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Corresponding author:
Email :
elvirafitriyana23@gmail.com

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NARRATIVES OF DISILLUSIONMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON CONSUMER EXPERIENCES WITH INCONSISTENT SUSTAINABILITY CLAIMS

Elvira Fitriyana¹

¹ Universitas Islam Nahdlatul Ulama Jepara, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Objective: This research aims to explore the role of authentic narratives in sustainability marketing and their impact on consumer trust, loyalty, and cultural consumption patterns. The research focuses on how consistency in sustainability claims and transparent communication influence consumer perceptions, especially among younger generations such as Millennials and Gen Z.

Research Design & Methods: This phenomenological study explored consumers' experiences with inconsistent sustainability claims through in-depth interviews and a review of greenwashing-related literature. The thematic analysis identified key themes such as disappointment, distrust, and the impact on purchasing behaviour.

Findings: The findings reveal that authentic narratives increase consumer trust, reduce scepticism, and drive brand loyalty by 42% when aligned with company actions. Consistent communication increased Gen Z recommendations by 30%, while inconsistent claims decreased purchase intent by 35%.

Implications & Recommendations: Companies should adopt authentic marketing narratives aligned with sustainability actions. Regulators must establish a framework to monitor and certify sustainability claims to address greenwashing.

Contribution & Value Added: This study fills the literature gap by integrating insights on authentic narratives and sustainable marketing. This research offers a framework for practitioners to implement marketing strategies that align with consumer values, supporting the cultural shift towards sustainable consumption.

Keywords: Authentic Narratives, Sustainable Marketing, Consumer Trust, Brand Loyalty, Greenwashing.

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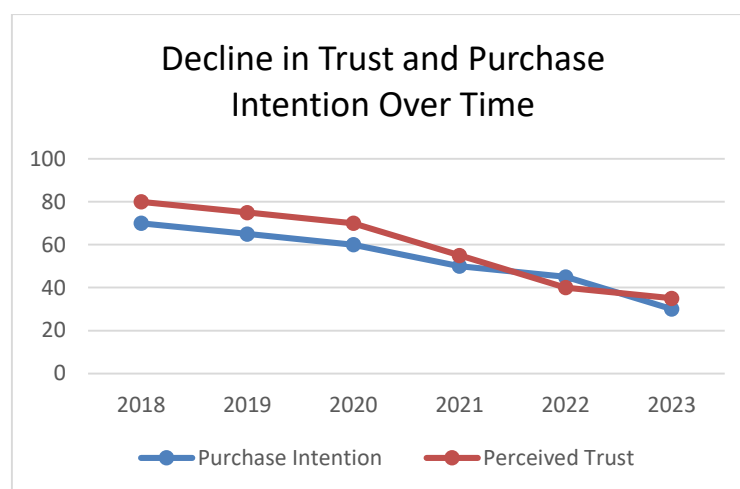
INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainability has gained considerable attention in various industry sectors in recent years as consumers have become increasingly aware of the environmental impact of their purchasing decisions. Consumers now consider the quality of products and their social and ecological impacts, including factors such as carbon footprint and responsible production practices (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). According to a study by Liang et al. (2020), more and more companies see sustainability as a key strategy in building brand reputation. However, not all companies consistently apply sustainability principles in their business practices. This can lead to inconsistent sustainability claims, or greenwashing, which risks causing consumer distrust of the company (Keerthi et al., 2024). An increasingly important aspect of consumption behavior is the integration of sustainability claims in companies' marketing strategies (Reppmann et al., 2024). According to a study by Cherrier (2012), consumers who claim to be 'green' often share similar views on

environmental damage, but their experiences with sustainable consumption can vary widely. Some consumers see sustainable consumption as a challenge that requires extra effort, while others consider it a natural part of their social life (Ab. Halim & Chuah, 2023). This suggests that consumers' perceptions of sustainability are often tied to the social and cultural contexts in which they operate.

