



Consumer Resistance to Green Marketing: Causes and Counterstrategies

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Abstract

In this era, the word Green Marketing has become synonymous with corporate social responsibility. It is now a popular strategy for brands to show that they are conscious about the environment. Despite these efforts, consumers have begun resisting it. This paper explores the reasons behind this resistance and the strategies that companies can use to overcome it. Research done in the past claims that one of the main causes of this resistance is Greenwashing, where brands make tall claims and exaggerate about being sustainable.

Additionally, many campaigns use western ideas about sustainability that do not fit well with Indian culture and daily life. Consumers are also experiencing “eco-fatigue” because of being exposed to endless green messages that lack impact. It also highlights the Cognitive Dissonance Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour can help understand the gap between consumers expectation, their behaviour and claims made by the company. To address these challenges, the paper suggests that companies should be more transparent by sharing clear and verifiable information about their environmental efforts. Using trusted third-party certifications can help rebuild confidence. Making green products more affordable and relating them to cultural values can make a difference. Involving consumers in recycling programs or community initiatives can also help in rebuilding their trust. Instead of seeing resistance as a problem, this study argues it should be viewed as valuable feedback. It shows that consumers want real commitment, not just marketing slogans.

Keywords: Green Marketing, Consumer Resistance, Eco-friendly, Greenwashing, Consumer Behaviour

Introduction

Environmental degradation climate change and resource scarcity have made sustainability a core business concern forcing brands to embrace Green Marketing as both a strategic tool and an indicator of being responsible towards the society at large. This trend has gained momentum because the customers these days are becoming more eco-conscious, the middle class has expanded, and the government has taken initiatives

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like Swachh Bharat and banned plastic. Despite these efforts, an issue has arisen: consumers today are resisting these Green Marketing initiatives.

The major reason behind this resistance is the growing scepticism towards environmental claims, especially when consumers believe that these claims made by the companies are inauthentic, superficial or opportunistic. Multiple studies have now shown that greenwashing, which is where companies exaggerate or fabricate sustainability efforts, has eroded consumer trust and also the credibility of the brand (Khattri & Singh, 2024; More, 2019; Mukherjee & Ghosh, 2015).

Consumers who reside in urban areas and are young adults have now become increasingly critical of emotionally charged green messages that do not support the claims made by the so-called eco-friendly companies (Ghosh, 2025). The research also reveals that when Green Marketing is not supported by data that can be verified or does not attest to third-party certification, the consumers disengage or they tend to reject such claims completely (Khandelwal, Sharma, & Jain, 2019; Ghosh, 2020). Issues such as price sensitivity, poor labelling and challenges related to accessibility have created a disconnect between consumer awareness and their actual green purchasing behaviour (Kaur & Gupta, 2020; Dixit & Singh, 2024).

It explores the causes behind consumer resistance to Green Marketing in India and also suggests counter-strategies that can be used to engage consumers more meaningfully and ethically. It also suggests that instead of looking at this resistance as a threat, it can be seen as an opportunity by the brands to reiterate their environmental messaging and build a deeper bond with the audiences that are more concerned about greenwashing. (Kumar et al., 2024; Kaur, Mishra, & Singh, 2022). Recent research suggests that resistance is often a sign of consumer empowerment, and it also showcases that consumers rely on transparency, accountability, and cultural resonance in sustainability efforts.

Literature Review

While such initiatives have gained momentum, consumer behaviour reveals a more complex picture, characterized by scepticism and resistance. To understand these dynamics in the following literature review examines work of various authors on Green Marketing resistance in India over the past decade. It is grouped into four categories based on common themes.

