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**Project Submission Sheet**

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# Consumer Trust and Purchase Intentions in Response to Authentic versus Green-washed Claims for Household Cleaning Products in Urban India

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## Abstract

This dissertation explores how Indian urban consumers understand authenticity cues within green advertisements plus how these understandings affect trust plus purchase intentions regarding household cleaners. Sustainability is a dominating factor in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) marketing. Because of all this, brands do increasingly use the eco-labels and nature-inspired imagery to make environmental claims. Consumer trust faces a critical challenge because of the rise of greenwashing where brands misrepresent or exaggerate their credentials. Within an underregulated Indian market, this study explores all of the psychological, cultural, and contextual processes. Consumers distinguish between authentic and misleading green claims by way of these processes.

The research uses a qualitative interpretivist design based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973). In Mumbai and Bengaluru, consumers plus marketing professionals were interviewed thirty times via semi-structured interviews analysed through Braun and Clarke’s six-phase thematic analysis. Emerging were five key themes including consumer-led verification strategies, practical barriers' impact on perceived control, social norms' influence, greenwashing's emotional plus behavioural fallout, and verifiable authenticity signals' role.

Findings reveal that trust links authenticity cues to green purchase intention also acts as a central mediator. Credible signals such as third-party certifications together with transparent ingredients in addition to performance guarantees make consumers more likely to act. Conversely, vague low-cost signals generate scepticism especially among digitally literate or experienced consumers. The study integrates trust as a cross-cutting construct refining TPB and improving Signalling Theory through introduction of a dual-axis model using signal cost and delivery medium credibility.

Research offers a theoretical understanding into sustainable consumer behaviour in the Global South. Actionable recommendations are also provided toward ethical marketing, regulatory reform, and digital consumer empowerment. It underscores the idea that authenticity must not merely be declared within a trust-deficit landscape. Instead, authenticity must be demonstrated now.

## Declaration

# Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

**National College of Ireland**
**Research Students Declaration Form**
***(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)***

**Name:** Dilju Emmanuel

**Student Number:** 23284871

**Degree for which thesis is submitted:** Master of science in marketing

**Title of Thesis: Consumer Trust and Purchase Intentions in Response to Authentic versus Green-washed Claims for Household Cleaning Products in Urban India**
**Date: 15 August 2025**

**Material submitted for award**

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B. I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged. ✓

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***Or*** *I declare that the following material contained in the thesis formed part of a submission for the award of

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude toward this dissertation's supporters throughout the entire course.

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I thank my family and close friends for understanding, unconditional support, plus you believed in me, notably during doubt. Your encouragement both made and gave deep meaning to this adventure.

This dissertation reflects the collective support along with the inspiration I have received, therefore I deeply give thanks for it.

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# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Rationale

### 1.1.1 Global Sustainability Trends

In recent years, environmental sustainability has emerged as a central theme within global consumer markets since businesses across industries integrate eco-conscious practices within their operations along with marketing strategies. This trend arose from more public awareness of environmental decline also resource loss plus climate change. Accordingly, both corporations as well as governments are responding via stronger commitments toward sustainability (Santos, Coelho & Marques, 2024). Worldwide, brands in fast-moving consumer goods sectors increasingly position themselves as environmentally responsible because they leverage claims of sustainable sourcing, of non-toxicity, as well as biodegradability. "Greenwashing" expands with actual concern for nature since it alters environmental qualities through overstatement, falsehood, or deceit, thus baffling buyer decisions (Szabo & Webster, 2021; Badhwar et al., 2024). Greenwashing weakens consumer trust so greenwashing damages credibility for authentic sustainability initiatives plus greenwashing potentially slows down the momentum within the broader green movement (Fella & Bausa, 2024; Alyahia et al., 2024).

### 1.1.2 Indian Consumer Context

In India, these global dynamics coincide inside a distinctive cultural, socio-economic setting. Consumerism with eco-consciousness is surging in urban centres, especially in those for which middle-class populations are expanding. Global media, increased exposure to sustainability narratives, along with domestic environmental challenges partly influence it. Consumers in Indian metropolitan hubs especially desire more transparency, accountability, and authenticity in green claims increasingly. Eco-labelling standards within the country, nevertheless, do remain unevenly enforced and inconsistent (Sharma & Rao, 2023). Awareness and adoption rates remain low in spite of initiatives such as the Ecomark certification. This type of regulatory gap blurs a distinction between genuinely real and deceptively false environmental messaging. Therefore, consumers have few tools for assessing claim authenticity.

### 1.1.3 Industry Niche: Household Cleaning Products

Within this context, the household cleaning products sector seems especially meaningful. These products uniquely intersect health, hygiene, also environmental responsibility. Sustainability messaging is able to find some fertile ground because of the intersection there. Brands use several green cues from lush landscape images and earthy colours to eco-certification logos and jargon labels like "eco-safe" or "plant-based." Health promises plus

environmental positioning have made this sector a key testbed for green marketing strategies. Features making the sector appealing to true sustainability efforts also make it open to greenwashing. Since consumers often lack specialised knowledge of chemical composition, biodegradability, or sourcing practices, deceptive marketing practices can easily manipulate surface-level cues on which they may largely rely.

### 1.1.4 Research Gap and Rationale for the Study

Although greenwashing and authenticity have been studied throughout various global contexts such as hospitality (Yu et al., 2024), fashion (Badhwar et al., 2024), and finance (Galletta et al., 2024) research has markedly failed to address how urban Indian consumers interpret authenticity cues in household-cleaner advertising with qualitative, context-specific studies. Absent specifically is the way in which these readings work with moderators such as brand familiarity plus environmental concern along with greenwashing awareness. This divide is critical given India's dueling pressures: consumer eco-literacy grows fast as green claims stay vague and unverifiable. This study fills this need and centers on Mumbai and Bengaluru. These are two representative urban markets in which we investigate the cognitive also emotional processes through which consumers distinguish between authentic and misleading eco-messaging. Since the study exists grounded within the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), it aims for illumination of the trust-building mechanisms and also behavioural intentions that come from such interpretations, offering both a theoretical understanding plus practical implications for marketers, policymakers, and consumer protection advocates.

## 1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim of this dissertation is to explore how authenticity cues in advertising influence trust and purchase intentions for eco-labelled household-cleaner products in urban India, with a particular focus on how *greenwashing awareness* moderates this relationship. Specifically, the study investigates how higher or lower levels of greenwashing awareness may strengthen or weaken the link between perceived authenticity and consumer trust. This aim is operationalised through the following objectives:

1. To identify cue-level indicators of authentic claims and greenwashing in household-cleaner advertising.
2. To assess how environmental cues and individual control variables (e.g., brand familiarity, environmental concern) shape consumer trust.
3. To examine the moderating role of greenwashing awareness in the relationship between authenticity and trust, clarifying when this awareness amplifies or diminishes trust.

4. To examine how authenticity cues and trust interact with Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) components—attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control—in shaping green purchase intentions.
5. To derive context-specific implications for policymakers and ethical marketing practitioners based on the lived experiences of Indian consumers.

## 1.3 Research Question and Sub-questions

**Main Research Questions:**

1. How do authenticity cues in household-cleaner advertising influence consumer trust and purchase intentions?
2. How does consumers' level of greenwashing awareness moderate this authenticity–trust relationship, once environmental concern, product knowledge, and brand reputation are taken into account?

**Sub-questions:**

- Which verbal and visual cues do shoppers interpret as genuine environmental proof versus greenwashing?
- How does individual awareness of greenwashing strengthen or weaken the authenticity–trust link?
- Among the TPB components, which most powerfully predicts intention when mediated by trust?

## 1.4 Contextual Landscape: Green Advertising in India

India's urban FMCG sector is now undergoing a very important transformation because public discourse brings environmental concerns into the mainstream regarding consumer expectations. Global media plus local environmental activism including rising climate consciousness can influence millennial plus Gen Z consumers attentive to sustainability narratives especially in metropolitan areas (Ummar et al., 2023). Environmental groups in this climate claim labels like "biodegradable," "chemical-free," or "made with natural ingredients," labels especially visible within household-cleaning products, linking environmentalism to personal health plus hygiene.

For an industry perspective, this segment is competitive and highly innovation-driven. Brands adopt a mix of product reformulation as well as eco-friendly packaging plus sustainability-themed marketing because of this. However, India's regulatory framework for green advertising remains relatively underdeveloped. For ecological standards, the Ecomark certification provides a potential benchmark. Yet, its use is small, and user knowledge stays weak (Sharma & Rao, 2023). Without stringent eco-labelling organizations for providing oversight, many companies declare self-declared labels and use ambiguous sustainability terms

what Szabo and Webster (2021) describe as “green gloss” in order to attract environmentally conscious buyers without the provision of verifiable evidence.

This regulatory as well as industry context increases the risk of greenwashing because consumers cannot verify claims with ease and must instead rely on heuristics like packaging colour, imagery, or brand reputation (Fella & Bausa, 2024). For addressing consumer protection and environmental policy goals, a comprehension of how consumers navigate these cues is required. Because deceptive claims influence interpretations, this understanding has importance. This study situates itself within this intersection because it uses qualitative perceptions to capture the lived realities of Indian consumers engaging with green advertising in an evolving and semi-regulated market.

## 1.5 Theoretical Foundation: Authenticity, Trust, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour

This study is conceptually grounded upon authenticity cues, consumer trust, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) which are three interrelated domains. The manner in which individuals evaluate green advertising is shaped by each component's distinct role in it. The roles of the components are intertwined in the evaluation and in the response.

### 1.5.1 Authenticity Cues

Authenticity in green advertising is a brand’s environmental commitment's perceived genuineness, signalled via verbal or visual cues within communication (Södergren, 2021). Cues can include transparency in sourcing, credible third-party certifications that are displayed, or narratives of sustainability integrated consistently across platforms (Chua et al., 2024). In order to ascertain if any green claim is actually genuine or is simply opportunistic marketing, consumers will frequently rely upon these markers (Badhwar et al., 2024). Authenticity is not always signaled with identical cues. Interpretations might differ greatly in markets and across cultures. This variability highlights the need to explore how Indian urban consumers identify and evaluate cues within household cleaning because eco-friendly messaging is popular yet difficult to verify.

### 1.5.2 Trust as a Mediator

Trust critically mediates between interpreting cues along with intending behavior because it transforms initial perceptual judgments so consumers can make actionable decisions. When companies make use of verified eco-labels or when they disclose sustainable sourcing in green advertising, they do not directly cause a purchase. Instead, these cues influence consumers toward belief in the brand's environmental claims. High trust augments the persuasive effect of

authenticity cues. Purchase likelihood increases because of this amplification (Isac et al., 2024). Scepticism, resistance, or avoidance behaviour (Santos et al., 2024) can instead be triggered by low trust often stemming from prior greenwashing encounters.

Marketing models with consumer behaviour established support trust centrality here, so trust acts like that psychological "bridge" between message reception plus behavioural adoption (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). These constructs do tend to operate downstream from trust, and perceived value or brand attitude can also influence purchase intentions. Even though a consumer might favor a brand, that sentiment can quickly dissolve if they compromise trust conversely sustained trust often reinforces the way they perceive value as well as their brand attitudes over time. This situation is especially noticeable in green ads because technical details with lopsided information cause consumers to trust brands.

Trust is the central mediator in this study for a more exact mechanisms examination. These mechanisms influence purchase intentions via authenticity cues. This focus also provides for an easier analysis within the TPB framework. Trust relates to attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control therefore environmentally friendly purchase actions form in environments open to deception.

