
GREEN MARKETING: CONCEPTUAL EVOLUTION, STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS, AND CONSUMER RESPONSE — A REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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ABSTRACT

Green marketing has evolved over the past three decades from a narrow, reactive response to isolated environmental crises into a comprehensive strategic philosophy that permeates product design, pricing, distribution, and communication. Despite this evolution, the conceptual and empirical literature on green marketing remains fragmented, and two problems continue to limit its explanatory power: the well-documented gap between consumers' pro-environmental attitudes and their actual purchasing behavior, and the erosion of consumer trust caused by greenwashing. This paper presents a conceptual review of the green marketing literature, tracing its definitional evolution, examining the expanded green marketing mix (the 7Ps), and synthesizing empirical findings on green consumer behavior, green trust, and greenwashing. Drawing on a comparative analysis of foundational and contemporary studies, the review identifies three principal gaps: the absence of integrative models linking the green marketing mix directly to consumer skepticism and purchase behavior, the scarcity of research outside business-to-consumer and Western contexts, and the limited use of longitudinal and experimental designs capable of establishing causal and temporal mechanisms. The paper concludes with a research agenda proposing integrative, cross-cultural, and methodologically diverse studies to build a more coherent understanding of when, and under what conditions, green marketing succeeds.

KEYWORDS: Green Marketing; Green Marketing Mix; Greenwashing; Green Consumer Behavior; Attitude–Behavior Gap; Sustainability Marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation, climate change, and resource scarcity have moved from the periphery of public concern to the center of consumer, investor, and regulatory attention (Kotler, 2011). Marketing, as the discipline responsible for shaping the exchange between firms and consumers, has been compelled to respond. What began in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a set of isolated tactics—recyclable packaging, energy-efficient appliances, and pollution-reduction claims—has matured into a broad strategic orientation commonly labeled "green marketing": the design, communication, and delivery of products and services in ways that reduce environmental harm while satisfying consumer needs and organizational objectives (Polonsky, 1994; Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017).

Yet green marketing's growth in practice has not been matched by conceptual consolidation in research. Peattie and Crane (2005) warned two decades ago that much of what passed for green marketing was, in fact, "green marketing myopia"—a narrow focus on environmental attributes at the expense of core consumer value—and cautioned that the field risked becoming a farce rather than a genuine business philosophy. More recent reviews confirm that the literature remains dispersed across disciplines, methods, and units of analysis, with limited convergence on definitions, measurement, or theoretical mechanisms (Chamorro et al., 2009; Leonidou & Leonidou, 2011; Alkhatib et al., 2023).

Two problems in particular continue to complicate the field. First, consumers consistently report favorable attitudes toward environmentally responsible products, yet this favorability translates only inconsistently into actual purchasing behavior—a phenomenon widely termed the attitude–behavior gap (ElHaffar et al., 2020; Sharma, 2021). Second, as green claims have proliferated, so too has skepticism about their authenticity; greenwashing—the practice of overstating or fabricating environmental credentials—has been shown to erode the very trust that green marketing seeks to build (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Chen & Chang, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2019).

This paper undertakes a conceptual review of the green marketing literature to address four questions: (1) How has the definition and conceptual scope of green marketing evolved since its emergence? (2) What does the expanded green marketing mix comprise, and how has it been applied in empirical research? (3) What do prior studies reveal about the relationships among green marketing, consumer trust, skepticism, and purchase behavior? (4) What gaps remain in the literature, and what research directions follow? The review proceeds by tracing the conceptual evolution of green marketing, examining the green marketing mix,

synthesizing the consumer-behavior and greenwashing literatures, comparing prior studies, and closing with a discussion of research gaps and an agenda for future inquiry.

2. Conceptual Evolution and Definitions of Green Marketing

Polonsky (1994) offered one of the earliest formal definitions, describing green marketing as encompassing all activities designed to generate and facilitate exchanges intended to satisfy human needs or wants while minimizing detrimental impact on the natural environment. This definition established two enduring features of the construct: it is holistic, spanning the full marketing process rather than a single tactic, and it treats environmental protection as a constraint to be satisfied jointly with, rather than traded off against, consumer value.

Peattie (2001) proposed that green marketing has developed through three broad eras. The ecological era, emerging in the late 1960s, was reactive, driven by isolated environmental crises and technical pollution-control solutions. The environmental era of the late 1980s and early 1990s introduced cleaner production technologies and the first wave of green consumer products, but remained largely promotional and product-focused. The sustainable era, from the late 1990s onward, reframed environmental responsibility as inseparable from long-term business strategy and corporate governance, extending green considerations across the full value chain and into organizational identity. Table 1 summarizes this progression.

Table 1. Three Eras of Green Marketing.

