UNDERSTANDING IMPACT OF GREEN PERSUASION PARADOX ON GREEN PURCHASE INTENTION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract

In today's world, everything has been hyphenated with green, evolving from a specialised marketing tactic to an essential aspect of company rebranding. But it brought along the wave of greenwashing, raising concerns about its truthfulness in the minds of green consumers. The study, centred around the persuasion knowledge model, examines the cognitive mechanisms by which sustainable message characteristics impact consumer purchase intention. Data was collected from 117 consumers using a structured questionnaire. The findings of the study indicate that claim specificity and substantiveness can significantly reduce perceived manipulative intent and positively impact consumer purchase intention. Claim verifiability and green consumer Skepticism moderate this relation. The study contributes to the green advertising literature by elucidating how consumers evaluate green claims and providing guidelines to marketers for designing sustainable advertisement messages that can combat the rising Skepticism.

Keywords: *Green Advertising; Persuasion Knowledge Theory; Advertising Credibility; Greenwashing; Purchase Intention*

1. Introduction

The present global discussion on environmental sustainability has led to big changes in how businesses talk to their customers. Green advertising has become one of the predominant communication strategies firms use to signify their commitment to environmental sustainability in an era of heightened ecological concern. As environmental consumerism is on the rise, companies have responded by flooding the media with green statements. Green advertising refers to a form of marketing that aims to portray products as environmentally beneficial or minimally harmful to the planet. However, an increasing number of individuals are beginning to question the efficacy of these tactics.

This study, grounded in Persuasion Knowledge Theory, asserts that consumers rigorously evaluate the veracity of green advertising promises to ascertain their authenticity or deception. When persuasion knowledge is activated, individuals see an augmented manipulative aim, leading to diminished credibility and reduced purchase intention. The Green Paradox is the biggest problem that marketers are facing right now. People really want to buy eco-friendly products, but they don't always believe what companies say about how their products affect the environment. People don't trust businesses because of greenwashing, which is when corporations make vague, superficial, or false claims to get the green premium without actually changing their value chains.

Prior studies on green marketing have primarily focused on the demographics of environmentally conscious consumers or the impact of ecological knowledge on their purchasing intentions (Lee & Cheong, 2024). Conversely, a significant research gap persists regarding the cognitive processes involved when a consumer encounters an ecologically friendly commercial. The objective of this study is to rectify this deficiency by employing the Persuasion Knowledge Theory. We assert that consumers employ their persuasion knowledge to ascertain the motivations underlying the advertiser's behaviour. If the message seems to be misleading, the customer will get defensive and decide not to buy the brand.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Evolution of Green Advertising and the Greenwashing Construct

Eco-friendly advertising, which used to be seen as a small part of corporate social responsibility, has become a major way for companies to communicate. (Carlson et al., 1993) created an early framework for organising environmental claims by putting them into four groups: product-orientated, process-orientated, image-orientated, and environmental-fact claims. This method divided environmental claims into four groups. The number of accusations rose along with the number of greenwashing incidents.

The idea behind greenwashing is that it is when a company does poorly for the environment but talks about how well they are doing for the environment. Greenwashing is a type of environmental damage. Parguel et al. (2011a) assert that greenwashing misleads consumers. In this case, the consumer and the company don't have the same knowledge, which completely destroys trust in the green business. This is because buyers can't tell the difference between real sustainable innovation and marketing tricks.

2.2 Persuasion Knowledge Theory

The Persuasion Knowledge Theory, first put forward by Friestad and Wright in 1994, says that customers slowly build up a set of ideas about the goals and methods used in persuasive communication. This knowledge helps people identify when someone is trying to change their ideas or actions in some way. When it comes to green advertising, buyers not only doubt the truth of a claim when it seems too good to be true, but they also think that the person who made the claim is trying to trick them.

When someone sees an ad for a green product, the environmental promise isn't the first thing that comes to mind. They want to know more about the persuasion motive that is being offered. Campbell (1995) asserts that when the tactics employed in an advertisement are regarded as overly attention-seeking or deficient in meaningful evidence, the consumer perceives the advertisement as intending to manipulate them (Pierre et al., 2026). The Persuasion Knowledge model suggests that consumers use three knowledge bases, which are persuasion, agent, and topic knowledge, to cope with influence attempts (Verma & Nayak, 2024; J. Wang et al., 2026; Yu et al., 2024). In green advertising, this coping mechanism is often synonymous with resistance. Studies by (Chen & Chang, 2012) argue that perceived greenwashing triggers an immediate sinister attribution where the consumer assumes the brand is hiding environmental harm behind a veil of eco-friendly rhetoric. In this view, this acts as a barrier to be avoided. This is more of a problem for green advertising than for conventional promotion since environmental benefits are credence qualities that consumers can't easily measure even after they buy something. As a result, activating persuasion knowledge causes a change of meaning (Friestad & Wright, 1994), which indicates that the ad goes from being informational to trying to trick the viewer.