A significant body of research has examined how greenwashing can cause distress among consumers and also damage the perceptions related to brands in the Indian market. Khattri and Singh (2024) demonstrated that when consumers perceive that the packaged food industry has been greenwashing its products, it significantly weakens its positive brand association, especially among consumers who were highly concerned about the environment. More, Praful Vijay (2019) reinforced through their research that the awareness of false green claims strongly correlates with declining brand loyalty and image. It also suggested that once consumers

identify the greenwashing that the brand uses, recovery becomes difficult. Similarly, Khandelwal, Sharma and Jain (2019) found that in sectors such as automotive, beauty and industries that rely on eco-claims that are vague and unverifiable, has witnessed widespread consumer dissatisfaction and distrust. Mukherji and Ghosh (2015) provided qualitative evidence that increase in green washing across industries now highlights how weak regulatory oversight has enabled misleading marketing to flourish without any checks. Together, these studies highlight the urgent need for credible third-party certificates, self-regulation, and strict enforcement of environmental advertising standards to restore consumer confidence. Another important group of literature emphasises that rising environmental awareness among Indian consumers, along with growing scepticism towards Green Marketing messages, has become an issue.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) further explains how greenwashing affects consumer behaviour. The class of consumers who believe themselves to be environmentally responsible will experience psychological discomfort when they get to know that a brand that claims to be sustainable has either exaggerated or made false claims regarding being Green. To reduce this dissonance, such consumers may either reject the brand or make a switch to the brands they believe are authentic and can provide an alternative solution or even criticise such false companies in public, as often seen in social media, against the fashion retailers who claim to be conscious but I am not in reality. (Khattri & Singh, 2024)

Ghosh (2025) found that while urban consumers are increasingly conscious of sustainability, they are also more critical of claims that are vague or emotionally manipulative. Claims that are not backed by any clear evidence, such as carbon footprints or third-party verifications, are often negated by urban consumers. In the year 2020, Ghosh had similarly observed that consumers prefer real and relatable messages over abstract messages that support the environment. These consumers do not trust the products that are priced high unless they believe the claims made by the companies are delivered upon. Kaur and Gupta (2020) further highlighted that there is a persistent gap between high consumer awareness and their actual purchase behaviour, stating the reasons as unclear labelling, inadequate access to options that are eco-friendly and limited trust in the claims made by the brands. Together, these studies reveal that effective Green Marketing strategies in India require companies not only to advertise about sustainability but also to act upon it as well as provide credible and transparent information that satisfies the consumers' need for transparency and value.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) helps understand the gap between consumers' positive attitude toward sustainability and their actual purchasing decisions. According to the theory of planned behaviour, it is believed that consumer behaviour is shaped by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In the Indian context, urban consumers may support the idea of purchasing green products, but there are factors that reduce their desire to do so. Factors like high prices, limited availability

and scepticism about the green claims made by companies discourage consumers from making purchases of products that claim to be environmentally friendly. (Kaur & Gupta, 2020; Dixit & Singh, 2024).

Several other studies have also explored the reasons behind Green Marketing strategies that work and the elements of the marketing mix that are responsible for purchasing intentions and enhance trust among the eco-conscious consumers. Kumar, Mallick, Hota and colleagues (2024) found that if a brand nails its eco-friendly claims and is not lying in its advertisements, then people start to trust them more. Also, if the brand is being real about what they are doing, like they do not hide behind buzz words, then the consumers are even more likely to believe that they are not just greenwashing. Kaur, Mishra and colleagues (2022) highlighted how different components of the marketing mix influence consumer behaviour. They found out that certain product-related aspects, such as eco-friendly design and packaging, are the most powerful factors that determine purchase intentions ahead of price and promotion of the marketing mix. These findings together suggest that when companies invest in innovation in making products sustainable and also communicate these benefits clearly and consistently to consumers, then they end up building brand credibility and also motivate consumers to buy more. It also suggests that brands must adopt sustainable practices in all that they do and move away from superficial messaging to ensure that consumers see them for what they truly are.

A small but important set of studies has examined how Green Marketing influences consumer behaviour within certain specific product categories. Dixit and Singh (2024) investigated how purchase patterns in the personal care and cosmetic sectors are affected by sustainability claims. The study points out that despite Green Marketing efforts successfully increasing awareness and also positively impacting buying decisions in the personal care and cosmetics sector, price sensitivity is still an important barrier, particularly in tier 2 Indian cities. The study suggests that if the products are priced cheaply and also, they are made more available, then eco-friendly products can achieve deeper market penetration. Though this study is sector-specific, it underlines the importance of adapting such Green Marketing strategies where sustainability is a major concern to adapt according to industry dynamics, price expectations and also available issues to ensure that companies see more sales.