### 1.5.3 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

For comprehension of the decision-making processes that are underlying eco-friendly product purchases, the Theory of Planned Behaviour provides for a strong structure (Ajzen, 1991; Saunders et al., 2019). TPB posits that attitudes toward the behaviour also subjective norms (perceived social expectations) with perceived behavioural control (PBC) shape behavioural intention, which reflects how easily or with what difficulty someone performs the behaviour. Trust in green claims' interaction among these components is explored using TPB in this research. For instance, even a consumer who feels positively toward eco-friendly products may refrain from purchasing if a low PBC acts as a barrier because of how high cost or limited availability limits it. However, powerful subjective norms might increase the trust pathway if peers make others environmentally aware. Also intention travels along this pathway. Because the study integrates authenticity cues and trust as well as TPB within one single conceptual model that it has, it offers up a thorough perspective upon all of the psychological processes supporting green purchase behavior within India's urban FMCG sector now.

## 1.6 Justification for a Qualitative Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research design so it uses semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. The exploratory nature of the research question justifies this

approach. In addition, green ads within India are quite complex; constructs like trust, perceived authenticity, and greenwash awareness are interpretive plus subjective.

Quantitative models are less suited to capturing the rich, context-specific narratives shaping consumer trust, though effective for establishing statistical relationships. In-depth study uncovers hidden importance and conflicts. It also exposes culturally embedded interpretations that numerical analysis cannot fully understand, as Finlay (2002) as well as Braun & Clarke (2006) note. Qualitative methods enable researchers to access these deeper layers of meaning since authenticity cues are interpreted through socio-cultural experiences and personal cognitive frameworks.

Due to its flexibility, thematic analysis was selected as the analytical strategy. It can accommodate both inductive with deductive coding (Nowell et al., 2017). The research is able to recognize trends as predicted by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) while also staying open to emergent themes unanticipated at the design stage. If awareness of greenwashing is a moderating factor then this further supports this approach since prior exposure to deceptive claims, eco-literacy campaigns, or peer influence can manifest in subtle as well as highly individualised ways that narratives can analyse (Guest et al., 2017).

In order to safeguard participant privacy and also encourage candid disclosures, interviews were not audio-recorded in keeping with ethical considerations. While when deciding that this risked potentially reducing data richness, they then implemented several measures that reduced and also preserved analytical integrity. In real time, detailed notes were taken during each interview, and reflective entries that captured tone and emphasis as well as recalled non-verbal cues followed right away. Participants had follow-up contact when clarification was needed so these notes were reviewed plus cross-checked in 30 interview minutes to reduce recall bias. Because of how they rigorously verified notes, they ensured that since no recordings were verbatim, they did not compromise the qualitative data's credibility or depth.

This study is positioned in order to offer novel as well as contextually rich perceptions into green consumer behaviour in India’s FMCG sector. It contributes to both academic theory along with practical strategies for ethical marketing because it combines a focus upon authenticity cues and trust with a qualitative methodology that is ethically responsible and reflexive.

# 2.0 Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction and Purpose of the Review

In recent years, environmental awareness has surged within and transformed how consumers engage with brands, particularly in fashion and hospitality sectors. Sustainability evolved since it moved away from a side issue toward a brand strategy core aspect since it shaped marketing communications, operations, and product development. This increased focus on sustainability has strengthened the prevalence of greenwashing where brands exaggerate or fabricate environmental credentials to appeal to eco-conscious consumers (Szabo & Webster, 2021).

Green brand authenticity has become quite a pivotal construct in the midst of this environment closely related with consumer trust as well as brand loyalty. Sustainable purchase intent is strongly linked to it as well (Yu et al., 2024; Alyahia et al., 2024). Here, we understand authenticity as when a brand's stated environmental commitments align to its verifiable actions and it communicates consistently across channels. Even though this dissertation focuses empirically on household cleaning products, the literature draws extensively from the fashion and hospitality sectors since these industries have been in fact at the forefront of implementing and then communicating sustainability initiatives. Very competitive markets can see frequent green claims and wide-ranging influencer-driven campaigns. Authenticity cues and greenwashing operate within that context due to their consumer-facing nature and are offering transferable perceptions.

The review which follows mainly integrates Signalling Theory as well as the Theory of Planned Behaviour theoretical constructs with empirical evidence from international and sector-specific studies. Brand credibility can be weakened by perceived greenwashing also green purchase intentions happen shaped by authenticity cues furthermore consumer trust can be influenced by factors that this synthesis enables identifying. Since the review critically combines theory with real-world observations, it founds the research on coherent concepts and thus avoids the common gap between abstract models and applied consumer behaviour analysis.

Through cultural values, Indian consumers interpret authenticity, trust, and environmental claims. India gains importance from this specific focus. Indian consumers often stress perceived honesty, personal recommendations, also social proof in green communication, unlike Western markets (Mukherjee & Nath, 2023). Consumers who are in this segment are also more susceptible to misleading green claims since they are indeed price sensitive, since they seek value, and as eco-labelling regulations are weakly enforced. Cultural subtlety is needed in sustainability marketing strategies because of these factors.

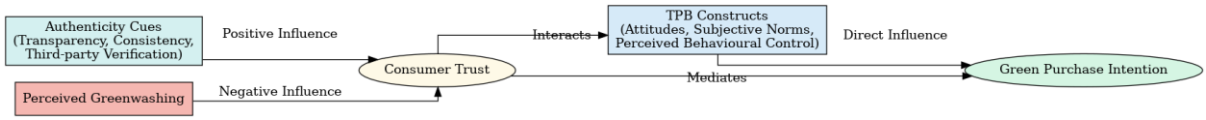



Figure: Conceptual visual model

This chapter's remainder examines the literature across five key areas: (1) signalling theory plays a role in green marketing, (2) TPB applies to green purchase intentions, (3) green brand authenticity and perceived greenwashing are dynamic, (4) social media and green influencers have influence, and (5) greenwashing impacts brand credibility and recovery. Together, these sections establish the study's conceptual and empirical groundwork.

## 2.2 Signalling Theory in Green Marketing Contexts

Signalling Theory, first developed in economics, shows how a party conveys credible information to another under certain information asymmetry conditions. As signalers in green marketing, companies project environmental values through campaigns, certifications, and sustainability messaging. It is in fact their hope that they influence consumer perceptions by doing of that. As is often the case with fast fashion or hotel services, this theory is quite relevant in contexts where consumers battle to directly verify a brand’s environmental claims as well as must rely on “signals” to judge authenticity (Szabo & Webster, 2021; Fang, 2024).

Such signalling is important and complex because of social media. Brands present packaging that is eco-friendly and collaborations with influencers on Instagram and also TikTok. They also highlight sustainability efforts behind the scenes to send persuasive environmental signals. Studies suggest these signals are not always received as intended however. Use of social media as planned can build brand legitimacy and drive green purchase intentions. However, it also can provoke some scepticism, especially in the event that consumers detect inconsistencies or low-cost attempts at “looking green” (Chua et al., 2024; Ummar et al., 2023).

Online, the size of vague and of deceptive green signals poses just one major challenge. Tomassi et al. (2024) define an “information disorder” as often fueled by automated bots plus AI-generated content, with false or exaggerated sustainability claims outcompeting verified signals. This environment worsens greenwashing and weakens attempts to signal genuinely, while vague “eco” labels or symbolic gestures, like green-coloured packaging, do not largely influence green brand trust according to fashion sector research (Badhwar et al., 2024).

Brands improve signal credibility through commitment to high-cost sustainability actions like lifecycle transparency, long-term eco-labeling compliance, or third-party certifications. Consumers are more apt to view such “costly signals” as authentic as well as trustworthy

because greenwashers probably cannot mimic them (Yu et al., 2024). Conversely, low-cost signals often backfire when they are temporary ad campaigns or slogans lacking verifiable action since consumers suspect something and consumers reduce purchase intent (Ling & Aziz, 2021; Alyahia et al., 2024). It is necessary that we distinguish between the signal content, which conveys the actual sustainability message, such as eco-labels or carbon neutrality claims, from the signal medium, which uses the communication channel, such as Instagram reels or product packaging. Misunderstandings may happen giving solid content using a medium without much trust. Strong content must be delivered by trustworthy channels.

Signalling theory is a particularly salient concept in hospitality since service delivery is intangible and consumer trust is heavily depended upon. Fang (2024) observed brands that consistently integrate sustainability into visual storytelling are apt to foster engagement. Consistent operational transparency also affects brand decisions. Constructing a believable green brand persona is central to the interplay between the visual impact of green signals with the perceived consistency of those messages over time.

Signalling theory helps to explain, in sum, why some green campaigns succeed while others get rejected because they are inauthentic. Consumer interpretations are influenced in terms of signal strength along with signal cost in addition to message consistency. The literature suggests that these elements are key ones. This sets the stage for more inquiry into authenticity cues, because they act as consumer-side validators for the signals being sent which is a topic explored in the next section.

## 2.3 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Its Application in Green Purchase Intent

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), a model used widely for explaining consumer intentions, was developed by Ajzen (1991). Behavioural intention results from attitudes about the behaviour, subjective norms, plus perceived control. It advances three separate concepts. In green consumption's context, TPB strongly frames just how people evaluate, just how social factors influence, and just how actions seem easy as they interact so as to shape eco-conscious purchasing, especially in digitally mediated environments like social media-driven brand engagement (Ummar et al., 2023; Nazish et al., 2024).

An individual's personal evaluation about engaging in environmentally friendly consumption represents attitudes toward the behaviour. This construct captures how much a consumer sees green purchasing as good helpful or valuable to them. Brand messaging that is both authentic and transparent along with sustainable values strengthens consumer's favourable attitudes (Yu

et al., 2024; Alyahia et al., 2024). These attitudes can erode because of greenwashing fear or suspicion conversely, especially when consumers find unsubstantiated claims or manipulative marketing (Szabo & Webster, 2021; Fang, 2024). Ummar et al. (2023) report, for example, that stronger pro-environmental attitudes tend to be fostered by green campaigns framed as educational as well as informative rather than purely promotional.

A specific behavior is what subjective norms perceive as social pressure toward performing or avoiding. Subjective norms are shaped through the influence of others whose opinions do matter to the consumer such as family, friends, peers, or public figures who are admired unlike attitudes that are based on personal evaluation. Online communities, influencer endorsements, and peer-generated content increasingly show social influences on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube in the digital era. The evidence confirms something that is empirical: the influencers that seem authentic affect the intentions for the purchase of the green products greatly. So influencers' apparent genuineness counts. Hasan et al. (2024) found consumer intentions to co-create green brand value were higher with authentic influencer commitment to environmental values. Yıldırım (2021) likewise observed relatable as well as consistent messaging could meaningfully shape sustainable fashion choices among Gen Z audiences by way of female influencers on social media.

Perceived behavioral control or PBC denotes the ease with which the individual assesses that they would engage in the behavior in question. It incorporates internal capabilities like knowledge and skills with external factors such as product affordability and availability. Label confusion, contradictory information, also a lack of trust in brand claims may diminish PBC. This occurs more specifically in the area of green consumption. Badhwar et al. (2024) note that these conflicting sustainability messages may weaken perceived control. The messages overwhelm the consumers with a level of uncertainty. Clear web atmospherics like consistent visual branding and intuitive navigation can improve PBC. Well-presented eco-information also helps in making sustainable choices feel achievable (Albarq, 2021).

TPB predicts more validly when concern for the environment as well as moral obligation integrate, as both influence one or more of the three constructs. Chua et al. (2024) discovered moral standards often arbitrate the link between attitudes and intentions within hospitality. Consumers do act upon favourable attitudes more when a moral duty for support of green initiatives is felt. Even when some control is so low or some subjective norms seem weak, they are then more likely for them to act.

## 2.4 Green Brand Authenticity and Perceived Greenwashing

In the context of sustainability marketing, consumer trust and behaviour are understood centrally through both green brand authenticity and greenwashing concepts. While branding is authentic if it is transparent as well as consistent then aligns with core values, greenwashing uses environmental claims deceptively so it misleads consumers. Both greatly influence green purchase intention, especially within fashion and hospitality. These sectors see growing examination of brand credibility (Sabo & Webster, 2011; Abubakri et al., 2024).