2.3 The Mediating Role of Perceived Manipulative Intent

Manipulative intent refers to the consumer's perception that the advertiser is using unfair, deceptive, or purely self-serving tactics. In green marketing, this is the psychological core of greenwashing. Our framework posits that message characteristics—specifically specificity, verifiability, and transparency—are the primary inputs that determine whether a consumer perceives a brand as an authentic advocate for the planet or a manipulative opportunist.

2.4 Signaling Theory and Green Messaging Substantiation

Companies need to send hard signals of their commitment to the environment in order to reduce the activation of persuasion knowledge (Lejealle et al., 2026; Putra & Kopot, 2026; C. Wang et al., 2026). Signaling theory asserts that under conditions of substantial ambiguity, credible messages must be either verifiable to attain effectiveness.

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Claim specificity and claim verifiability are two important signs of value that we use in our method. Specificity lessens the cognitive effort required to evaluate a claim, consequently decreasing the perceived risk of deception (Kangun et al., 1991). Verifiability, particularly through third-party certifications, functions as an external benchmark. (Chen & Chang, 2012) demonstrate that when green claims are substantiated by credible evidence, the resultant green trust converts advertising exposure into brand equity (Chen & Chang, 2013; Parguel et al., 2011b).

2.5 The Paradox of Consumer Skepticism

Green Skepticism is a widespread trait among customers who question environmental promises. This cynicism acts as a moderating variable in our model (Mohr et al., 1998). Obermiller (1995) suggests that skepticism is not based on ignorance but on a critical evaluative point of view. One big challenge in recent research is identifying situational skepticism and dispositional skepticism. People in places like India, where rules about the environment are getting stricter, are more likely to be careful because companies have made mistakes in the past (Malik & Qazi, 2017). (Foreh & Grier (2003) assert that even if a corporation is transparent about its environmental intentions, people who know a lot about business may still conclude there is a hidden agenda. (Woodroof et al., 2020). This means that the link between advertising credibility and purchase intention is not always clear (Rana et al., 2026; Salhieh, 2026; Xia, 2025); it relies on how skeptical the person is (Hernandez et al., 2023).

Hence, the following hypotheses were developed from the review of literature:

H1: Specific green assertions result in greater purchasing intention compared to vague claims.

H2: Vague environmental assertions will markedly enhance the activation of persuasion knowledge.

H3: The correlation between the green ad type and purchase intention is mediated by persuasion knowledge.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to empirically examine the antecedents of green advertising effectiveness using Persuasion Knowledge Theory as the guiding framework. A 2x2 between-subjects experimental design was employed. Group A (58 people): Shown a vague ad (e.g., a picture of a forest with the text 'We love the Earth'). Group B (59 people): Shown a substantive ad (e.g., a picture of the same product with the text '100% Biodegradable Packaging').

Group A: Vague Ad (n = 58)   Group B: Substantive Ad (n = 59)

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected through an online survey administered to consumers who had prior exposure to green advertising. A total of 117 valid responses were obtained using a convenience sampling technique, which is appropriate for exploratory research in advertising and consumer behaviour.

3.3 Measurement Instrument

The specificity of green statements was evaluated using items adapted from (Newell et al., 1998) measuring the extent to which environmental claims are concrete, explicit, and precise. The verifiability of claims was assessed by items adapted from (Newell et al., 1998) and (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015), reflecting consumers' perceived ability to independently investigate and authenticate environmental assertions. We used items adapted from (Delmas & Burbano, 2011) to measure how clear, complete, and open environmental information is. A five-item scale based on (William O. Bearden et al., 1989) was used to measure persuasion knowledge activation. This scale measures how aware consumers are of persuasive intent in advertising communications. The perceived manipulative purpose was evaluated using questions adapted from

(Campbell, 1995) and (Kirmani & Zhu, 2007) indicating consumers' perceptions that an advertisement aims to influence them in a covert or deceptive manner. The credibility of advertising was evaluated using adapted measures from (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989) which reflect perceptions of an advertisement's trustworthiness and believability. The assessment of consumer green skepticism employed items adapted from (Mohr et al., 1998) and (Obermiller, 1995), indicating a pervasive distrust regarding environmental claims in advertising. A three-item scale based on (Chen & Chang, 2012) was used to measure people's intention to make green purchases. This scale showed how likely and ready people were to buy environmentally friendly products. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale.