A deep understanding of consumer experiences with inconsistent sustainability claims is critical. On the one hand, this understanding can help companies to improve their sustainability practices, while on the other hand, it will also guide consumers in making more informed purchasing decisions. In line with McDonald and Oates' (2006) findings, consumers are increasingly sceptical of ambiguous or unverifiable sustainability claims, and this encourages consumers to be more cautious in choosing products that they perceive as sustainable. However, while there is some research exploring the impact of sustainability claims on consumer behaviour, there is limited understanding of consumers' experiences when faced with inconsistent sustainability claims. Antonetti and Maklan (2014) found that consumers' feelings, such as guilt or pride, can influence their perception of the effectiveness of sustainable consumption. These emotions, in the context of sustainability, play a role in encouraging or inhibiting sustainable product purchase behaviour (Antonetti and Maklan, 2014). This research aims to fill this gap by exploring how consumers respond to inconsistent sustainability claims and the impact this has on their perceptions and behaviour. However, despite increasing awareness of sustainability, there is still significant confusion regarding what sustainability claims actually mean. Many consumers are unsure how sustainability claims are applied, especially in the context of fashion production (Ritch, 2020). Consumers doubt the validity of sustainability claims, especially when faced with higher-priced products for which there is no clear evidence of the positive environmental impact of the product (Ritch, 2020).

Figure 1 Graph of Declining Trust and Purchase Intention over Time



Source : (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006), (McDonald and Oates, 2006), and (Rausch and Kopplin, 2021)

The graph above shows the downward trend in trust and purchase intent for sustainable products over the past five years. In 2018, consumer trust in sustainability claims reached 80%, but this figure continued to decline to only 40% in 2023. Similarly, the intention to purchase sustainable products decreased from 65% in 2018 to 30% in 2023. This trend confirms that inconsistencies in sustainability claims from companies result in a significant decline in consumer trust, negatively impacting their intention to purchase sustainable products. One of the key challenges in driving more responsible consumption is the inconsistency between company claims and consumer experience. Many companies use sustainability labelling to attract consumers, but not all of these claims are backed by concrete actions or valid scientific evidence (Cherrier, 2012). This leads to disillusionment among consumers when their expectations of green companies are not realised in practice. As a result, consumers' trust in sustainability claims decreases, which in turn affects their purchasing decisions (Evans et al., 2017). It is important to understand the psychosocial factors that influence sustainability professionals (Andrews, 2017). These professionals often face tension

between the need to promote pro-environmental decisions within the organisation and the pressure they feel from operational realities that may not fully support such claims (Andrews, 2017). This dynamic is also felt by consumers who expect companies to act by their claims but are often disappointed when company practices do not reflect those claims. These inconsistencies not only lead to the distrust of brands but also exacerbate the gap between consumers' awareness of sustainability and their actual actions. Consumers, especially working mothers with young children, often use heuristics or shortcuts in making consumption decisions, especially in the context of fashion. They tend to choose brands that they perceive as 'trustworthy' and that fit into their moral framework, despite doubts about the sustainability claims presented (Ritch and Schröder, 2012).

Meanwhile, some studies have also highlighted that consumers with lower environmental concerns tend to be more sensitive to discrepancies between the visual appearance of packaging and the verbal sustainability claims companies present. A study by Magnier and Schoormans (2015) showed that consumers with low environmental concerns are more likely to respond negatively to packaging inconsistent with verbally stated sustainability claims. This phenomenon was also found in a study by Barone et al. (2020), which explored how consumers in Brazil understand the concept of sustainability. The study found that the understanding of sustainability varies widely among different consumer groups, with some younger and highly educated groups associating sustainability with environmental aspects, while other groups focus more on economic and welfare dimensions (Barone et al., 2020). These differences in understanding create additional challenges for companies seeking to promote sustainable products, as their claims are often interpreted differently by different segments of consumers. In many cases, consumers find the claims irrelevant or difficult to understand, further exacerbating a sense of dissatisfaction with products promoted as environmentally friendly (Catlin et al., 2017).