Era	Approximate Period	Core Orientation	Representative Marketing Activities
Ecological era	Late 1960s–1970s	Reactive response to acute pollution and environmental crises	Pollution-control technology; compliance-driven communication
Environmental era	Late 1980s–1990s	Proactive but largely product- and promotion-centered	Recyclable packaging, eco-labeling, cleaner production, green product launches
Sustainable era	Late 1990s–present	Strategic and organization-wide; environment integrated into core business model	Life-cycle assessment, sustainability reporting, green innovation, stakeholder engagement

This periodization is useful, but Peattie and Crane (2005) cautioned that firms often adopt the language of the sustainable era while continuing to practice the narrower, product-focused tactics of the environmental era—a mismatch they termed green marketing myopia. They identified four recurring failure modes: a narrow focus on environmental performance to the neglect of core consumer benefits ("being green" instead of "selling green"), targeting the

wrong segment with green appeals, communicating claims that are difficult for consumers to verify, and using an inconsistent or exaggerated tone that invites skepticism. Kotler (2011) extended this critique by arguing that the environmental imperative required marketers to "reinvent" the marketing mix itself rather than simply append environmental claims to existing offerings, a call later operationalized through the systematic reviews of Dangelico and Vocalelli (2017), who synthesized decades of definitions into a common framework centered on three elements: environmentally sound product and process design, transparent communication, and coherent organizational commitment. Together, these contributions suggest that green marketing is best understood not as a fixed set of tactics but as a strategic orientation whose credibility depends on the coherence between what firms claim and what they verifiably do.

3. The Green Marketing Mix: From 4Ps to 7Ps

As green marketing matured from a promotional tactic into a strategic orientation, researchers extended the traditional marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion) to capture environmentally relevant dimensions of service delivery and organizational process, arriving at a 7Ps framework that adds people, process, and physical evidence (Eneizan et al., 2016). Table 2 summarizes this expanded mix and illustrates each element.

Table 2. The Green Marketing Mix. (7Ps)

Element	Description	Illustrative Application
Product	Design that minimizes environmental impact across the product life cycle	Biodegradable materials, energy-efficient design, take-back and recycling schemes
Price	Pricing that reflects environmental value while remaining competitive	Premium pricing for certified green products; cost savings passed on from resource efficiency
Place	Distribution channels that reduce the environmental footprint of logistics	Local sourcing, low-emission transport, reduced packaging in the supply chain
Promotion	Communication of environmental attributes and achievements	Eco-labels, certification marks, cause-related and educational campaigns
People	Employee and stakeholder engagement with environmental values	Green training programs, employee-led sustainability initiatives
Process	Operational and production processes designed to reduce environmental harm	Cleaner production technology, waste reduction, closed-loop manufacturing
Physical evidence	Tangible cues that signal environmental credibility to stakeholders	Green building certification, visible renewable-energy infrastructure, sustainability reports

Empirical tests of the green marketing mix suggest that its elements are not equally influential. Rahbar and Wahid (2011), studying Malaysian consumers, found that eco-labeling and eco-brand positioning exerted a stronger influence on purchase behavior than eco-price, suggesting that credible, verifiable signals of environmental performance matter more to consumers than price incentives alone. Cronin et al. (2011) proposed a complementary, stakeholder-based classification, arguing that green marketing strategies can be positioned along the traditional marketing mix, targeted at different stakeholder groups (consumers, employees, communities, regulators), and pursued at different organizational levels (tactical, functional, or strategic). This stakeholder lens reinforces the view, introduced in Section 2, that the credibility of any single mix element depends on its coherence with the firm's broader strategic commitment to sustainability, rather than being effective in isolation.

4. Green Consumer Behavior and the Attitude–Behavior Gap

A substantial body of research documents that consumers report positive attitudes toward environmentally friendly products and express willingness to pay a premium for them, yet this favorability does not reliably convert into purchase behavior (Sharma, 2021). ElHaffar et al. (2020), in a narrative review of the attitude–intention–behavior literature, identified this gap as one of the most persistent unresolved problems in sustainability marketing and organized its explanations into three categories of moderating factors: individual-level factors (environmental knowledge, perceived consumer effectiveness, price sensitivity), contextual factors (product availability, social norms, situational constraints), and marketing-related factors (the credibility and clarity of green claims, trust in labels and certifications).

This last category connects consumer-behavior research directly to the marketing-mix literature reviewed in Section 3: the effectiveness of eco-labels and green promotion depends heavily on whether consumers perceive them as credible rather than performative (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011). Sharma's (2021) synthesis similarly concludes that purchase intention is shaped less by the mere presence of green attributes than by consumers' confidence that those attributes are genuine and independently verifiable. This dependence on perceived credibility sets up the central problem addressed in the following section: what happens to green marketing's effectiveness when that credibility is undermined by greenwashing.