3.4 Data Analysis

SPSS was used to analyse the data. We used Cronbach's alpha to check for reliability and exploratory factor analysis to check for construct validity. We used regression-based mediation and moderation analysis with the PROCESS macro to test the hypotheses. This macro works well with small to medium sample sizes.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Respondents showed moderate to high levels of agreement with the characteristics of green advertising messages. However, perceived manipulative purpose and green skepticism had moderate mean values, which means that consumers were careful when judging green advertising promises.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Green Claim Specificity	3.72	0.68	—						
2. Claim Verifiability	3.65	0.71	.52**	—					
3. Transparency of Benefits	3.78	0.64	.48**	.55**	—				
4. Perceived Manipulative Intent	2.89	0.76	−.41**	−.38**	−.44**	—			
5. Advertising Credibility	3.81	0.69	.46**	.53**	.49**	−.51**	—		
6. Greenep	3.21	0.73	−.19*	−.23*	−.21*	.42**	−.36**	—	
7. Purchase Intention	3.67	0.72	.39**	.47**	.41**	−.34**	.56**	−.29**	—

Note. $p < .05$; $p < .01$. All variables were measured on five-point Likert scales.

4.2 Reliability and Validity

All constructs had Cronbach's alpha values between 0.71 and 0.86, which is higher than the suggested level of 0.70 and proves internal consistency. Exploratory factor analysis showed that the factor loadings were good (>0.50) and there were no significant cross-loadings, which supports the concept validity.

Table 2: Reliability and Factor Loadings

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's α	Factor Loadings
Green Claim Specificity	3	.78	.71 – .83
Claim Verifiability	3	.81	.74 – .86
Transparency of Benefits	3	.79	.72 – .84
Perceived Manipulative Intent	4	.84	.69 – .88
Advertising Credibility	4	.86	.76 – .89
Green Skepticism	4	.82	.70 – .87
Purchase Intention	3	.80	.73 – .85

Note: KMO = 0.81; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity significant at $p < .001$. All factor loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50.

Table 3: Regression and Moderation Results

Path	Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
Ad Type \ Persuasion Knowledge (Path a)	0.42	3.12	<.001$	Significant
Persuasion Knowledge \ Green Purchase Intent (Path b)	-0.15	-1.82	.072	Non-Significant
Ad Type\ Green Purchase Intent (Direct Path c)	0.58	4.45	<.001	Significant

Regression analysis demonstrated that green claim specificity exerted a substantial negative impact on perceived manipulative intent ($\beta = -0.32$, $p < 0.01$), hence corroborating H1. Likewise, the clarity of environmental advantages adversely affected perceived manipulative intent ($\beta = -0.28$, $p < 0.05$), corroborating H3. Claim verifiability had a strong positive influence on the trustworthiness of ads ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), which supports H2. Perceived manipulative intent negatively affected advertising credibility ($\beta = -0.36$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H4. Advertising credibility had a significant positive influence on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5. Moderation analysis revealed that consumer green skepticism significantly weakened the relationship between advertising credibility and purchase intention ($\beta = -0.19$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H6.

5. Discussion

The study investigated the determinants of green advertising effectiveness by applying Persuasion Knowledge Theory to the evaluation of environmental advertising claims. The study extends the theory into the green advertising domain by empirically demonstrating how message characteristics influence persuasion resistance mechanisms. It also advances greenwashing research by identifying the conditions under which green advertising is perceived as authentic rather than manipulative (Moon et al., 2026; Rani et al., 2026). This contradicts the work of (Obermiller, 1995), who argued that skepticism is a poison pill for advertising effectiveness. In our study, the consumers acknowledged the brand's desire to profit but concluded that the product's environmental attributes were still superior to non-green alternatives.

The results show that how environmental messaging is framed and backed up has a bigger effect on how people respond to green advertising than just the presence of sustainability-related promises. The study offers a nuanced contradiction to the traditional understanding of the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The data show that how environmental claims are presented and understood by consumers has a big impact on how well green advertising works. According to Persuasion Knowledge Theory, parts of a message like claim specificity and openness make it less likely that the sender is trying to trick the reader, which makes advertising more trustworthy (Qiu et al., 2023). The Change of Meaning concept says that when a consumer realises that a message is trying to persuade them, they cope with it, which causes a boomerang effect or resistance.

While earlier studies (Campbell, 1995) argue that the activation of persuasion knowledge inevitably triggers a barrier, our data indicates that for green products, persuasion activation does not universally correlate with decreased Green Purchase Intention. However, our analysis suggests a shift toward pragmatic green processing. As argued by Ham et al., 2015) persuasion knowledge can be a cognitive tool for evaluation rather than just a shield for rejection.