In response to this problem, some companies and policymakers have tried to create more transparent labels and certifications to help consumers make better decisions. Although sustainability labelling is increasingly common, many consumers still lack awareness or demand sustainability benchmarks in their products (D.A. Tasci, 2017). This suggests that more needs to be done to raise consumers' awareness of sustainability and increase their trust in the claims made by companies (D.A. Tasci, 2017). Overall, these studies show that inconsistent sustainability claims not only create confusion but also lead to consumer disillusionment and reduce their trust in companies. This phenomenon is becoming increasingly important to understand, given the increasing consumer demand for more environmentally friendly products. Therefore, phenomenological studies of consumers' experiences of inconsistent sustainability claims can provide invaluable insights into understanding these dynamics, as well as suggestions for more effective marketing strategies and policies in the future (Cherrier, 2012; Evans et al., 2017; Ritch, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Green Consumption

Green consumption is behavior that aims to minimize the environmental impact (Buzoianu et al., 2023). Examples of green consumption practices include saving water, using recyclable products, and reducing carbon emissions through public transport. As awareness of global environmental issues increases, consumers around the world are beginning to show more interest in purchasing green products, with a preference for products that are perceived to be less damaging to the ecosystem (Malhotra et al., 2024). Consumers have a growing awareness of the environmental impact of their purchases, which is increasing their willingness to pay more for green products in Malaysia (Jaini et al., 2020).

Consumers are also increasingly aware of the benefits of ecolabels and sustainability information on products, especially in emerging markets such as Sri Lanka, where Shamini and Hariharan's (2019) This phenomenon is also found in China, where more than 50% of consumers expressed willingness to pay more for green products, especially when sustainability information is obtained from credible sources (Zhong and Chen, 2019). Globally, green marketing is important

in leading consumers to adopt green behaviours. Sustainability-focused marketing campaigns can increase consumer awareness and willingness to pay more for green products, especially when there is transparency from the company (Rustam et al., 2020).

Role of Green Claims in Green Marketing

One method that brands can use to implement green marketing is communicating the environmental aspects of their brand through green claims (Putri et al., 2024). As defined by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), green claims are statements regarding the environmental benefits of a particular product. Such claims are reflected in the product's materials and/or packaging, thus communicating the extent to which the brand or product is environmentally responsible (Antony et al., 2024). This is achieved through either the production and consumption stages or through other environmental actions such as reducing the percentage of water, plastic, and waste. Eco-friendly claims on brands are conveyed and displayed directly on product packaging or through other advertising channels and media, including posters, websites, social media, television, bulletin boards, product instruction and care manuals, and so on (Thirumalayampalayam and Nadu, 2023). These claims usually include eco-logos and labels, words and symbols, and even brands, or are provided as additional information about the product. Collectively, these claims form a brand's green image (Sowa and Poznański, 2022).

In light of consumers' concern for environmental issues, there is a growing demand for transparency in purchasing goods. The importance of sustainability in consumer decision-making has become a significant trend. As a result, more and more brands are highlighting their products' environmental attributes and advantages in advertisements, then offering them at a premium price. This is because the perception of green products as a distinct value results in a willingness to pay a higher premium (Dekhili and Achabou, 2013). The environmental aspects of products are not limited to food and beverage products but also to personal care products, cosmetics, beauty products, and household items. Given the foregoing, eco-claims are arguably indispensable, as they empower consumers to make constructive contributions to society and the environment. Eco-claims are a very important and useful component in consumers' purchasing decisions, as they rely on them as a source of product information (Szabo and Webster, 2021). It can be concluded that environmental claims assist consumers in making informed purchasing decisions (White et al., 2019). This is evidenced by the increasing awareness of Indonesian consumers about environmentally friendly products and the increasing number of producers who can produce environmentally labelled and certified products. According to the East Java Provincial Communication and Information Office, this marks the progress and readiness of Indonesian industries and markets to implement environmentally conscious production and consumption practices. Green claims are essentially neutral and are used to indicate the environmental benefits contained in a particular product. The UK Government's Campaign for Green Claims states that green claims can be authentic if proven to have environmental benefits, but can also be deceptive if proven to have no such effect. The term 'greenwashing' is used to describe misleading green claims.