Research Gap Analysis

Although existing literature offers valuable insights into the causes of consumer resistance towards Green Marketing, it leaves several important areas unexplored which are outlined in the research gap analysis done here. More studies are limited in terms of demography. This focuses on urban, educated, middle-income consumers while neglecting rural and low-income groups. These studies do not compare product types or industries. Also, very little is said about how digital versus traditional platforms also result in a difference in perception, and the changes in the consumer buying behaviour over a period of time are also almost absent. Along with that, any insight into how Indian advertising regulations is impacting the advertising industry as

well as the psychological mechanism that includes identity and cognitive dissonance, also remains unexplored. These studies have also noted that brands can barely recover trust after being tagged as greenwashing their products. Also, the role of involving consumers in creating eco-friendly products, which could have led to reduced resistance, has received very little attention. Also, how the concept of green fits into the cultural framing of Indian consumers is regularly examined, and a persistent gap in the awareness and action is studied to understand the specific barriers responsible for this gap.

Types of Consumer Resistance to Green Marketing

There are different types of consumer resistance particularly to Green Marketing which are driven by a mix of motivation. By recognising these patterns marketers can target consumers that are Eco-conscious with genuine and transparent messages.

1. Active versus Passive Resistance: Active resistance means openly pushing back against the Green Marketing messages that feel insincere or misleading. Such an example of active resistance can be the backlash faced by H &M and Zara for their so-called conscious collections on social media sites. On the other hand, the passive resistance is quiet. It means the consumers will ignore advertisements that claim to their eco-friendly, skipping over green messaging or simply not purchasing products that are labelled sustainable or environmentally friendly.

2. Individual versus Collective Resistance: Individual resistance is personal; that is, a consumer may choose to stop buying from a brand when they start believing or they have a cause to believe that the brand is greenwashing. On the other hand, collective resistance means that it is done by a group of people, such as online moments or even group campaigns. In India, we have witnessed instances where people have come together on digital platforms to call out the brands that claim to be eco-friendly but are not in reality. In such cases, the brand is shunned by a group of people at large for greenwashing.

3. Overt versus Covert Resistance: In overt resistance, the consumer displays their dissatisfaction openly, such as by complaining, starting an online petition or writing negative reviews about the brand of the product that claims to be sustainable but is not. Covert resistance means that the consumer may show disengagement quietly by not purchasing the products from that particular brand or label, or choosing some other alternative which he or she perceives as more genuine.

Causes of Consumer Resistance to Green Marketing

The root cause of consumer resistance to Green Marketing is the disconnect between what the brand promises and what consumers experience or believe. A few of the key reasons why people push back against Green Marketing are listed below:

1. Greenwashing and Perceived Hypocrisy: It is one of the core reasons why consumers resist Green Marketing. Consumers become sceptical and are less likely to trust such green claims because of the contradictions that they experience. From a cognitive dissonance perspective, when there is a contradiction between the consumers who identify themselves as Eco-conscious individuals and the reality of sustainability claims which are not true, it often triggers discomfort. This, in turn, motivates action such as boycotting, spreading negative word of mouth, or even switching to brands that they believe are more authentic

2. Affordability and Accessibility: Generally, sustainable products often cost more as the manufacturing cost is also higher, which makes these products feel out of reach for many. Particularly in India, where the middle class and the lower-income families are huge in number, they perceive that green products are meant only for the wealthy consumers because of the price. For example, eco-friendly or organic goods may be too expensive for the majority of Indians, which makes the Green Marketing seem exclusive or elitist. According to the theory of planned behaviour, affordability directly influences a consumer's behaviour; that is, if a consumer believes that the sustainable product is beyond their financial reach, their intention to purchase will remain low, regardless of a positive attitude toward environmentally friendly products.