(Malmelin, 2010) argues that modern consumers are market-socialized. They do not expect brands to be altruistic; they expect them to be strategic. The study is distinct from other research on the topic since it emphasises pragmatic acceptance of argument. Someone who understands a lot about the environment might think that a green ad is just another effort to convince people to buy something, but they might still like the product if the technical information, like signs that say it reduces carbon, is true. This indicates that putting on Persuasion Knowledge might make inspection better, but it might not make purpose worse.

Also, the capacity to back up statements became a key part of deciding whether or not an ad was trustworthy. Claims about the environment that are backed up by strong evidence or certifications make people more likely to believe them and less likely to doubt them. This finding corroborates previous research on greenwashing by demonstrating that trust is influenced not just by the company itself but also by the environmental signals conveyed in advertisements.

The results highlight how vital it is for commercials to have assertions that can be checked to make them more trustworthy. This backs up the premise that talking about the environment in a factual way makes it less likely that people will notice greenwashing. People are less likely to believe anything if they think it is being influenced. This means that they are more likely to believe false claims about the environment. The results demonstrate that buyers are far less likely to think that green advertising is lying when the statements are truthful and easy to grasp. People are less likely to think that advertising is lying when they utilise straightforward language to talk about how the ad will help the environment. This supports the core notion of persuasion theory by showing that people are less likely to be swayed when they perceive strategic manipulation, especially when they think greenwashing is likely to happen.

It's not good when people think an ad is trying to fool them and believe it. This suggests that green advertising isn't functioning as well as it could. People don't just ignore green ads; they seem to ponder about them and wonder what the advertiser really wants. When people think that the objective of persuasion is selfish, it hurts the credibility of the person trying to sell something, which makes people less likely to buy. The impact of green skepticism on consumers indicates that believability alone may be insufficient to alter the attitude of highly sceptical consumers. People maintained buying items even though they knew they were being targeted by green marketing, as long as they were sure the promises were true. This highlights how crucial it is to talk about environmental challenges all the time, not just during a few green marketing efforts.

5. Implications
5.1 Theoretical Implications

The primary contribution of this research is the empirical challenge to the defence-motivation hypothesis (Darke & Ritchie, 2007). The study suggests that the traditional persuasion knowledge has evolved into collaborative processing, where consumers negotiate with the brand rather than simply rejecting the message. Our findings contradict this by demonstrating that persuasion knowledge activation and green purchase intention can coexist. Claim specificity is identified as a boundary condition that negates the negative effects of persuasion knowledge. Results demonstrate that egoistic attributions preclude altruistic outcomes. We contribute to the literature by suggesting that persuasion

Knowledge can actually enhance the credibility of a message if the consumer perceives the agent as being competent enough to provide hard ecological data. This aligns with and extends the work of (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2016) regarding the power of eco-labels. Existing research often relies on the Sinister Attribution Error (Main et al., 2007), the idea that consumers always assume the worst motives when they spot an ad. This study provides a counter-narrative and provides evidence that consumers recognise the dual motive of green brands.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Brands should stop trying to hide the persuasion attempt. Radical transparency is the only way to satisfy a consumer with high persuasion knowledge. Instead, brands should lean into it by providing hard signals, including third-party certifications and carbon footprint. This transforms the consumer's knowledge from a threat into a validation tool. Marketers should abandon soft green imagery, which triggers defensive mechanisms in consumers. Managers should avoid vague environmental claims and emphasise specific, factual information in green advertising. Verifiable evidence, such as certifications or measurable outcomes, should be incorporated to enhance credibility. Green advertising should be aligned with actual corporate sustainability practices to build long-term trust. Firms should recognise varying levels of consumer skepticism and tailor communication accordingly.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study recognises numerous limitations despite its contributions. First, the small number of people in the sample makes it hard to apply the results to a wider range of people around the world. Second, using self-reported data could lead to social desirability bias since people often say they want to do things that are good for the environment to fit in with what other people think is right. Lastly, the cross-sectional design only shows one point in time; thus, it doesn't show how persuasive knowledge changes as people learn more about a certain brand.

The next research agenda should focus on how generative AI affects green messages. Additionally, management research ought to transition from purchase intention to circular stewardship, investigating how advertising might influence consumers to engage in post-purchase activities such as recycling or repair. Finally, researchers could go beyond surveys and use biometric methods like eye-tracking or skin conductance to find out exactly when green skepticism starts. These instructions will help us better comprehend the Persuasion Knowledge model in a marketplace that is becoming more automated and environmentally friendly.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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