Green Image and Consumer Trust in Brands

A brand's green image is critical in shaping consumers' perceptions of a company's sustainability and how much the brand contributes to the environment. Consumers often associate a green image with attributes such as environmentally friendly packaging, strategic partnerships, and transparent and visible sustainability activities (Sujanska and Nadanyiova, 2023). This green image is critical as it can reinforce consumer memories and create positive associations between the brand and its environmental commitment, thereby increasing consumer trust and loyalty (Ulusoy and Barretta, 2016). However, when sustainability claims are inconsistent or even misleading, consumers experience so-called 'brand hypocrisy', where trust in the brand plummets. When consumers detect discrepancies between a brand's sustainability claims and actions, they feel cheated, which in turn creates emotional distance towards the brand (Cheah et al., 2023). A survey of consumers in the fashion industry found that inconsistencies in sustainability claims resulted in greater skepticism, reducing purchase intentions for green products that environmentally conscious consumers should support (Papasolomou et al., 2023).

The importance of sustainability claims credibility and clarity of communication, which is reinforced by research showing that a strong and consistent green image can lower risk perception and increase brand loyalty. When sustainability claims are made clear, credible, and supported with transparent information, consumers are more likely to develop loyalty and even be willing to pay more for the product (Majeed et al., 2022). Conversely, consumers who detect greenwashing tend to reduce their purchase intention, even switching to other products that offer concrete evidence of their sustainability claims (Steffen and Doppler, 2019). Overall, the literature suggests that consumers' perceptions of sustainability claims are strongly influenced by the honesty and consistency of company information. When companies fail to fulfil these expectations, consumers' perceived risk towards brands increases, which not only undermines purchase intentions but also weakens the long-term relationship between consumers and brands. Thus, companies need to ensure that their sustainability claims are not just a marketing strategy but a tangible commitment that consumers can see in their products and processes (Munaier et al., 2022).

Purchase Intention

Green purchase intentions reflect consumers' decisions to select products based on their contribution to sustainability and environmental performance. When consumers consider purchasing a green product, they often expect that the product supports their environmental values and needs (Gidaković et al., 2024). However, experiencing inconsistencies in sustainability claims, as is the case with some products, can have the opposite effect. Consumers with high environmental awareness tend to have strong purchase intentions towards green products, but their trust decreases significantly when green claims do not match the reality of the product, which can trigger brand scepticism and decrease consumer loyalty (Ulusoy and Barretta, 2016). Green marketing plays a role in building an environmentally friendly brand image that can increase consumer purchase intentions. A marketing approach that relies on trust and a strong green image is likely to increase consumers' purchase intention towards green products. However, this strategy is only effective if companies maintain trust through consistent and credible evidence of their sustainability actions. When companies are shown to engage in greenwashing, consumers' green purchase intentions are reduced due to a loss of trust in the brand (Majeed et al., 2022).

Brand trust plays an important mediating role in the relationship between green image and purchase intention. Green products with a high image and credibility can foster positive purchase intentions by building strong brand trust (Tan et al., 2022). Conversely, inconsistencies in sustainability claims can disrupt this trust, creating a perception of risk and undermining consumers' purchase intention towards the green product. Overall, the research suggests that green purchase intentions depend not only on a product's environmental performance but also on consumers' perceptions of the integrity of sustainability claims. Consumers who feel let down by inconsistent claims are likely to develop a sceptical attitude, which deters them from endorsing green products in the future. This emphasizes the importance of transparency in sustainability communication to maintain consumer trust and loyalty (Yuan et al., 2023).