3. Distrust in certification and claims: With many green labels in the market where many of which are unregulated, it is hard for consumers to know what is real. That are credible certifications available in the market issued by the government of India, but are often lost among self-declared eco-labels. People begin doubting the authenticity of environmental cleans made by such companies when there is no clear third-party proof to support their claims.

4. Eco-fatigue and information overload: When consumers are constantly exposed to environmental messaging, it can back fire. When every brand cleans to be green, it becomes hard to distinguish which one is genuine. Because Indians are exposed repeatedly to such superficial messages of being eco-friendly, we often find consumers feeling overwhelmed, confused and even numb to these messages in India's crowded media space.

5. Cultural disconnect and imported narratives: Many green campaigns use ideas that resonate with western culture like the idea of minimalism. It sits well with the western values but not with the Indian perspective where abundance is often linked to prosperity and success. Sustainability claims feel out of place when the message does not reflect the local beliefs or realities.

6. Lack of structural support and long-term action: Certain promises made by the brands, like promoting recyclable packaging, feel insincere because people find it difficult to recycle these recyclable packaging in India because of an underdeveloped waste management system. In such circumstances, the efforts made by

the companies to promote them as green feel incomplete. Today's consumers want more than eco-friendly slogans; they want to see changes that are real and last long.

Counterstrategies to Address Green Marketing Resistance

To overcome such causes of resistance, brands must adopt multi-dimensional counter strategies which are discussed in this section:

- 1. Be transparent:** People want to know the truth. Brand should clearly explain their environmental practices and support they cleans with trusted certificate full stop for example, Fabindia has created trust among consumers by sharing detailed stories about its eco-friendly sourcing and production on its packaging as well as website. Transparency often reduces the likelihood of cognitive dissonance as it aligns consumer expectations with the actual brand practices, ensuring the environmental claims can withstand the scrutiny by consumers.
- 2. Making green messaging local and culturally relevant:** Sustainability claims should feel familiar and reflect local values. Using local languages and cultural references in green messages can help brands connect better with Indian audience.
- 3. Keep eco-friendly options affordable:** Purchasing eco-friendly products shouldn't feel like purchasing luxury items full stop startups like their necessity has made plastic free eco-friendly products that are reasonably priced. It ensures that green products are accessible by more people at affordable prices. Enhancing the affordability and availability of the products will improve the perceived behaviour control, it is a key driver in the theory of planned behaviour. It will help convert positive intentions to convert into purchases.
- 4. Integrate sustainability across the entire product life cycle:** Green initiative should not be limited only to packaging. Consistency across sourcing production and disposal is the need of time. Paper Boat, for instance, uses recycling packaging and avoid artificial pressure weaves which helps it align the value of being sustainable throughout its product line.
- 5. Involve consumers in the journey:** People will trust the brands more when they are invited to be part of the solution, such as recycling programs, refill stations like those of The Body Shop or even campaigns that encourage users to share their green practices.
- 6. Commit for the long run:** Sustainability should not be a seasonal campaign it should be along them commitment. Companies like the Tata Group have earned lasting trust by staying consistent in their ethical and environmental values over the decades. This helps reduce consumers skepticism.

Critical Reflections

Many brands in India see consumer resistance towards Green Marketing as a threat rather than valuable feedback. By doing so, they miss an opportunity to grow. Consumer resistance to Green Marketing is not a problem that needs to be fixed, but it's a sign of progress. It shows that people are paying attention and demanding more than just a fancy advertisement or claims. In Indian markets, where environmental challenges are met with social inequalities, Green Marketing strategies will have to find a balance between ecological goals, affordability and cultural relevance, which can be done by listening to consumers, being honest and inviting collaborations, which will turn this resistance into resilience.

Conclusion

Resisting Green Marketing strategies is a key feature of today's sustainability landscape, which is not driven by negativity or even ignorance, but it reflects growing consumer awareness and the need for higher ethical standards. Brands that embed sustainability into daily practices and go beyond just the green messages used as marketing tools to build consumers' trust and lasting loyalty. To move ahead, Green Marketing must become more inclusive, transparent and culturally relevant. It is only then that the brands will be able to overcome the current limitations.

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