A brand's green initiatives that are perceived as genuine and consistent and aligned define green brand authenticity in general. According to Yu et al. (2024), green authenticity fosters emotional engagement so consumers feel well, especially when hospitality brands integrate sustainability within their customer experience. This perception increases when brands communicate consistently concerning sustainability across all of the channels, use verified materials, as they act socially and environmentally responsible. Chua et al. (2024) also argue that authenticity deepens brand relationships, as well as spreads positive word-of-mouth. Specifically, millennials plus Gen Z consumers feel eco-conscious effects.

Authenticity is shaped through co-creation strategies also influencer credibility. Each exerts a key force upon views of buyers now online. According to Hasan et al. (2024), consumer trust is more strongly affected through influencer authenticity which is characterized through transparency with personal alignment toward green values with long-term commitment than it is by celebrity status. Yalimov (2021) also demonstrated how green female influencers do actively encourage sustainable fashion among women, for this creates a sense of community and models behaviour that aligns with brand messaging. When consumers perceive influencer values to align with brand practices, perceived authenticity improves greatly. Furthermore, co-creation initiatives, in which brands co-create with consumers in sustainability practices such as recycling programmes that are participatory, designing sustainable products, or campaigns that drive cause do further strengthen authenticity through embedding shared ownership into the brand narrative (Fasan et al., 2024).

However, greenwashing weakens this dynamic occurring when brands superficially implement, exaggerate, or falsify environmental practices for show. Badhwar et al. (2024) found that greenwashing tactics do frequently use vague language. These tactics also lack third-party certification furthermore visually manipulate consumers. These do create consumer confusion and scepticism, and this makes it harder for people to distinguish genuine sustainability efforts from marketing gimmicks (Fung, 2024). This confusion can weaken brand

trust and purchase intention both, even among consumers with strong environmental values (Sabo & Webster, 2011).

Individual brand evaluations are affected by perceived greenwashing as with the sustainability movement. According to Majed and Bin (2022), greenwashing perception reduces eco-labels' effectiveness plus discourages repeat visits in the hospitality sector. Siano (2021) likewise emphasised that consumers exposed to inconsistent sustainability claims are less likely toward engaging with green brands. They are also not as likely to recommend those brands to other people especially if past experiences are in conflict with environmental promises (Rahman et al., 2023).

Authenticity relies mainly upon brand consistency over a period. Helgesson (2021) suggests that long-term behaviour does align with stated values. For example, companies maintain eco-friendly operations beyond seasonal campaigns also reinforce consumer trust. Daily hospitality operations using consistent green practices such as energy-efficient systems or linen reuse programmes can impact consumer purchase decisions positively (Chua et al., 2024).

Consumers co-creating in sustainability initiatives is another emerging strategy to improve authenticity. Hasan et al. (2024) show that when consumers are involved within eco-friendly design, circular supply chains, or recycling programmes, this increases perceived authenticity by fostering a sense of participation and transparency. This method agrees with stakeholder involvement theory. Mutual accountability between the brands and the consumers is emphasised thereby.

Generally, green brand authenticity and perceived greenwashing are on opposing ends of trust within sustainability marketing. Authenticity improves upon emotional connection, reinforces identity alignment, and also drives purchase intention. Greenwashing diminishes believability, diminishes devotion to brands, and grows distrust after it diminishes claims of sustainability. For this reason, brands that aim to appeal to eco-conscious audiences must prioritise communication through tactics that are genuine, transparent, and consistent and is supported by credible influencers and participatory engagement platforms.

## 2.5 The Role of Influencers and Social Media in Shaping Green Consumer Attitudes

Social media and digital platforms have reshaped the way consumers engage in and perceive environmentally responsible brands. Influencers advocating sustainable lifestyles shape consumer perceptions of eco-friendly behaviour especially “Green influencers.” Their credibility often stems not from celebrity but from audiences perceiving their reliability

transparency and emotional connection with them (Yu et al., 2024). These influencers see green brands when they make sustainable options like vegan products, eco-friendly travel, or slow fashion desirable. Concrete actions result from their translation of abstract environmental ideas like “carbon neutrality”. These actions are in fact everyday ones (Nisbet, 2020).

Social media influencers are effective in cases where audiences perceive authenticity. As Hu et al. (2024) highlight, consumers are more likely toward adopting sustainable behaviours when influencers seem aligned with the values they promote and are seen as sincere. For instance, even in India, sustainable lifestyle influencer Prerna Chhabra has cultivated such a large following because she consistently shows that low-waste living and eco-conscious shopping integrate some practical tips along with relatable content. Based in everyday Indian realities, her advocacy has been shown to encourage her followers to support local green businesses and try eco-labelled household products.

Macro-influencers have large followings also micro-influencers have smaller niche audiences, research distinguishes. The distinction is between all of the celebrities and smaller niche audiences. Macro-influencers can, in a broad sense, make campaigns about sustainability visible, but micro-influencers often have deep impacts because they happen to be accessible, with people perceiving them as authentic in order to foster trust (Fritz et al., 2017). For example, Kritika Khurana, a well-known Indian fashion content creator, has integrated sustainable fashion brands into her lifestyle content for the reason that she frames them as stylish as well as ethically responsible. By coupling product use with storytelling she reinforces pro-environmental attitudes while avoiding overtly commercial tones.

Social media enables interactive engagement by way of polls, challenges, or pledges, which may increase brand transparency as well as co-create meaning. Co-creation includes risks within. Han et al. (2023) warn against involving influencers in sustainability campaigns. Such collaborations can backfire even if they are perceived as tokenistic, according to the scholars. A leading FMCG brand within India faced some backlash after partnering up with a popular Bollywood actor for some “plastic-free” campaign. It was revealed later on that the brand’s packaging remained unchanged largely, which serves as just one example. This inconsistency was damaging to consumer trust and did reignite debates over greenwashing.

Transparency, as well as contextual relevance, and messenger credibility are what determine how influencers shape green consumer attitudes. Attitudes of consumers strengthen toward eco-friendly goods via influencer messaging. It happens when it follows real sustainability actions. Yet, the influencer's felt genuineness plus persuasive strength weaken when

inconsistencies occur. This highlights the delicate balance that exists between marketing effectiveness as well as ethical responsibility in the digital age.

## 2.6 Greenwashing: Types, Effects, and Remediation

Greenwashing, which people define as misleading of consumers about a brand's environmental practices or its benefits, still threatens brand perception within corporate credibility greatly in the sustainability era. Environmentally aware customer groups are constantly growing though misleading eco advertising. Such actions can damage confidence and can reduce customer devotion in fields such as clothing, tourism, and also packaged retail products.

### 2.6.1 Types of Greenwashing

The forms of greenwashing do happen to vary in terms of their scale, in terms of their intent, and also in terms of their impact. Before now, scholars have identified these multiple forms. Symbolic greenwashing features gestures quite visible yet lacking environmental benefit for example hotel campaigns encouraging towel reuse since such campaigns disregard sustainability topics such as energy sourcing or waste management that are more important. Selective environmentalism happens at times when brands highlight minor green initiatives in instances when they continue to use non-recyclable packaging or they rely upon unsustainable supply chains and they conceal major environmental shortcomings. As is found in the Volkswagen emissions scandal, the deliberate manipulation or fabrication of environmental data or claims involves a planned deception, widely discussed in the literature. These categories do highlight the way greenwashing is at times intentional or unintentional, and it risks weakening consumer confidence at the time when people do detect the misrepresentation.

### 2.6.2 Effects of Greenwashing

Those greenwashing effects do more than simply disappoint consumers. Szabo and Webster (2021) argue that in fact this very practice is particularly damaging. It is a process in which moral and emotional values are exploited. In those cases in which consumers do perceive environmental claims as being false or manipulative, then they will disengage psychologically as well as transactionally. Empirical research proves that brands tied into detected greenwashing are evaluated more negatively in overall credibility, product quality, and ethical standing.

Diaz-Bustamante-Ventisca et al. (2024) discovered trust in the fashion industry greatly declines when environmental campaigns are unclear, excessively broad, or omit source citations. According to Mukendi et al. (2020), green skepticism is a phenomenon. Consumers now doubt claims about sustainability without third-party verification that is credible. Ling and Aziz

(2021) note a parallel effect “greenwash fear” in hotels, while distrust of fakery lowers repeat visits after fine service.

Greenwashing raises green perceived risk, according to Chen and Chang (2013), including fear of exploitation from sustainability claims. This risk perception discourages sustainable purchases with suspect brands affected as well as companies committed legitimately to environmental practices. Since more informed consumers identify deceptive claims as well as penalise the brand, Isac et al. (2024) find environmental knowledge mediates this very relationship. Consumers who are less informed often feel betrayed only after the fact, and this leads to a stronger emotional backlash. Santos et al. (2024) extend this claim linking greenwashing to brand hate particularly when environmental messaging improves a firm’s social image beyond achieving actual environmental benefits.

### 2.6.3 Remediation Strategies

Greenwashing may often lead to much more severe damage. Brands can recover though if they use a clear planned method research indicates. Alyahia et al. (2024) highlight green transparency plus green authenticity as two key restorative tools. To ensure sustainability claims are credible also as comparable, these strategies are most effective whenever reinforced by independent third-party verification, such as environmental audits, ISO 14001 compliance, or else B Corp certification.

So that there can be proper remediation, the public has to acknowledge all past shortcomings. They must develop action plans that are clear and time-bound too. Sustainability reporting should be continuous along with publicly accessible because such reporting signals corrective measures beyond temporary image management. However, remediation efforts within India face structural challenges which are important including regulation that is fragmented along with enforcement of eco-labelling standards that is limited as well as consumer awareness of certification schemes such as Ecomark that is low (Sharma and Rao, 2023). In consideration of collective norms as well as peer approval, green purchasing decisions tend to be influenced much more strongly than by individual attitudes (Panda et al., 2024). Thus cultural factors are able to mold recovery routes. This means that in restoring brand credibility often what is required are communities for engagement as well as institutions for reform.

## 2.7 Brand Recovery After Greenwashing

Recovering consumer trust after a greenwashing scandal poses a difficult problem since scepticism increases concerning corporate environmental claims in places like India and information travels quickly through online avenues. For successful trust restoration, emotional

repair that is combined with credibility building that is evidence-based, instead of just depending on public apologies or symbolic gestures, is what is needed.

Researchers consistently find communication to be transparent as well as wrongdoers should acknowledge their misdeeds plus auditors should work independently after people should improve the environment demonstrably. These actions are important to the effective recovery (Santos et al., 2024; Alyahia et al., 2024). A brand's reputation prior to the crisis has a strong influence on things. Even if things go badly, consumers still will likely regain trust. Companies with a well-established history of acting with corporate social responsibility as well as acting authentically are better positioned in order to recover, as seen in the case of international brands like Patagonia, which has navigated reputational risks successfully through consistent sustainability action. Brands with exaggerated claims or prior controversies often face secured distrust and prolonged reputational damage (Galletta et al., 2024).

In India, media fragmentation plus consumer memory bias complicate brand recovery. Dishonesty may seem lasting since consumers in rural areas might have less corrective message exposure from weaker digital skills. Differently, urban consumers who are highly connected can quickly and sustainably mobilise backlash using platforms like Instagram and Twitter, as shown by FMCG brands accused in 2023 of misleading green packaging that still got bad commentary months after publishing clarifications (Badhwar et al., 2024).

Outcomes of recovery are also found to be influenced by culture. In collectivist settings, family perceptions and also peer perceptions often do mediate forgiveness of any brand. Intermediaries such as sustainability influencers, non-governmental organisations, or respected community figures make corrective measures through trust more effective. Sustainability must be properly embedded into the very core of operations to ensure any long-term recovery. Progress updates consistently are also a must. Regular third-party audits, public sustainability dashboards, and community-focused initiatives exist as examples of these practices. These actions show a real change instead of a short image makeover. In just a digital environment in which reputational records can be easily retrievable yet consumers do remember it for a long time, sustained transparency plus authentic action essentially do re-establish trust after greenwashing.