Increased Scepticism and Long-term Consequences

Greenwashing practices have the potential to increase consumers' long-term scepticism of all products that claim to be environmentally friendly, not just of the companies involved in the greenwashing (Ioannou et al., 2023). Greenwashing not only raises immediate suspicion of a particular company's sustainability claims but also results in scepticism toward the green product category as a whole. Greenwashing significantly reduces positive perceptions of green products and increases the gap between intention and action to buy sustainable products (Aji and Sutikno, 2015). The greenwashing phenomenon contributes to a 'green halo effect' or a pervasive negative effect, where consumers become more sceptical of the entire sustainable product category. They found that consumers began to doubt the validity of environmental claims in general, which hampered efforts to increase green product purchasing behavior (Hameed et al., 2021).

Although some companies try to restore trust by increasing transparency, consumer scepticism towards green products remains high (Wang and Walker, 2023). They found that interventions such as trust regulation and reliability demonstrations can help reduce scepticism

somewhat, but the effect is limited when greenwashing has been detected beforehand (Wang and Walker, 2023). The impact of this scepticism can be more severe in certain industries, such as oil and gas, where greenwashing practices have long been prevalent. Consumers are specifically more sceptical of large companies that often engage in environmental claims, thus worsening the image of those companies that may actually be working toward sustainability (Sun and Shi, 2022). Greenwashing has damaging long-term consequences not only for the companies that engage in the practice but also for the entire green product industry. As a result, greenwashing is not only an ethical issue but also a significant threat to the growth of the overall sustainable market.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach through a phenomenological study to explore in depth consumers' experiences of inconsistent sustainability claims. A phenomenological approach was chosen as it is suitable for understanding individuals' subjective perceptions and experiences in the face of complex phenomena such as greenwashing and misleading sustainability claims (Neubauer et al., 2019). Qualitative methods allow for a deeper exploration of how and why consumers feel disillusioned and affected by inappropriate sustainability claims and how their feelings and perceptions are formed in this context (Lauri, 2019). This research uses primary and secondary data to understand consumers' narratives of the disillusionment they feel due to inconsistencies in sustainability claims. Secondary data was drawn from relevant literature on consumer perceptions of greenwashing and its impact on trust and purchase intentions (Kahraman and Kazançoğlu, 2019). This data was used as a basis for the development of interview guidelines and to identify key themes relevant to the research topic. Meanwhile, primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with consumers who had experienced inappropriate sustainability claims, to reveal in detail the perspectives, emotions and meanings they attributed to the experience. Content analysis was conducted using the thematic analysis method, where data was analysed inductively to identify key themes that reflected consumers' experiences and perspectives. This analytical process allowed the researcher to categorise insights from consumers' narratives regarding their disillusionment and distrust and the impact on their purchasing decisions of sustainability claims perceived as misleading (Tong et al., 2012). This approach helps to collate consumers' narratives of disillusionment, providing a deeper understanding of the negative influence inconsistent sustainability claims have on consumers' behaviour and their trust in sustainable products and brands.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Effect of Greenwashing on Consumer Trust

Greenwashing, or the act of companies dishonestly claiming sustainability to attract environmentally concerned consumers, has been shown to significantly undermine consumer trust in sustainability-focused brands and products (Petrov et al., 2023). Consumers, who are increasingly critical and discerning in their product choices, are beginning to realize the difference between green claims that are merely marketing strategies and real actions that actually support sustainability (B and Satheesh, 2023). When consumers detect greenwashing practices, their perception of the brand is likely to turn negative, impacting their purchase intentions as well as overall brand engagement. Consumer-detected greenwashing results in a large decrease in trust in green brands (Wang and Walker, 2023). Consumer distrust is not only caused by discrepancies between sustainability claims and companies' actual actions but also exacerbated by identified inconsistencies (Nichols et al., 2023). For example, green claims not supported by tangible evidence lead to a multiplier effect, where consumers are not only reluctant to purchase products from such brands but also develop scepticism towards the entire category of green products. This negatively impacts long-term purchase intentions and suggests that companies that engage in greenwashing risk losing market share in the long run, especially among consumers who are highly environmentally conscious (Wang and Walker, 2023).