5. Green Trust, Skepticism, and the Problem of Greenwashing

Trust functions as the psychological bridge between a firm's green claims and a consumer's willingness to act on them. Chen (2010) conceptualized green trust as a consumer's

willingness to depend on a product, service, or brand based on the belief in its environmental performance, and demonstrated that green trust is driven jointly by green brand image and green satisfaction, ultimately shaping green brand equity. This construct provides a mechanism for understanding why identical environmental claims can produce very different consumer responses depending on the credibility a brand has accumulated over time.

That credibility, however, is fragile. Delmas and Burbano (2011) distinguished between internal drivers of greenwashing (organizational incentives, weak monitoring, short-term performance pressure) and external drivers (regulatory gaps, market demand for green products without adequate verification mechanisms, and competitive imitation), showing that greenwashing is often a rational, if reputationally risky, organizational response to these conditions rather than an isolated ethical lapse. Once greenwashing occurs, its consequences ripple through the trust mechanisms identified by Chen (2010): Chen and Chang (2013) found that greenwashing reduces green trust indirectly, by increasing green consumer confusion and green perceived risk, while Nguyen et al. (2019) showed that green skepticism mediates the negative relationship between perceived greenwashing and green purchase intention. Taken together, this stream of research indicates that greenwashing does not merely fail to help a firm—it actively degrades the trust infrastructure on which all subsequent green marketing communication depends, a conclusion echoed in Montgomery et al.'s (2024) review of the broader greenwashing literature, which characterizes consumer and stakeholder skepticism as a self-reinforcing cycle that becomes harder to reverse the longer inauthentic claims persist.

6. Comparative Analysis of Prior Studies

Table 3 compares the studies reviewed above along their focus, method, and principal finding, illustrating both the field's methodological diversity and the thematic threads—definitional consolidation, the marketing mix, consumer behavior, and greenwashing—that connect otherwise disparate streams of research.

Table 3. Comparative Summary of Key Studies.

Study	Focus	Method	Key Finding
Polonsky (1994)	Definition of green marketing	Conceptual	Establishes green marketing as a holistic process balancing consumer needs and environmental protection
Peattie (2001)	Historical evolution of the	Conceptual	Identifies three eras (ecological, environmental, sustainable) of

Study	Focus	Method	Key Finding
	field		green marketing development
Peattie & Crane (2005)	Critique of green marketing practice	Conceptual/critical review	Identifies "green marketing myopia": four recurring failure modes in green marketing execution
Chamorro et al. (2009)	State of green marketing research	Bibliometric review	Finds the field fragmented, predominantly conceptual, and lacking theoretical consolidation
Leonidou & Leonidou (2011)	Growth of environmental marketing research	Bibliographic analysis	Maps rapid growth in publication volume alongside persistent methodological homogeneity
Kotler (2011)	Strategic role of the environment in marketing	Conceptual	Argues environmental concerns require reinventing core marketing strategy, not just messaging
Dangelico & Vocalelli (2017)	Definitions, strategy, and tools	Systematic literature review	Synthesizes definitions into a common framework of product/process design, communication, and commitment
Rahbar & Wahid (2011)	Green marketing tools and purchase behavior	Survey (Malaysia)	Eco-labeling and eco-brand influence purchase behavior more strongly than eco-price
Cronin et al. (2011)	Stakeholder-based green strategy	Conceptual	Classifies green strategies by marketing-mix element, stakeholder target, and organizational level
Chen (2010)	Green brand equity	Survey (Taiwan)	Green trust mediates the effect of green brand image and satisfaction on green brand equity
Delmas & Burbano (2011)	Drivers of greenwashing	Conceptual/analytical	Distinguishes internal (organizational) and external (market/regulatory) drivers of greenwashing
Chen & Chang (2013)	Greenwashing and green trust	Survey	Greenwashing reduces green trust via increased green consumer confusion and perceived risk
Nguyen et al. (2019)	Greenwashing and purchase intention	Survey (Vietnam)	Green skepticism mediates the negative effect of perceived greenwashing on purchase intention
ElHaffar et al. (2020)	Attitude–behavior gap	Narrative review	Identifies individual, contextual, and marketing-related moderators of the green attitude–behavior gap
Sharma (2021)	Green purchase behavior	Systematic review	Synthesizes antecedents of green purchase intention; credibility of claims is a recurring determinant
Alkhatib et al. (2023)	Green marketing in the digital era	Systematic literature review	Identifies digital and social media channels as an underdeveloped extension of green marketing

Study	Focus	Method	Key Finding
Montgomery et al. (2024)	State of greenwashing research	Review and research agenda	communication Characterizes stakeholder skepticism as a self-reinforcing cycle once inauthentic claims emerge