# 3.0 Methodology

## 3.1 Research Approach

This study uses an interpretivist qualitative model for research to see, in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, how green brand authenticity is viewed plus how greenwashing gets a response from Indian urban consumers. Interpretivism assumes individuals socially construct reality coupled with the best comprehension of it through the subjective meanings they assign to their experiences (Saunders et al., 2019). Interpretivism values the depth of context and also individuals' lived realities instead of positivist approaches that are seeking generalisable laws by way of objective measurement. This ontological as well as epistemological stance particularly suits study of consumer trust and authenticity phenomena that deeply root in culture, emotion, plus symbolic communication.

This philosophical orientation with a qualitative approach enables a rich, in-depth examination of the subtleties involved in how consumers interpret environmental claims and brand credibility. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research explores complex processes unfolding within natural settings. Qualitative research becomes ideal since factors specific to context shape these processes. In the Indian context, green consumption evolves along with rapid urbanisation as well as increasing eco-literacy. Economic pressures contend since a qualitative approach notes socio-cultural dynamics shaping views on authenticity. Capturing details about how participants emotionally and cognitively navigate the tensions between genuine and misleading eco-claims would require more than quantitative approaches, though those approaches are useful for measuring general trends.

Furthermore, this study engages with theories such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and Signalling Theory (Connelly et al., 2011), also these theories are interpretative by nature because they focus on intention, belief, and perception rather than on observable behaviours alone. According to both theories, behaviour is shaped by internal attitudes and perceived control as well as social norms. For all of these factors, subjective exploration is what is required. Thus, interpretivism, in an appropriate way, allows one, philosophically, to investigate just how individuals make sense of green claims that appear in FMCG advertising particularly when trust plus deception happen to be central themes.

This research explores, because it seeks conceptual comprehension of how greenwashing and authenticity operate within Indian consumer consciousness rather than seeking to test hypotheses. The study seeks for a way to investigate just how personal experiences can influence consumer responses. Cultural narratives plus media exposure also influence

consumer responses to environmental messaging in everyday household products such as personal care items plus cleaning supplies. This agrees with Denzin and Lincoln's (2018) argument qualitative inquiry acts as a method yet also commits morally and politically to improve lived experience and contextual complexity.

### 3.2 Sampling Strategy and Participant Profiles

To capture diverse and meaningful perspectives, this research purposefully samples participants, using a non-probability technique where researchers select them because they are relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). The study focuses on both consumer trust and also authenticity that exists in green marketing. Therefore, participants must have at least some amount of exposure to sustainability messaging and also eco-claims. Therefore, the study is one that will recruit from urban consumers in a count of 25, the consumers being drawn from both Mumbai and Bengaluru which are two of India's most environmentally progressive metropolitan areas [NITI Aayog, 2021] plus those who self-identify as being eco-inclined or environmentally conscious. Due to demographic diversity plus active sustainability communities, these cities were chosen. Their organic FMCG markets grow, also they are more environmentally aware than smaller urban centers.

Consumer sample design shows variety across gender, age, occupation, and roles in households. This design makes sure urban Indian consumer behavior's complex nature is shown. This includes perspectives from homemakers, working professionals within both corporate and creative sectors, and students in higher education, because each group may vary in how they interpret and respond to green marketing. Age ranges are expected to span out from early twenties to late forties because they capture both younger consumers in the brand-loyalty formation stage and older consumers with established purchasing patterns. While purposive sampling is valuable for ensuring thematic relevance, when online zero-waste communities, eco-friendly product subscription forums, together with sustainability-oriented FMCG companies' brand loyalty programs recruit, they may over-represent consumers already highly engaged with environmental topics. This potential selection bias is being acknowledged as just a limitation. These participants could have greater eco-literacy or more intense attitudes toward green marketing than most people.

Five marketing professionals who work in sectors such as personal care, cleaning products, along with packaged foods will be interviewed, in addition to those consumers. They gain perception into the calculated, creative, and regulatory factors driving green advertising campaigns when data are included and perspectives triangulated. This dual perspective

combines consumer as well as marketer narratives so it strengthens the credibility of these findings since it illuminates both ends of the brand–audience relationship. Researchers are going to continue on to recruit new participants until they reach full thematic saturation that point at which there are no perceptions emerging (Guest et al., 2006). For generating rich, subtle perceptions, a total sample size of 30 participants is considered appropriate based on similar studies (Kumar & Mohapatra, 2020; Ghosh et al., 2021).

### 3.3 Interview Design and Stimulus Strategy

The interview process follows a semi-structured format, because it balances consistency with flexibility as it captures participants' thoughts, emotions, and experiences in their own words (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Four progressive phases structure the discussion.

The first phase explores household cleaning habits of participants. FMCG products' baseline attitudes are also explored via product preferences. FMCG brands of India provide advertisements in print and in digital form within the curated second phase in reality. Half represents authentic green marketing while the others depict common greenwashing tactics. Established academic frameworks guided selection (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Lyon & Montgomery, 2015) so two independent marketing academics and one FMCG branding specialist reviewed to confirm their classification. Experts validate that the stimuli do accurately reflect all of the intended categories. This validation makes sure that these stimuli happen to be culturally relevant for people in the Indian market. Participants are asked to describe the messages that they perceive as well as whether these feel credible or unconvincing, and participants should explain the cues that can inform their judgement.

Phase three is with a focus on personal experiences with those environmental claims. The original question "Have you ever bought a product thinking it was eco-friendly, but later felt misled?" has been reframed to: "Can you recall any personal experiences where the environmental claims of a product influenced your view of that brand?" The risk for leading responses is minimised because this phrasing invites both positive and also negative examples, so it allows for a more balanced set of the responses.

The final phase involves the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) for investigating the formation of intention. Eco-friendly purchasing decisions involve attitudes, perceived social norms, with participant control reflections. Marketing professionals use similar guiding questions adapted by them. These questions center around brand strategy, message framing, and audience reception. The interviews last approximately 15–20 minutes also are conducted flexibly so interviewers probe deeper while they prioritise participant comfort and openness.

### 3.4 Pilot Testing and Refinement

Before formal data collection, one marketing professional along with one consumer participant will be involved in a pilot test. The primary purpose of the pilot is for assessment of clarity, sequencing, and cultural sensitivity in the interview questions and the stimulus materials. In cross-cultural contexts like India, it is a vital step because the use of language, emotional expression, and sustainability discourse can vary greatly across regions, genders, and class lines (Banerjee & Dey, 2021).

Adjustments that include rewording confusing questions ensuring neutral phrasing removing jargon as well as calibrating the stimuli's emotional tone will incorporate feedback from the pilot. The researcher also will be able to refine the probing techniques. Time management within interviews will also be improved. For example, if participants battle in distinguishing between authentic and greenwashed claims during the stimulus phase, then additional visual aids or contextual explanations may be introduced.

To check as to whether pilot interviews do yield meaningful, relevant, and sufficiently rich data aligned with the aims of the study, they will be transcribed and briefly analysed. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) suggested pilot testing so the researcher can practice ethical steps such as gaining consent and debriefing actually.

Importantly, pilot data will not be included within the final analysis unless found fully consistent and complete. The purpose is to prevent skewed thematic views or data that is incomplete.

### 3.5 Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Data will be collected through online or in-person interviews because of how participant availability and convenience will be determining. Online interviews will be hosted on Zoom or on Google Meet via encrypted video platforms and in-person sessions will be hosted in quiet neutral settings that foster open conversation. With fully explicit participant consent, all of the interviews will be audio-recorded. Analysis requires a verbatim transcription of interviews later.

In this research ethical guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021) and the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013) are strictly adhered to. Before data collection commences, the university Research Ethics Committee will grant ethical clearance.

Each participant will receive a Participant Information Sheet clearly outlining the benefits, possible dangers, voluntary nature with the study’s purpose. They will also sign a Written

Informed Consent Form before the interview. That participants will be assured of withdrawal at any point without explanation and data deletion upon request if desired.

During the transcription process, the staff will have to remove all of the identifying information. They will use pseudonyms also for the sake of preserving participant anonymity. Only the research team can access transcripts as well as recordings in a secure, password-protected drive. At the end of the study, all of the data will be archived as required in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Data stewardship that is responsible will be guaranteed.

Participants will be reminded they are free to skip any question or stop the interview, after which the researcher will ensure interviews are conducted in a supportive tone. The entire data collection process is subject to the beneficence principle. People realize that their views can assist communicators in making communication about sustainability ethical plus trustworthy. This is especially relevant within a society in which eco-consciousness grows though consumer scepticism still entangles it. Regulatory oversight remains limited, also corporations perform (Ghosh & Sur, 2022).

### 3.6 Data Analysis Procedure – Thematic Analysis Framework

Once data collection concludes, the recorded interviews will be transcribed, and then we will analyze them thematically when we follow the widely accepted six-phase framework that Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021) proposed. This method is suited well for interpretivist qualitative research since it allows for a systematic but still flexible analysis of rich textual data so that the researcher can recognize trends and meanings that emerge from the lived experiences of participants.

Familiarisation with all of the data involves also the first phase. The researcher will read through and re-read through all of the interview transcripts, and they will listen again to all recordings so that they retain vocal subtlety and emotional tone. Initial impressions, recurring ideas, as well as prominent expressions will be recorded in such memos. Memos give one a way to achieve this. The analysis stays grounded within participants' perspectives because of this engaging process. The researcher starts to get sensitised to both expected and to unexpected themes on account of the grounding.

During the second phase, the researcher will generate initial codes because they use both deductive and inductive strategies. Signalling Theory along with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)'s pre-determined concepts are concepts that will deductively guide. Code creation will therefore be guided by something. In relevant situations, codes for example

"perceived cost of signal," "social pressure," "eco-label trust," or "perceived behavioural control" are going to be applied. An inductive approach will simultaneously allow for the discovery of emergent codes rooted directly in participant language such as "green guilt," "brand betrayal," or "emotional ambivalence." This hybrid coding strategy ensures theoretical alignment, also preserving the exploratory value of qualitative research (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Because it assembles related codes within larger idea groups the third phase gathers codes into likely themes. "Visual credibility," "green influencer trust," and "low-cost cues," for instance, individual codes may be grouped under a larger theme like "authenticity indicators," and the researcher will explore how themes relate to one another and how they align with the research objectives and TPB constructs.

These themes will be reviewed as well as refined by the researcher in the fourth phase. This includes the checking of whether the coded data within each theme coherently supports the theme and also whether the themes relate sensibly to the overall dataset. Overlapping or weak themes will be merged or discarded. Thematic maps as well as colour-coded spreadsheets will support multiple rounds of theme iteration to visualise relationships to ensure internal consistency.

The naming and the defining of themes are in the fifth of phases. Each theme will be given a meaningful concise name described by its scope, core idea, and features. For example, a theme such as "Broken Trust" might be defined as also including experiences of consumer betrayal after people experience greenwashing, which can be often associated with disappointment or anger or with changed future behaviour. This stage makes concepts understandable. It prepares also the groundwork so we can interpret with meaning.

The sixth phase focuses on the production of the narrative account. This account addresses the research objectives via themes twisted into a compelling story. Illustrative verbatim quotations from participants will be included within the final write-up, improving authenticity and transparency while retaining the voice of the consumer. Because these quotes show how the study advances or challenges prevailing understandings, they will be contextualised within existing literature and theories.

To stay close, researchers will track spreadsheet data by hand. During analysis, researchers will maintain a reflective journal always. This journal will record decision rationales with coding dilemmas, evolving interpretations, and positionality reflections. Rigour is supported as analytic transparency is improved as well.

### 3.7 Ensuring Trustworthiness and Rigour

In qualitative research, validity is not defined only by statistical measures but instead by trustworthiness, which includes also credibility, transferability, dependability, plus confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To safeguard the integrity of its findings, this study adopts multiple strategies and ensures methodological rigour.