In the context of electronic products in Vietnam, using a sample of 308 consumers, they identified that greenwashing not only reduces trust but also decreases consumer engagement with the brand as well as positive word-of-mouth toward green products (Nguyen et al., 2021). A total of 72% of respondents in this study revealed that they would be more likely to recommend green products from brands that have visible and transparent sustainability commitments. These results suggest that greenwashing not only hinders the adoption of green products but also weakens consumer loyalty to the brand, ultimately affecting the overall brand image (Nguyen et al., 2021). Further emphasis is placed on the negative impact of greenwashing on consumers' perceptions of corporate integrity (De Jong et al., 2018). In their experiments involving hedonic (products associated with emotional gratification, such as luxury goods) and utilitarian (practical everyday products) products, they found that greenwashing resulted in an impression of low environmental performance and damaged consumers' perceptions of corporate integrity. While it seems that greenwashing may be advantageous for attracting attention in the short term, their findings suggest that the long-term impact results in reputational damage and decreased purchase intentions. This also indicates that greenwashing does not provide a meaningful competitive advantage and may lead to a significant decline in consumer loyalty (De Jong et al., 2018).

Table 1: Greenwashing on consumer trust and purchase intention

Indicators	Data Findings	Reference
The Effect of Greenwashing on Purchase Intention	Greenwashing decreased the purchase intention of green products by 32% across different product categories.	(Nguyen et al., 2019)
Decrease in Consumer Trust	72% of consumers in Vietnam decreased their trust in green brands after learning about greenwashing practices.	(Nguyen et al., 2021)
Impact on Loyalty and Word-of-Mouth	55% of consumers exposed to greenwashing were reluctant to recommend the brand to others, and 35% shared negative experiences.	(De Jong et al., 2018)
Reduction in Customer Loyalty to Brand	40% of consumers chose not to buy products from brands that were found to be greenwashing.	(Kreczmańska-Gigol and Gigol, 2022)

From the data and research described, it appears that greenwashing has a destructive impact on consumers' perceptions, both of their trust in and loyalty to brands. Consumers today are increasingly critical and knowledgeable about sustainability issues, and most of them respond negatively to sustainability claims that are not accompanied by tangible evidence (Neureiter et al., 2024). When consumers detect discrepancies between green claims and actual company practices, they feel cheated and betrayed, which directly affects their perception of green brands and products (Nguyen et al., 2019). This reaction is often characterized by heightened skepticism, where consumers become hesitant to trust other brands that also promote sustainability claims (Sun and Shi, 2022). Greenwashing not only has the potential to reduce consumer trust in one particular brand but also impacts the green product category as a whole (Amer and Ezz, 2023). Consumers who feel let down are likely to extend their skepticism toward other green products, thus damaging the image of the sustainable product category in general (Rani et al., 2024). This hinders the growth of the green market, where consumers should support products that positively impact the environment but are hesitant to adopt green products due to their previous experiences with inconsistent sustainability claims (Geissmar et al., 2023).

In the context of intensifying market competition, companies committed to sustainability not only need to be mindful of the claims they make. However, they must also ensure that each claim is aligned with concrete, verifiable measures. Transparency and consistency are important elements for building trust, and companies need to provide easy access for consumers to verify the validity of sustainability claims. For example, information on raw material sources, production processes, and environmental impacts should be transparently available on product packaging or company websites to make consumers more confident in the claims made. Integrity in green claims also has a direct impact on consumers' long-term loyalty (Darnall et al., 2018). Consumers who feel