Two patterns stand out from this comparison. First, the earliest and most-cited works (Polonsky, 1994; Peattie, 2001; Peattie & Crane, 2005) are conceptual, establishing definitions and typologies rather than testing relationships empirically; empirical testing of specific mechanisms—trust, skepticism, and the mix elements that drive behavior—concentrates mainly in the past fifteen years. Second, the consumer-behavior and greenwashing streams (Chen, 2010; Chen & Chang, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2019) have developed largely in parallel to the marketing-mix stream (Eneizan et al., 2016; Rahbar & Wahid, 2011; Cronin et al., 2011), with few studies explicitly integrating mix-level strategic choices with the trust and skepticism mechanisms that determine whether those choices succeed with consumers.

7. Research Gaps

Building on the comparative analysis in Section 6 and the conceptual review in Sections 2 through 5, this paper identifies five interrelated gaps in the green marketing literature.

- Fragmented integration of the marketing mix with trust and skepticism mechanisms. Studies of the green marketing mix (Eneizan et al., 2016; Rahbar & Wahid, 2011) and studies of greenwashing-induced skepticism (Chen & Chang, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2019) have rarely been tested within a single integrative model that traces the pathway from specific mix elements through trust and skepticism to purchase behavior.
- Persistent but under-theorized attitude–behavior gap. Although ElHaffar et al. (2020) catalog moderating factors, few studies test these moderators jointly or explain why their relative influence appears to vary by product category, culture, or market maturity.
- Geographic and sectoral concentration. The empirical base draws heavily on Asian and Western consumer-goods contexts (e.g., Chen, 2010, in Taiwan; Rahbar & Wahid, 2011, in Malaysia; Nguyen et al., 2019, in Vietnam), leaving business-to-business, service-sector, and African or Latin American green marketing substantially underexplored.
- Limited methodological diversity. The literature remains dominated by cross-sectional surveys (Chamorro et al., 2009; Leonidou & Leonidou, 2011); longitudinal designs capable

of tracking how trust erodes and recovers over time, and experimental designs capable of isolating causal effects of specific green claims, remain comparatively rare.

- Underdeveloped treatment of digital and algorithmic green communication. Alkhatib et al. (2023) note that social media, influencer marketing, and algorithmically personalized advertising represent a substantial extension of the promotion element of the green marketing mix, yet remain only lightly integrated into the trust and skepticism frameworks developed primarily around traditional labeling and certification.

8. Future Research Agenda

Addressing the gaps identified above suggests several concrete directions for future research.

- An integrative model testing the full pathway from individual elements of the green marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion, people, process, physical evidence) through green trust and green skepticism to purchase intention and repurchase behavior, using structural equation modeling on cross-industry survey data.
- Comparative, cross-cultural studies replicating the attitude–behavior gap moderators identified by ElHaffar et al. (2020) across emerging and developed markets, to test whether the relative weight of individual, contextual, and marketing-related moderators differs systematically by market maturity or regulatory environment.
- Longitudinal panel studies tracking green trust before and after a greenwashing incident becomes public, to test the "self-reinforcing cycle" of skepticism proposed by Montgomery et al. (2024) and to establish how quickly, and under what conditions, trust can be rebuilt.
- Experimental research manipulating the specificity, verifiability, and source (firm-generated versus third-party-certified) of green claims to isolate their causal effect on perceived greenwashing and purchase intention, extending the correlational findings of Chen and Chang (2013) and Nguyen et al. (2019).
- Extension of green marketing mix research into business-to-business and service contexts, and into the digital and social media channels highlighted by Alkhatib et al. (2023), including studies of how algorithmic personalization of green messaging affects perceived authenticity and trust.
- Qualitative and mixed-methods studies exploring how frontline employees (the "people" element of the mix) shape consumer perceptions of organizational environmental commitment, a dimension acknowledged conceptually (Eneizan et al., 2016) but rarely examined empirically.

9. CONCLUSION

Green marketing has evolved from a reactive, product-level tactic into a strategic orientation intended to align firm behavior with environmental responsibility and consumer expectations. This review has traced that evolution, examined the expanded green marketing mix, and synthesized the literature on green consumer behavior, trust, and greenwashing. Across these strands, a consistent theme emerges: green marketing succeeds only to the extent that its claims are perceived as credible, and that credibility is neither automatic nor permanent. The persistence of the attitude–behavior gap and the corrosive effect of greenwashing on consumer trust both point to the same underlying requirement—coherence between what firms communicate and what they verifiably deliver. The gaps identified here, particularly the limited integration of marketing-mix strategy with trust and skepticism mechanisms, and the narrow geographic and methodological base of existing studies, offer a clear agenda for future research capable of building a more complete and generalizable understanding of green marketing effectiveness.

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