If findings seem believable and accurately show participant views, credibility improves through member checking. Thematic summaries will be sent to some participants after analysis because we will ask for their feedback on interpretations' accuracy and resonance. Researcher misinterpretation risk is able to be reduced and participant views can be validated or can be challenged (Birt et al., 2016).

A coder who is independent trained in qualitative analysis will apply double coding to at least 20% of all of the transcripts. This action ensures analytical consistency along with dependability. Toward a Cohen's Kappa (κ) score above 0.75, this step verifies intercoder agreement because it strengthens the coding framework's reliability (McHugh, 2012). The coding scheme can be refined through a process of consensus-building. This is the way that discrepancies will be discussed and will be resolved.

Thick description supports this extent if findings may transfer to like settings. Because we will provide rich contextual details about participant demographics, cultural subtleties, and FMCG brand interactions, readers will be able to assess relevance to other urban Indian or global consumer contexts. Describing eco-consumers in Mumbai responding to cleaning products that are Ayurvedic-based gives cultural framing. It is a necessity to compare all of this to just how Bengaluru's tech-savvy segment responds.

Findings are confirmable to the extent that participants, and not researcher bias, shape them, and we will address this via researcher reflexivity and bracketing. The researcher will document their own environmental stance, personal views on greenwashing, also assumptions about trust, to ensure these do not unduly influence the interpretation of data. Qualitative expert peer debriefers absent from study involvement will detect interpretive leaps and challenge analytic conclusions during regular discussions.

A thorough audit trail will be maintained throughout the project as well as documenting data collection procedures, coding decisions, theme revisions, and ethical decisions. This improves transparency, and future researchers or supervisors can trace the study's conclusions' logic by it. Continual upholding of ethics will occur as cultural sensitivity will be maintained. Participants will experience respect, compassion, and responsiveness, particularly when

negative or emotionally charged experiences with deceptive advertising are recounted. We will pay attention to the way people use language, how they avoid academic jargon during interviews, and how they use terms that align with local cultural idioms and urban Indian consumer experience.

# 4.0 Analysis

## 4.1 Introduction

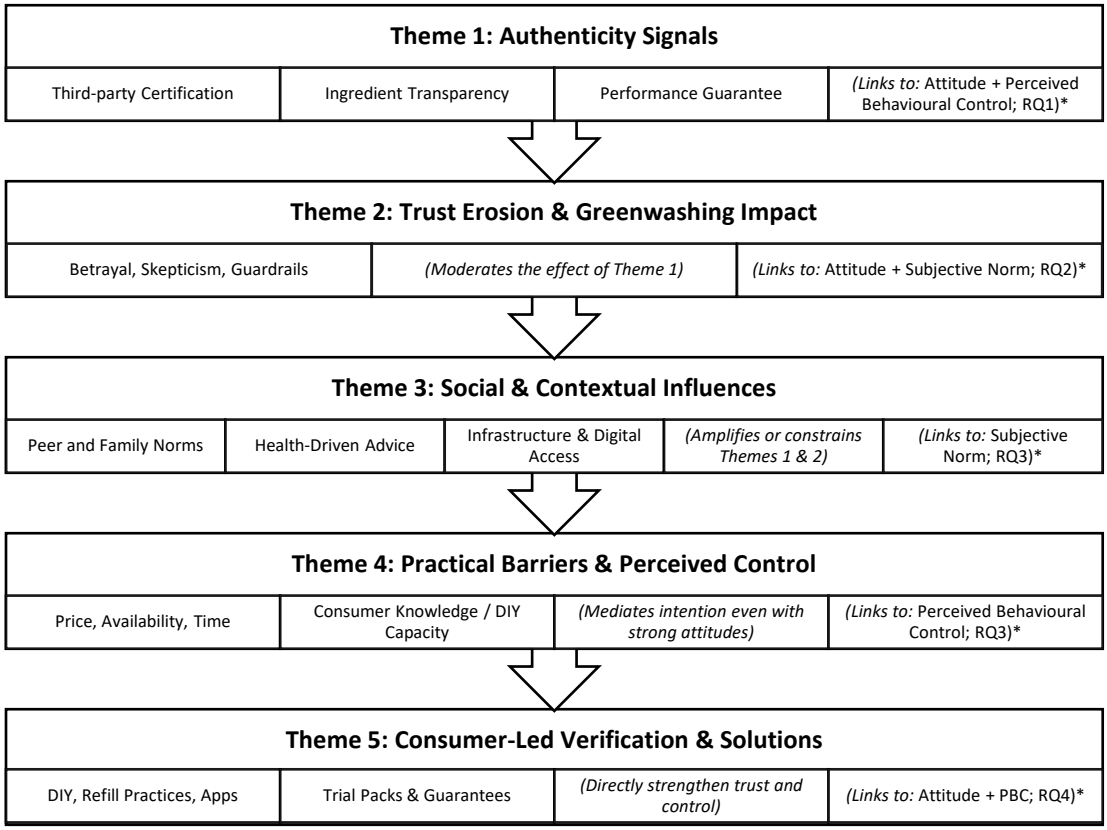
The data generated from thirty semi-structured interviews were analysed through Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach. Inductive exploration of participants' lived experiences justifies this method's selection. Established theories like Signalling Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) are tested deductively as well. Thematic analysis was particularly suited for this study because it could flexibly identify latent meanings beyond surface-level content while it still systematically coded aligned to theoretical constructs.

An interpretive process is thematic analysis, the researcher acknowledges, also coding decisions along with theme construction may be influenced by the researcher's own positionality which is shaped by a background in sustainability research as well as awareness of green marketing controversies. Throughout the analysis, reflexive memos were kept in order to record analytical choices so that bias could be reduced, and regular peer debriefing sessions challenged assumptions so they improved credibility.

This six-phase process involved:

1. **Familiarisation** – Repeatedly read through interview transcripts and take reflexive memos so as to immerse in all of the data and capture initial impressions.
2. **Generating Initial Codes** – Systematic, line-by-line coding of meaningful units was done in each transcript and deductive codes (drawn from Signalling Theory and TPB constructs) were joined with inductive codes from data.
3. **Searching for Themes** – Theme searching means you group codes that relate into themes. This is done through recognizing patterns of meaning across the dataset.
4. **Reviewing Themes** – Themes are iteratively refined such that coherence within each theme together with distinctiveness between themes are ensured via thematic maps by code-support matrices.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes** – For defining and for naming of themes clear definitions in addition to boundaries for each theme must be fully articulated plus exemplar quotes must support each of them.
6. **Producing the Report** – Themes happen to be twisted into a narrative that can be cohesive plus addresses questions.

A visual thematic map shows relationships among themes. The research questions of the study are addressed by these relationships in a collective way.




The following table summarises the five final themes, their constituent codes, and the research questions each addresses:

*Table 1: Final Themes*

| Theme | Constituent Codes | Related RQ / TPB Component |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Authenticity Signals** | High-Cost Cue: Certification; Ingredient Transparency; Demand for Transparency; Performance Guarantee | RQ1: Which cues convey authenticity? Attitude, Perceived Behavioural Control |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **2. Trust Erosion & Greenwashing Impact** | Trust Erosion: Betrayal; Marketing Fluff; Skepticism of Claims | RQ2: How does awareness of greenwashing moderate trust?<br>Attitude, Subjective Norm |
| **3. Social & Contextual Influences** | Social Influence: Peers/Family; Responsibility Attribution; Health Concerns | RQ3: How do social norms shape purchase intention?<br>Subjective Norm |
| **4. Practical Barriers & Perceived Control** | Barrier: Price; Barrier: Availability; Perceived Control: High; Perceived Control: Low | RQ3: Which TPB component most strongly predicts intention?<br>Perceived Behavioural Control |
| **5. Consumer-Led Verification & Solutions** | Need for Verification Tools; DIY & Refill Preference | RQ4: How can practice and policy enhance credible green marketing?<br>Perceived Behavioural Control, Attitude |

Each theme is able to be thoroughly explored. As verbatim quotations show, urban Indian consumers interpret and react to authenticity cues and greenwashing. Social and contextual factors are what shape their intentions, and they propose particular practical measures so trust may be strengthened in green marketing. This high-quality, theory-driven analysis lets us subsequently discuss implications for marketers, regulators, also future research.

## 4.2 Thematic Narrative

### 4.2.1 Theme 1: Authenticity Signals

Across the thirty interviews, participants stated consistently that trust regarding environmental claims depends on verifiable, specific cues instead of vague green imagery. Spence's Signalling Theory (1973) backs this result and says that costly signals which are hard to fake lessen information asymmetry between firms ("signalers") and consumers ("receivers"). Ingredient transparency, performance guarantees, together with third-party certifications emerged within green marketing's context.

### *Third-Party Certifications*

EcoCert and PETA are examples of recognised global bodies certifying products. National bodies like Ecomark also certify products, and that was repeatedly cited as the most persuasive authenticity cue. These labels were described by consumers as "hard evidence" brands underwent strict auditing for them. "Certified biodegradable and plastic-free… EcoCert and PETA give me confidence," one participant explained (P01, Female, 28). However, credibility perception showed a subtle hierarchy: several respondents, even those with international exposure, viewed global certifications as more strict and better recognised, while others valued Ecomark and similar Indian standards because they were culturally relevant and aligned with local environmental priorities. This suggests that it seems as though certification universally improves trust, while where certification comes from can influence how people perceive stringency and relatability.

### *Ingredient Transparency*

Participants stressed the importance of ingredient transparency listing each component as well as source. "To let me cross-check things" was the way a full disclosure approach was lauded as well (P09, Male, 29). Ingredient lists indicate a moderate expense since they involve investing in supply-chain traceability yet are cheaper than external certification. Chen with Chang (2013) found that clarity around product composition mediates trust. Their prior work extends this sub-theme, plus it reduces perceived risk. In our data, transparency also contributed to perceived behavioural control because consumers felt empowered for the validation of claims themselves, strengthening their locus of control over sustainable shopping choices as well.

### *Performance Guarantees*

Several participants valued performance guarantees' promises like money-back offers or comparative performance metrics ("cleans as well as X brand"). "If they do show to me performance comparisons or a money-back kind of guarantee, then I will believe the eco-claims," one respondent noted (P16, Male, 34). Brands that are willing to absorb financial risk in order to prove efficacy suggest confidence via costly guarantees. These guarantees positively influence attitudes and strengthen perceived control by reducing trial's perceived cost and uncertainty, under TPB by framing eco-products as reliable substitutes for conventional options.

*Low-Cost Signals and Skepticism*

On the contrary, packaging that is green in colour and imagery with a nature theme were dismissed as not sufficient for the purpose of inspiring trust. Generic eco-phrases like "eco-safe," "planet-friendly" were widely dismissed too. Several participants described all of these cues as "marketing fluff" unless verifiable evidence accompanied each one of them, which then reflected broader research on just how low-cost, easily imitated signals weakly combat greenwashing (Badhwar et al., 2024). Design elements of this kind might at first attract attention. Lacking transparent substantiation or certification, people viewed the elements as shallow.

*Synthesis*

Third-party certification ingredient transparency along with performance guarantees together create a layered credibility architecture. This architecture builds foundational trust, invites consumer verification, and underwrites functional expectations under preferences between local and global certifiers. Attitudes rarely shifted from only low-cost visual or verbal cues. Still, when used reliably and honestly, these might improve more costly signals. To combat greenwash doubt, brands put money into cues that are verifiable plus hard to fake. This investment moves consumers ahead from tentative interest toward committed purchase intention. Because of how it pinpoints indicators at a cue level for authenticity that do most strongly shape trust and also provides a clear roadmap to help marketers seeking to signal genuine performance regarding environmental matters, this theme addresses Research Question 1 in a direct way.

### 4.2.2 Theme 2: Trust Erosion & Greenwashing Impact

While Authenticity Signals serve to build trust, participants vividly depicted how greenwashing deploys superficial or misleading eco-claims, swiftly weakening that trust for derailing purchase intentions. This theme captures emotional fallout along with behavioural consequences of encountering deceptive green messaging. Thereby, greenwashing awareness's moderating role in the trust–purchase pathway is indeed elucidated.