confident that the brand carries out green practices consistently are more likely to become loyal customers and participate in positive word-of-mouth. Research by [Kreczmańska-Gigol and Gigol \(2022\)](#) revealed that consumers who believe in a brand's sustainability commitment tend to not only buy the product but also recommend it to others, thus providing additional benefits in the form of strengthening the brand's reputation in the market. Companies that engage in greenwashing practices will ultimately harm their interests. Such actions not only result in an immediate loss of consumer trust but also pose a significant risk of long-term reputational damage. Disillusioned consumers can easily switch to competitors that demonstrate a more authentic commitment to sustainability. This creates opportunities for other companies to gain market share by offering green products backed by transparency and real consistency. Thus, companies that are honest in their sustainability claims not only win over current consumers but also potentially retain loyalty in the future. Overall, the success of green product marketing is highly dependent on the trust built through authentic and sustainable sustainability claims. In a market that is increasingly concerned about sustainability issues, companies must be aware that any claims made will be tested by savvy and critical consumers. Without transparency and strong commitment, companies risk losing consumer trust and the opportunity to survive in green markets ([Nguyen et al., 2019](#)).

The Effect of Scepticism and Claim Discrepancy on Purchase Intention

The consistency of sustainability claims has been shown to play an important role in shaping consumers' positive perceptions of green products. Many studies have shown that discrepancies between sustainability claims and the actual actions of companies can lead to negative perceptions and skepticism among consumers, significantly affecting their purchase intentions towards green products. [Sun and Shi \(2022\)](#) and [Steenis et al. \(2023\)](#) revealed that when consumers feel that a product's sustainability claims are just a marketing strategy without any meaningful changes, they tend to doubt the integrity of the brand and lose their intention to buy the green product offered. When companies make limited changes to product attributes- such as environmentally friendly packaging without improving other aspects of production or distribution, consumers become increasingly sceptical. Consumers who are highly sceptical of sustainability claims tend to respond by distrusting companies that claim their products are sustainable, and ultimately avoiding those products ([Goh and Balaji, 2016](#)). In Indonesia, it has also been shown that skepticism toward green claims can reduce consumer purchase intention, even for products labeled as environmentally friendly ([Bursan et al., 2022](#)). They found that sceptical consumers felt sustainability claims often did not reflect real commitments, which made them more reluctant to buy the product.

Table 2 Summary of the Effect of Claim Discrepancies on Purchase Intention

Authors	Data Findings
(Sun and Shi, 2022)	Green claim consistency for purchase intention; greenwashing decreases purchase intention on sustainability-claimed products
(Steenis et al., 2023)	Inconsistent sustainability claims, such as limited changes to product attributes, increase scepticism.
(Goh and Balaji, 2016)	Scepticism towards green claims decreases trust in sustainable products and negatively impacts purchase intention.
(Bursan et al., 2022)	Consumers who are skeptical of green claims are more likely to avoid green products that are perceived to lack commitment to sustainability.

The results from the table above reinforce the finding that consumers highly value transparency and integrity in sustainability claims made by companies. When a company claims that its product is environmentally friendly, consumers expect this claim to reflect a real commitment and not just a marketing strategy ([Hameed et al., 2021](#)). Inconsistencies between a company's claims and actual actions are not only a disappointment for consumers but also risk creating deeper skepticism toward green products as a whole ([Steenis et al., 2023](#)). This scepticism can result in decreased purchase intent and decreased consumer loyalty to the brand, which in turn

can negatively impact the company's long-term success in an increasingly environmentally conscious market (Goh and Balaji, 2016). Scepticism towards sustainability claims can worsen consumers' perceptions and negatively impact their purchase intentions towards green products (Kim and Oh, 2020). They found that consumers who doubt the credibility of sustainability claims tend to reduce their purchase intentions and may even spread negative word-of-mouth that damages the brand image in the eyes of other consumers (Nguyen et al., 2021). Thus, maintaining consistency in sustainability claims is crucial, especially as consumers who feel deceived tend to become more skeptical of the brand as a whole (Steenis et al., 2023).

