to enhance generalizability.

Table 1. Dimensions of Consumer Trust in Sustainability and Their Impact on Green Purchase Intentions

Trust Dimension	Description	Impact on Consumer Behavior
Integrity	The perception that the company acts in good faith and does not mislead consumers.	Increases brand loyalty and reduces hesitation in choosing green products (Chen & Chang, 2020).
Transparency	The degree to which a company openly discloses sustainability related information.	Fosters a sense of security and confidence in purchase decisions (Zhang et al., 2023).
Credibility	The validity of sustainability claims, supported by third party verification.	Minimizes greenwashing effects and reinforces purchase intention (Testa et al., 2021).
Behavioral Consistency	The company's commitment to consistently applying eco friendly practices.	Builds long term trust and encourages repeat purchases (Grubor & Milovanov, 2021).
Long term Commitment	The perception that sustainability efforts are part of a long term business ethos.	Strengthens emotional brand connections and increases perceived brand value (Singh & Verma, 2022).

The five trust dimensions identified in Table 1 integrity, transparency, credibility, behavioral consistency, and long term commitment represent critical psychological and perceptual constructs that collectively shape consumers' willingness to purchase environmentally friendly products. Integrity refers to consumers' belief that companies act in good faith and do not intentionally mislead through sustainability messaging. According to Chen and Chang (2020), perceived integrity strengthens consumer-brand relationships, particularly when green claims are matched with ethical corporate behavior. Similarly, transparency defined as the open communication of a company's environmental practices contributes to a sense of consumer security and reduces skepticism in decision making (Zhang et al., 2023). When transparency is lacking, consumers are more likely to doubt the authenticity of eco friendly branding, leading to reduced engagement with green offerings. Both of these dimensions function as foundational trust building mechanisms that influence cognitive evaluations of product legitimacy and emotional alignment with brand values.

Credibility adds a further layer to this trust construct by focusing on the verifiability and reliability of sustainability claims, typically supported by third party certifications or recognized eco labels. As demonstrated by Testa et al. (2021), credible signals reduce information asymmetry and mitigate the effects of greenwashing, ultimately reinforcing consumer confidence in environmental promises. Meanwhile, behavioral consistency addresses how continuously and reliably companies implement sustainable practices over time. Grubor and Milovanov (2021) argue that inconsistent or opportunistic behaviors such as shifting to green products only when it is profitable can weaken consumer trust, even if individual sustainability campaigns appear convincing. Lastly, long term commitment plays a strategic role by shaping consumer perceptions of whether a company views sustainability as a core value or as a temporary marketing tactic. Singh and Verma (2022) highlight that consumers are more emotionally attached to brands that exhibit a clear, enduring environmental mission, which fosters loyalty and purchase intention over time. Together, these dimensions create a comprehensive framework through which consumers filter, assess, and act upon sustainability information in the marketplace.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of consumer trust in sustainability as a foundational determinant of interest in purchasing environmentally friendly products. Through a systematic literature review, five core dimensions of trust integrity, transparency, credibility, behavioral consistency, and long term commitment were identified as key psychological constructs influencing green purchasing behavior. Trust, in this context, functions not merely as a mediating variable but as a central mechanism through which environmental awareness is transformed into actionable consumer decisions. The integration of theoretical frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Trust Theory, Signaling Theory, and the Value Belief Norm (VBN) Theory further underscores that trust simultaneously influences cognitive, emotional, and moral aspects of consumer behavior. The findings affirm that without sufficient trust, even environmentally conscious consumers may hesitate or refrain from purchasing green products, highlighting trust as a strategic asset in sustainability communication.

Furthermore, the study confirms that trust in sustainability is not a singular or static attribute, but a dynamic and multifaceted process shaped by both corporate behavior and consumer perception. Practices such as greenwashing when companies exaggerate or falsify environmental claims can seriously damage trust and, consequently, deter sustainable consumption. Therefore, companies must demonstrate consistency in their environmental actions, ensure transparent communication, and utilize credible third party certifications to strengthen consumer trust. At the same time, policy interventions are needed to create stricter regulations around sustainability claims, ensuring that environmental communication remains truthful and verifiable. In sum, the study provides a comprehensive conceptual model that positions trust not only as a driver of green purchase intention but as a necessary precondition for the success of sustainability efforts in the marketplace.

6. Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all parties who provided support during the research and manuscript preparation process. Special thanks are extended to Politeknik LP3I Tasikmalaya and Universitas Putra Indonesia YPTK Padang for their administrative and technical support. We also appreciate the valuable input and feedback from colleagues during the literature review and theoretical synthesis stages.

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