*Differences Between First-Time Buyers and Experienced Eco-Consumers*

Greenwashing impacted consumers in different ways when consumers experienced eco-products before. For the first time, buyers are often motivated by curiosity or by social influence. After what is a negative encounter, they feel especially discouraged, sometimes even concluding that "green products aren't worth the risk" and reverting entirely to conventional brands. Experienced eco-consumers, those with a longer history relating to sustainability-

labelled products, tended to approach new claims with more initial scepticism. Before purchase they used harder evaluation criteria. Experienced buyers, expressing frustration, were more likely to treat greenwashing as just an isolated incident and redirect their purchases toward verified alternatives, rather than abandoning the eco-category altogether like the other group. This distinction underscores just how prior exposure plus eco-literacy shape if trust is resilient or fragile after greenwashing incidents suggesting how to target authenticity signals toward different consumer segments.

### *Emotional Response and Betrayal*

Greenwashing impacted consumers in different ways when consumers experienced eco-products before. For the first time, buyers are often motivated by curiosity or by social influence. After what is a negative encounter, they feel especially discouraged, sometimes even concluding that "green products aren't worth the risk" and reverting entirely to conventional brands. Experienced eco-consumers, those with a longer history relating to sustainability-labelled products, tended to approach new claims with more initial scepticism. Before purchase they used harder evaluation criteria. Experienced buyers, expressing frustration, were more likely to treat greenwashing as just an isolated incident and redirect their purchases toward verified alternatives, rather than abandoning the eco-category altogether like the other group. This distinction underscores just how prior exposure plus eco-literacy shape if trust is resilient or fragile after greenwashing incidents suggesting how to target authenticity signals toward different consumer segments.

### *Skepticism and Cognitive Guardrails*

Participants reported a heightened sense of skepticism and developed cognitive guardrails with which to screen future claims beyond any raw emotion. P02 (Male, 33) said "'Green bottle' feels like marketing fluff I ignore those ads now," a statement that exemplifies the "trust deficit" (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). In this case, greenwashing damages the brand in question it makes people generally wary so later signals of honesty must defeat it. Signalling Theory suggests all signals lose credibility after deception is noticed, so brands must show authenticity and increase their burden of proof.

### *Behavioral Fallout and Normative Spillover*

Respondents recalled changes in behavior after greenwashing incidents. Many gave their loyalty away from the offending brand. Some quit any experimentation with new eco-products. P07 (Male, 45) explained, "It felt like they were cashing in on the green trend without actually doing anything different. I wasted money on that." Reactions such as those depict a negative

normative cascade, and the stories of betrayal propagate through social circles, thus reinforcing subjective norms against the trusting of unverified green claims. This highlights how greenwashing awareness impacts the connection of authenticity cues with purchase intention. Strong signals battle in order to regain credibility after trust is eroded.

*Implications for Trust Repair*

People think that fixing trust after greenwashing needs actions beyond saying sorry. Concrete as well as verifiable actions are demanded importantly. “Brands should publicly admit past failures as well as commit to third-party audits,” P05 (Non-binary, 38) recommended. Transparent remedial measures may restore perceived behavioral control through signaling that consumers can once again rely on brands’ eco-claims, resurrecting positive attitudes and intentions, from a TPB standpoint. This aligns to that of Free et al. (2024), who advocate within it for strict sustainability assurance frameworks.

### 4.2.3 Theme 3: Social Influences and Contextual Factors

While individual perceptions of authenticity and experiences of greenwashing critically shape trust, participants consistently highlighted two distinct connected factors affecting eco-purchasing decisions: (1) social influences operating through interpersonal networks, shared norms, and community membership, and (2) contextual factors related to urban infrastructure and digital access. Both of the sets of influences interact with TPB’s subjective norms component along with, to a lesser extent, perceived behavioral control, plus this shapes just how consumers evaluate as well as act upon green marketing claims.

*Social Influence*

**Peer and Family Recommendations**

Interviewees often found and then used real green products because of advice. These recommendations came from friends and from family members or from online communities and resulted in more continued use. For instance, P01 (Female, 28) noted “I follow sustainable forums and Instagram influencers—they guide my choices”. Likewise, P24 (Male, 48) explained “My daughter researches products and advises me—her recommendations matter”. These accounts underscore subjective norms' establishment within digital and offline networks. Under TPB, when important others endorse a behaviour such as purchasing certified eco-products, individuals perceive greater social pressure for conforming and this strengthens their intention to act (Ajzen, 1991).

**Professional and Interest-Based Communities**

Also, sustainable consumption was shaped by professional affiliations, interest-based communities, and personal circles. P22 (Male, 42), a marketing manager, described how industry conferences and agency peer groups establish standards for credible eco-claims.

“In my line of work, since I hear from colleagues concerning misleading buzzwords, I am more vigilant when choosing products for my own home.”

Likewise, students and academics (e.g., P03, Male, 23; P30, Female, 27) spoke about campus sustainability clubs also academic discourse reinforcing normative expectations. These clubs and this discourse permitted access to factual information, so they seemed to shape outlook.

**Health-Driven Motivations**

Peers distinctly influenced each other by way of health advice. The recommendations from healthcare professionals along with wellness communities were heavily relied upon by participants with specific conditions, like P08 (Female, 52), who suffers from eczema.

“As someone who has eczema, safety is very important for me.” I trust in the brands that do consider safety. “My choices are guided by my daughter's healthcare products expertise.”

As moral and practical guidance was offered, health-conscious norms intersected subjective norms, increasing perceived control through trusted knowledge sources.

**Generational Differences in Peer Influence**

Peer influence's form as well as strength was different among age groups. Often, older adults valued recommendations from close-knit family and long-term social contacts because of trust developed over time. By contrast, Gen Z participants reported that they relied more on peer-generated content beside social media influencers plus digital micro-communities. They valued the diversity of perspectives and with immediacy. Both groups responded to social proof, also the channels through which influence operated differed markedly, which suggests that authenticity signals may need to be tailored to generationally preferred networks.

**Contextual Factors: Urban Infrastructure and Digital Access**

Mumbai and also Bengaluru's metropolitan settings introduced a set of structural conditions. These conditions supported green purchasing or constrained it. High internet penetration occurred in these cities, where zero-waste forums thrived, so this gave consumers unprecedented access to product information as well as peer reviews plus verification tools. These conditions improved the level of consumer confidence in making eco-friendly choices. However, the same urban context presented barriers. Participants were often nudged by competing time demands, traffic congestion, and the fast-paced lifestyle to conveniently choose familiar, mass-market brands.

P02 (Male, 33) explained, as an example.

"I mostly shop online because getting discounts on big brands is easier. I sometimes skip eco options for the reason that I don't have time for research."

Social encouragement separates from contextual constraints along with it highlighting a key understanding. Strong subjective norms can motivate sustainable purchasing, but perceived behavioural control often moderates their effect for the reason that people can easily access authentic green products. Dealing with infrastructure problems can be just as vital. For example, improving availability at local shops or creating faster verification tools promotes social advocacy for green choices.

### 4.2.4 Theme 4: Practical Barriers & Perceived Behavioural Control

The interviews underscored that cost and availability as practical constraints do play a role in shaping trust in green claims translating into actual purchase behaviour. These barriers affect that which people can access for example price and also stock availability and that which people perceive for example confidence in trying new products or fear of wasting money which jointly inform how behaviour is controlled (PBC) within the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Consumers with trust infused and well-intentioned may refrain from buying authentic green products if they feel insufficiently equipped to navigate logistical or economic obstacles deemed too high.

#### *Price Sensitivity as an Objective and Subjective Barrier*

Across a series of interviews, a recurrent refrain was about the premium pricing of eco-friendly products. This pricing was relative as it pertained to mass-market alternatives. Participants described feeling torn amid their household budgets and their desire. They wanted for supporting sustainable brands. P06 (Female, 31) shared, as example:

"I tried the eco-friendly dish soap, but it was greatly more expensive and didn't foam as much. I then reverted to my standard brand."

P19 (Female, 47) made a similar note:

Eco-products will typically cost from 20–30% more. I am not willing to make that extra payment unless I do see a clear benefit.

Because the cost is higher, this depicts an objective economic barrier. It also displays a personal control threshold when people feel investment risk might not yield enough value. “Wasting money” deters attempts, even if people believe in a brand or certification. Economic PBC meaning belief in one's ability to act financially often obstructed green product adoption.

### *Availability and Distribution Limitations*

Limited access for consumers to eco-friendly products especially in physical retail channels was another challenge beyond price point. Participants often cited sourcing specialty products as well as inconsistent stock. P18 (Non-binary, age 26) stated thus:

That grocery near me does not have them also Amazon is often out of stock. “It is simpler to stay with what is constant.”

P24 (Male, 48) highlighted geographic disparities, and also he noted that his rural guests in Bengaluru “lacked access to green options altogether.” These accounts reinforce that logistical PBC—when consumers perceive convenience and availability, then that perception can inhibit green behaviour, even among consumers who are motivated and environmentally conscious.

### *Knowledge and Expertise as Control Enablers*

However, some people already knew the product quite well. These people had a better comprehension of the environment and also had more perceived control. P03 mentioned, “I am a 23 year old male environmental science student”:

“I know exactly where to find reliable brands as well as interpret labels through that. I feel very much in control of my choices because of that.”

P17, a retired engineer (Female, 50), did likewise share of her DIY routine.

“I do not depend on commercial products at all, so I make cleaners myself from baking soda and vinegar.”

These examples show self-assurance regarding expertise can counter structural barriers. Higher perceived control appeared more often among educated, urban, and professionally skilled participants, which is interesting. Income level, occupation, and gender seemed to shape access toward knowledge and strategies. Greater efficacy when creating or when identifying trusted green solutions tended to be reported by students as well as female professionals.

Both actual as well as perceived control from interventions can be increased by improving consumer knowledge like tutorials, in-store demonstrations, or third-party verification tools.

This eases green behavior and closes the divide between trust and action by diminishing the mental and logistical friction of eco-consumption.

### 4.2.5 Theme 5: Consumer-Led Verification & Solutions

Complementing a reliance on external cues as well as the navigation of practical barriers, many participants advocated for consumer-driven mechanisms since they verify green claims. These strategies highlight how consumers seek authenticity. These strategies are already in use, under consideration, or imagined as ideal solutions now. Participants for sure verified products as well as customised products, and they did report feeling a greater sense of agency. This increased their trust in green products, their mindset, and their feeling that they could make choices for sustainability; this was control of perceived behaviour.

#### *Digital Verification Tools – Desired/Hypothetical*

To participants, databases and mobile applications that enable the quick verification of certifications and ingredient lists before purchase were of strong interest. For instance, P01, a female of 28 years old, envisaged this:

“A central app in which you scan a barcode and immediately see if the claim is valid would be useful. Such an app would be a game-changer.”

No participant reported the action that they actively took to use such a thorough tool rather this represents one solution that someone desired to address the attitudinal need for credible information and the PBC challenge of swift, hassle-free verification.

#### *Refill-Station and DIY Preferences – Implemented/Aspirational*

Some strategies were in use by participants. For instance, P10 (Female, 36), an NGO project manager, described bringing (implemented) her own containers toward local refill outlets. She made certain of complete transparency regarding ingredients. P05 (Non-binary, 38) (implemented) stated “Eliminates any doubt” while making their citrus vinegar spray. Consumers gain total command over product ingredients as these approaches maximize PBC avoiding misleading advertising indicators. Others expressed aspirational interest in the adopting of these practices in the event resources and facilities became more accessible and suggested that practical and knowledge barriers still limit common uptake.

### *Trial Sizes and Money-Back Guarantees – Aspirational/Implemented*

Aspirational as well as implemented were mixed within requests for performance guarantees or small trial packs. Brands that are offering these particular options were viewed as strong signals of brand confidence by some participants who were already engaged. P15 (Female, age 24) stated that:

"I'm more willing to experiment upon seeing a money-back promise or buy a small sachet."

These mechanisms reduce perceived risk (attitude) also lower financial and psychological barriers (PBC). Due to them, a more frequent trial of eco-products is enabled from just a theoretical standpoint.

### *Interaction of Attitude and Control*

A reinforcing loop was clear across these strategies between attitude and control. When consumers trusted environmental claims regarding a product (positive attitude), they were more willing to invest time as well as make efforts in verification or DIY solutions (increased control). However, their belief about results and readiness for green products grew (positive attitude) if they felt able to make choices or check assertions (high control). Since reciprocity exists, interventions strengthening either dimension likely influence the other positively, and they increase overall purchase intention.

### *Equity and Access Implications*

The implementation of these strategies required either digital tools or even time or knowledge that not all of the participants had access to equally. Educated, urban, and tech-savvy consumers like P01, P03, and P27 were more likely to actively explore and to adopt such practices for they benefited from high digital literacy as well as proximity to refill stations or eco-stores. In contrast, participants like P04 as well as P19 faced constraints over time, resources, or access to technology. Participants expressed an aspirational interest or completely disengaged from those methods. This disparity raises important equity considerations: through efforts that target democratising access to verification tools and infrastructure that sustains products, solutions consumers lead risk becoming privileges of niche, well-resourced segments rather than mechanisms that broadly build market-wide trust.

## 4.3 Summary of Key Findings

The thematic analysis of thirty semi-structured interviews reveals that a complex process exists where urban Indian consumers navigate green marketing claims then translate or fail in attempts to translate them into purchase intentions. Five interlocking perceptions emerge:

**1. Verifiable Authenticity Signals Are Essential**

Through transparent ingredient disclosures, performance guarantees, and hard-to-imitate, high-cost third-party certifications, trust is improved and positive attitudes shaped.

People consistently recognised these cues for indicating brand commitment genuinely toward environmental responsibility.

**2. Greenwashing Undermines Trust and Intention**

Emotional responses involving betrayal and scepticism trigger more encounters with misleading or superficial claims such as “vague slogans” plus “green-coloured packaging”.

Experiences did discourage participants from even trying green alternatives at all in some cases, thereby reinforcing social scepticism through those peer networks.

**3. Social Norms and Context Amplify or Constrain Choices**

Subjective norms do shape trust to a large extent, particularly for younger consumers because family members, peers, influencers, and professional communities do shape trust.

Health concerns contribute toward influence. Influence is seen especially from among wellness-focused groups and from older adults.

However, good intentions are often not enough and contextual factors force reversion to usual products. These factors include time scarcity, online shopping habits, together with limited local access.

**4. Practical Barriers Significantly Moderate Behaviour**

High prices coupled with inconsistent availability mainly acted as barriers while limiting perceived behavioral control even for trust-inclined consumers.

However, people familiar with DIY or eco-literacy showed more confidence. They also felt more agentive when they navigated sustainable options.

**5. Consumers Seek Active Verification and Co-creation**

Consumer-led tool demand grows through mobile apps, barcodes, trial packs, and refill stations.

These mechanisms build trust and make action feel easier reinforcing intention to buy verified green products.

### 4.3.1 Limitations

While the findings offer robust insight into urban Indian consumer behaviour, several limitations must be acknowledged. The sample was drawn exclusively from Mumbai and Bengaluru—India's most environmentally aware and digitally connected cities which may limit the generalisability of results to rural or semi-urban populations. Furthermore, the sample leaned toward educated and eco-aware participants, with greater access to digital tools, information, and sustainability infrastructure. This demographic skew may underrepresent the barriers faced by consumers with lower digital literacy, limited discretionary income, or reduced product access. Future research should expand to include a wider cross-section of consumers across socioeconomic and geographic divides.

These findings lay the foundation for the following Discussion chapter, which critically interprets the themes in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks, and evaluates their implications for marketers, policymakers, and consumer advocacy in India's evolving green economy.

# 5.0 Discussion

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the thematic analysis's main results shown in Chapter 4 through connections to theoretical ideas from Chapter 2. Exploring how urban Indian consumers perceive authenticity, form trust, and translate green marketing claims into behavioural intentions or fail at doing so. The discussion draws upon two core theoretical frameworks: Signalling Theory, because it explains how consumers interpret marketing claims under conditions of information asymmetry, along with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), because it identifies the psychological determinants of consumer intention namely, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control.

Five major themes identified from within the data are revisited again through this very lens. These include verifiable authenticity signals as well as important, greenwashing that disrupts, social norms with contextual enablers that play a role. Practical constraints influence perceived control, also consumer-led verification practices grow in their role. This chapter shows dynamic interdependencies instead of treating these elements as separate ones. Trust and verification in addition to social influence coalesce in order to shape attitudes and control perceptions. In doing so, this chapter advances theory via extending TPB beyond cognitive bounds so it incorporates trust's emotional and moral dimensions and refines Signalling Theory through a dual-axis perspective that considers signal cost and medium credibility. The chapter concludes at that time when it offers up some implications, and it acknowledges some limitations, and it proposes some future research priorities.

## 5.2 Relating Themes to Theory

### 5.2.1 Signal Cost and Medium Credibility in Green Marketing

Signalling Theory has roots located in economics plus it posits that individuals rely on signals so that they may judge the quality or authenticity of a product or service when perfect information happens to be absent. Within green marketing, this study found consumers consistently interpret high-cost signals such as independent third-party certifications, detailed disclosures, and performance guarantees as credibly indicating authenticity. These signals reduce uncertainty and build trust, which inauthentic brands find difficult of imitation. EcoCert also India’s Ecomark were often viewed by participants not merely as labels. Instead, they were viewed more as assurances for institutional oversight along with environmental accountability. Unreliable cues or manipulative cues also vague cues or cues superficial were at times dismissed, such as packaging green in colour, buzzwords that read “eco-friendly,” or logos with

stylised leaf designs. Participants used terms such as “fluff” and “marketing gimmick” to describe these tactics, and that aligns alongside prior research suggesting that low-cost signals tend to exacerbate scepticism when used without substantiating evidence.

This study does also reveal in an important way that the content itself matters just as much as that of a signal's medium. An influencer's unverified social media post sharing legitimate certification met more scepticism than a brand’s official website or government database making a modest eco-claim. This is a finding that highlights a key gap within classical Signalling Theory. Often, the theory overlooks the messenger's role. This research proposes a subtler interpretation: the delivery medium's credibility and signal's intrinsic cost shape signal reception. Signals, therefore, operate along two axes: costliness with channel trustworthiness, and only those that score highly on both tend to generate genuine trust.

### 5.2.2 Trust Erosion, Attitudes, and the Moral-Affective Core of TPB

Attitudes are a key determinant of behavioural intention according to TPB. Attitudes customarily reflect cost–benefit reasoning coupled with being conceptualised as rational evaluations of outcomes. Within green purchasing, this study finds attitudes are infused by moral and emotional dimensions. Trust violations in particular highlight these very attitudes. When experiencing greenwashing, participants often described that they felt “cheated,” “angry,” or “betrayed,” moral indictments of perceived dishonesty rather than any simple disappointment.

Such responses depict much of the complexity within attitudes toward green products. These attitudes do not have only utilitarian assessments as a basis. They are closely related to consumer values, ethical norms, and corporate transparency needs rather. When such expectations are violated, the attitudinal damage is deep and often irreversible. Even though the product had some cleaning efficacy, one participant who felt misled by an “eco” detergent vowed that she would never purchase from that brand again. This reaction underscores just how durable attitudinal breakdowns can be. When something compromises trust, the breakdowns become durable.

Moral-affective influences are in this way suggested to extend through the TPB. Trust functions as being the emotional and also ethical scaffolding and it is not merely as being a precursor for positive attitudes. When the trust is broken then the entire attitudinal structure collapses down. This collapse does not only lead to behavioural avoidance but also leads to active reputational damage by way of negative word-of-mouth for the reason that trust is gone.

### 5.2.3 Norms, Control, and the Interdependence of Intention Drivers

TPB identifies subjective norms along with perceived behavioural control (PBC) as key antecedents of behavioural intention. Viewpoint is a factor too. The findings of this study affirm that subjective norms have a contextual nature. Subjective norms are defined as the perceived social pressure for performing or avoiding a behaviour. Consumer perceptions that concern green authenticity were shaped in the main by peer groups as well as family members plus professional communities and also digital influencers. For several cases, participants said they decided to adopt or avoid a product entirely because someone they trusted advised or judged it. Due to its demonstration that normative influences matter most in uncertain situations such as eco-consumption, this agrees with research.

Individuals perceive control when they sense their own ability for behaving. This control that they felt was important too. When consumers felt confident verifying claims through apps, certifications, or prior experience, they acted more often on sustainable intentions. However, trust-rich consumers used standard methods when verifying proved hard or lengthy. Those with time constraints, deficient skills, or list overload particularly found this true.

Perceived control together with attitude had a feedback loop. This feedback loop notably emerged afterward. One green claim was verified by consumers successfully, and they gained confidence to discern claims later. Their positive attitudes for sustainable products overall were improved and they were made more willing to explore unfamiliar brands. Attitude and control thus strengthened one another jointly. Verifying has successfully bred the confidence within, and confidence has nurtured openness for ultimately creating a cycle of engaging more deeply into green initiatives.

## 5.3 Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes further to theory through the offering of two key advances. First, it offers within an integrative model that connects Signalling Theory as well as the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Trust, once earned through credible signals, strengthens all three psychological determinants of intention as it fosters positive attitudes, aligns with social norms, and improves perceived control. This triangulation suggests that trust is just not an isolated construct. It rather intersects, triggers, and connects the TPB parts like a stimulus.

In this study, a dual-axis framework introduces Signalling Theory refinements. Signal cost is stressed in Signalling Theory applications customarily. They downplay the importance of delivery channels, however. Even when delivered by way of low-credibility sources, costly signals can still fail while those signals that are moderately priced may then succeed through

trusted channels. This comprehension gains especial import now. Authenticity can vary across all of the diverse platforms wherein consumers may receive marketing messages. Hence, future signalling research should move beyond cost analysis, and also it should incorporate channel dynamics.

### 5.4 Managerial and Policy Implications

The findings suggest marketers invest in high-quality authenticity signals like certifications, fully disclose, and guarantee, a strategy necessary but insufficient. Consumers view reliable channels that must also send these signals. Official brand websites, government certification portals, also verified influencer collaborations convey credibility more successfully. Unvetted or purely aesthetic promotions are less likely toward this.

Transparency as well as message integrity should be in the focus of influencer marketing as it shifts away from visual appeal. For the responsible communication of green claims, proper training and also proper guidelines should equip the influencers. For platforms that include Instagram and also YouTube, regulatory partnerships could then be formed so that those partnerships vet green content with use of AI-powered filters for compliance and badges for verified claims.

In policy, India's Central Consumer Protection Authority might introduce a national green-claims registry or app that then lets consumers scan and verify instantly brand certifications. Digital literacy campaigns can surely help in democratising access for verification tools if those target less tech-savvy populations. This could narrow the fairness disparity for eco spending.

### 5.5 Study Limitations

Despite the perceptions generated, this study has limitations. The sample was made up mostly of educated urban residents. These residents were from Mumbai and from Bengaluru. Therefore, green discourse may prove less generalisable to rural populations or those less exposed. Second, interviews were conducted over phone. The depth of qualitative data might well have been limited since they were not recorded. However, this was then reduced since note-taking was quite strict, memoing was very reflexive, and transcripts had double-coding for ensuring reliability. Third, household cleaning products were in the study's exclusive focus. While these items relate to sustainability research as a useful topic, other forces can function within fields such as food or fashion. Finally, the design of the study limits our ability for observing how trust or behaviour changes as time goes on.

## 5.6 Future Research Directions

Three avenues for future research are proposed here. For testing their interactive effects on intention and trust, experimental studies manipulating both delivery medium and signal cost are needed. Such of these studies would help to establish causality. They would also improve the dual-axis signalling model shown here. Researching throughout India could help uncover how demographic, cultural, also infrastructural differences mediate what people receive as green claims. Concerning the current study's urban bias, this would provide comprehension of consumer behaviour across more diverse settings. In future work, longitudinal methods such as diary studies or digital ethnography could be adopted so as to explore the evolution of consumer trust across repeated brand interactions. This would broaden perception into pardon after deceptive marketing exposures or after-sale actions such as brand devotion, item endorsement.

This research provides a useful guide and a better conceptual framework for adoption of behaviour in ecological marketing and improving genuineness and credibility. Scholars along with practitioners can build more effective inclusive plus credible pathways toward sustainable consumption via understanding how signals, trust, norms, as well as perceived control co-evolve.

# 6.0 Conclusion

## 6.1 Comprehensive Conclusion and Reflective Summary

This dissertation investigated the way authenticity cues in green advertising influence consumer trust and purchase intentions regarding household cleaning products in urban India. Based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Signalling Theory, the study gave a subtle view using a qualitative, theory-informed analysis of how Indian urban consumers understand environmental claims in a more saturated, semi-regulated marketing area. That research drew on thirty semi-structured interviews with consumers as well as marketing professionals right across Mumbai and Bengaluru. It revealed the complexity in green communication and the critical role of trust mediating consumer interpretation and action.

From its outset, the research observed that marketing oriented to sustainability particularly in the FMCG sector is increasingly vulnerable to greenwashing. Eco-labelling standards lack the needed stringency, and vague or else unverified claims do proliferate, so consumers battle to decipher environmental messaging authenticity without any formal guidance. As this study has confirmed, consumers are not the passive recipients of advertising. Rather, they do assessments evaluating what they view as truthful or false, assessments that are often emotionally intense. Cultural values, past experiences, digital literacy, also access to knowledge deeply embed these interpretations.

The present study helps much via seeing trust as emotional, moral, and social simultaneously, not just a rational idea. In deceptive green claims, participants frequently described experiences that included betrayal and disappointment and also anger. This was highlighted by how they perceived authenticity tied to brand ethics and social responsibility. This finding deepens the customary comprehension about trust in marketing because it suggests something. In the context of sustainability, trust functions as a moral currency that is earned slowly through both consistency and transparency but that expectations can quickly violate as well as lose.

As a researcher, my perspective about green advertising and consumer psychology has evolved greatly over this study. At first, I approached the topic with a predominantly structural view because I focused on the mechanics of message framing, signal types, and behaviour models. A messier but also much richer reality was revealed in participant narratives however. Consumers are framed by a landscape that involves partial knowledge plus varying social influence in addition to competing claims. Their trust is not automatically earned by eco-brands or certifications. Instead, repeated verification and also peer validation in addition to experiential consistency cultivate it. Both sustainability communication coupled with

consumer agency are now conceptualised by me within a way greatly influenced by this shift from a cognitive-informational framework to a relational-ethical one.

### 6.2 Advancement of Theory and Conceptual Integration

The findings of this study do contribute in a way to the employed theoretical frameworks. In regard to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the study supports the model's central elements attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control of behaviour. When describing green purchase intentions, these components are relevant. Trust's pivotal mediating role is demonstrated too, extending the TPB however. This research reveals trust as an antecedent influencing all three components simultaneously rather than a downstream effect of attitude or norm. By shaping the way authenticity is evaluated, it informs consumer attitudes; via alignment with peer and influencer recommendations, it reinforces subjective norms; also by reducing uncertainty and increasing confidence in product selection, it strengthens perceived control. This very cross-cutting function of trust demands for it its repositioning. Trust must be a necessary element within the TPB framework regarding green consumer behaviour.

The study does also expand the Signalling Theory's explanatory scope when it proposes a dual-axis framework for evaluating just how effective green marketing signals are. Signalling literature often stresses signal cost to show credibility, yet these results suggest the signal medium matters as much. By the participants, signals that were encountered through brand websites or certified databases were differentiated consistently from those encountered through influencer content or generic advertisements. The interpretation was influenced through the credibility of that delivery platform. This occurred even despite consistent message content. Therefore, a signal is effective only if it is difficult for one to fake. To be effective, the signal requires consumers who perceive the medium as trustworthy. This view refines Signalling Theory in an important way and greatly matters in the digital age, where content mediates and decentralises highly.

Toward the literature on green brand authenticity, identifying consumer-led verification as a distinct process supporting trust formation contributes. Different from customary models that focus on brand-originated cues, this research shows that consumers increasingly engage in their own verification practices because they scan at barcodes, research into ingredients, and share product experiences within peer networks. These practices authenticate something during participation by people. People co-construct that authenticity in place of just receiving it. The concept defies the unidirectional framework because advertising speaks and steers toward a more engaging, consumer-based idea that envisions trust within ecological usage.

## 6.3 Limitations and Critical Reflection on the Research Design

While this dissertation yielded valuable perceptions, we must reflect critically upon what the research design and execution may limit. The researchers decided to forgo audio recording and to instead take detailed notes because they were ethically motivated and sensitive in consideration of participant comfort. However, this decision may have worked to restrict the data's great richness. Subtleties in tone, hesitation, and emphasis did not always provide the additional interpretive value they could have. Though wide-ranging memoing and immediate reflection were used to preserve the integrity of responses, verbatim transcripts would have benefited from a more layered analysis such as discourse analysis or semiotic examination.

The sampling strategy was additionally limited to Mumbai along with Bengaluru, though diverse within the cities. These cities, highly representative of urban eco-conscious India, cannot fully capture the diversity of experiences, values, and access constraints faced by consumers among non-digitally connected populations in rural areas or smaller towns. This urban bias may have overrepresented consumers who have sustainable alternatives access plus high brand awareness and eco-literacy levels. When there were more participants hailing from less wealthy groups or from digitally marginalised groups, researchers could then uncover different forms relating to trust formation or different forms relating to scepticism. Other barriers and motivators not explored here could also be uncovered by researchers.

Though theoretically justified the exclusive focus on household cleaning products limits applicability of findings across product categories. For greenwashing, various sectors can elicit distinct emotional responses as well as moral responses. Sectors including fashion, food, or technology may invoke different authenticity criteria. To adopt a lens that is cross-sectoral would help future studies to see if the mechanisms found here will transfer or stay uniquely in health-and-hygiene-centric consumption.

Perceptions were explored via the semi-structured interview format. Complementary methodologies could have improved it with focus groups, digital trace analysis, or in-situ shopping observations, however. The social negotiations surrounding green consumption along with real-time decision-making processes might have gained further understanding through these methods.

## 6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations and reflections outlined above suggest some recommendations toward later investigation naturally. It is a foremost priority for inquiry to broaden socio-economic and geographic scope. Future studies should explore consumer trust dynamics in Tier-2 and Tier-3

cities, since product availability, infrastructure, and sustainability narratives do differ greatly from India's major metropolitan centres. This would act to help uncover just how authenticity is interpreted within contexts of lower product penetration. It would shed light upon reduced certification visibility as well as minimal eco-literacy infrastructure.

Consumer trust regarding green brands should be examined using longitudinal research designs. Understanding trust's evolution across time remains important. Repeated interactions as well as brand behaviour and external influences such as regulatory actions or social media discourse shape trust which is not a static attribute. For example, a study tracks consumer perceptions across multiple touchpoints before, during, as well as after a greenwashing incident, plus it could yield valuable perceptions into the durability and repairability of trust.

This study suggests causal mechanisms, and experimental approaches may prove helpful with testing them. The dual-axis signalling framework that was proposed can be empirically validated when researchers manipulate signal cost and vary delivery channel credibility. Furthermore, in the event researchers integrate biometrics, eye-tracking, or real-time decision-mapping, then they could gain further perceptions into just how authenticity cues happen to be processed and evaluated at a subconscious level or behavioural level.

For green claim verification purposes, future research must investigate the efficacy of technological tools. About barcode scanners, mobile apps, or AI-powered product audits, several participants showed interest. An investigation exploring tool engagement might reveal impacts to perceived control, trust, and intention. More effective consumer empowerment platforms would derive also from such work's design.

## 6.5 Practical and Policy Implications

This study has clear implications for consumer advocacy groups, policymakers, also practitioners concerned with responsible consumption as well as sustainable marketing. The research underscores the necessity for verifiable action grounding for marketers in the FMCG sector of India. Relying on evocative packaging, aspirational slogans, or symbolic green imagery is insufficient now. For consumers, most notably those having experienced greenwashing before, it actively seeks out proof through the certifications, transparent ingredients, and performance that is assured. Credibility vanishes when brands do not meet proof demand. These brands also risk wider reputational damage from consumer word-of-mouth coupled with social media backlash.

Therefore, marketing strategies must fully integrate sustainability right across all of the layers of brand communication for the reason that they design products, label products, advertise, and

then engage after sales. When brands vet influencer partnerships they should consider more than reach or visual appeal. They also should confirm that influencers do align with their own environmental ethos. It is important for training and equipping of influencers so that they can responsibly communicate green claims, most especially because misinformation can spread with rapidity and consumer trust is itself fragile.

Policymakers have a part of importance to perform. Also, their role is key. This research discovers and urges that we create a national green claim verification platform, possibly as a public-private collaboration among the Central Consumer Protection Authority, environmental NGOs, and technology providers. Such a platform could include a mobile barcode scanner, a reporting mechanism for suspected greenwashing, and a searchable database of certified brands. The regulatory framework that surrounds environmental marketing must be strengthened now. This strengthening must mandate disclosure standards and also penalise misleading claims.

Consumer advocacy organisations must try harder to educate the public in interpreting eco-labels, distinguishing between authentic and deceptive signals, and demanding brands' accountability. Campaigns that target schools, urban communities, along with digital users can play a transformative role in shaping a more informed plus empowered consumer base. Consumers only can become agents of sustainable change when equipped to navigate green marketing confidently instead of corporate greenwashing victims.

### 6.6 Final Remarks

Ultimately, this dissertation has demonstrated green marketing tests corporate sincerity, exercises consumer agency, and maintains regulatory integrity in India’s urban FMCG sector instead of simply communicating persuasively. For cultivating trust in green claims, a constellation of signals, experiences, and social validations works. This faith is not something automatic. When that trust is honoured, consumers are willing to invest in alternatives that are sustainable, advocate for brands that are responsible, and engage in practices that support well-being for the environment. However, the fallout does extend beyond the individual brand and to the entire green economy in the event betrayal occurs. So teamwork regarding ecological duty gets feeble instead.

This study contributes a theoretically strong as well as empirically grounded comprehension regarding sustainability communication by investigating how consumers interpret, challenge, and validate authenticity cues operating within this high-stakes environment. To be certain that green advertising is a trustworthy bridge for an ethical sustainable future, it calls for some

renewed commitment from each of the stakeholders: marketers, regulators, influencers, and consumers.

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# Appendix

## Consent Form

**Research Title:**

*Consumer Trust and Purchase Intentions in Response to Authentic versus Greenwashed Claims for Household Cleaning Products in Urban India*

**Researcher:** Dilju Emmanuel
**Institution:** National College of Ireland
**Supervisor:** Dr. Maria Batishcheva

**Consent Declaration**

Please read and tick the boxes below to indicate your agreement:

☐ I confirm that I understand the purpose of this research and what participation involves.

☐ I voluntarily agree to take part in the research interview.

☐ I understand that I may refuse to answer any question and can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

☐ I understand that my identity will be anonymised, and all responses will be kept confidential.

☐ I give permission for the interview to be audio recorded.

☐ Yes ☐ No

☐ I understand that anonymised quotes may be used in the final dissertation or related academic outputs.

☐ I am at least 18 years old and giving informed consent to participate.

**Participant Name:** _____

**Signature:** _____

**Date:** _____

**Researcher Name:** _____

**Signature:** _____

**Date:** _____