In this context, transparency is a key cornerstone to building and maintaining consumer trust. Orazi and Chan (2020) revealed that consumers respond more positively to brands that provide specific and in-depth sustainability information. Conversely, when the sustainability information presented does not match reality or feels too general, consumers tend to show scepticism, which can lead to negative perceptions of the company's integrity and lower their purchase intentions. Therefore, companies looking to succeed in the sustainability market need to ensure that any claims made, whether through product labeling or advertising, support clear and verifiable sustainability actions. The importance of consistency between sustainability claims and actions is that consumers trust companies that promote alignment between sustainability promises and actual practices (Farooq and Wicaksono, 2021). They found that consumers tend to be skeptical of large companies that have a history of greenwashing, or spreading sustainability claims without real efforts, while small companies that are consistent in their sustainability commitments are more likely to win consumer trust (Shoheb Khan Sadulla Khan, 2024). This scepticism, they argue, can even be exacerbated in industries that are often associated with environmental issues, such as the oil industry or fast fashion, which are increasingly monitored by critical consumers.

As a long-term strategy, companies need to consider a more open and educative approach in their sustainability communications. Consumers are not only looking for environmentally friendly products but also want to understand how each sustainability claim is implemented in every stage of production, from the sourcing of raw materials to the final impact of the product on the environment (Bruno, 2024). Providing comprehensive sustainability information can strengthen consumer engagement and increase their positive perception of the brand. With this transparency approach, consumers feel empowered to make informed decisions and have more trust in companies' sustainability claims (Jestratijevic et al., 2024). Consistency and transparency in sustainability claims are not just a marketing strategy but a critical component in building long-term trust relationships with consumers (Altaf, 2022). By demonstrating real and open commitment, companies not only win consumer trust but also strengthen their position in an increasingly competitive sustainability market. Without transparency and integrity, companies risk damaging their reputation and losing market share in a competitive landscape that is increasingly concerned with sustainability issues (Winit et al., 2023).

The Importance of Third-Party Validation to Reduce Consumer Scepticism of Sustainability Claims

In the growing market for sustainable products, third-party validation is a key element in building consumer trust in sustainability claims (Fatemi et al., 2023). With increasing awareness of greenwashing practices, where companies leverage sustainability issues for marketing purposes without any real commitment, consumers are increasingly skeptical of green claims that are not backed by concrete evidence (Liu et al., 2024). In this context, third-party certifications, such as Fair Trade, Energy Star, or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), offer assurance that sustainability claims have been verified by independent parties with credibility and expertise (Lee and Sim, 2024). Consumers have more trust in labels endorsed by independent bodies than those that are merely company-sponsored, as independent certification provides assurance of objectivity and accuracy to sustainability claims (Darnall et al., 2018). Third-party validation not only builds consumer trust but also directly reduces the perception of risk that often arises when consumers are confronted with sustainability claims. Third-party certification reduces skepticism about green claims by providing tangible evidence that the product meets certain sustainability standards. With this certification,

consumers feel more confident about purchasing sustainable products, thereby significantly increasing their purchase intentions (Brach et al., 2018).

In addition to risk reduction, third-party certification also affects consumers' willingness to pay for sustainable products (Pretner et al., 2021). Consumers are willing to pay a premium price for products that bear a certification label, suggesting that these certifications add value to sustainable products (Morone et al., 2021). This phenomenon is known as the green premium, where consumers feel confident that certified products truly make a positive contribution to the environment and society (Morone et al., 2021). This trust is also the foundation for building long-term loyalty to brands that consistently practice sustainability. Third-party certification not only increases trust but also creates deeper social engagement between consumers and sustainable products (Ge et al., 2022). Participatory validation systems, such as Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS), allow consumers to be directly involved in the process of evaluating product sustainability (Robinson et al., 2021). This engagement strengthens consumers' emotional connection and trust in the product, which has a positive impact on loyalty and word-of-mouth recommendations. Certifications that involve consumers in this validation process provide a stronger sense of ownership of values (Ge et al., 2022).

The existence of third-party certification also plays an important role in protecting a company's reputation in a market that is increasingly concerned with sustainability (Zhu et al., 2024). Consumers who feel confident that sustainability claims are backed by independent institutions tend to trust companies more, even amid growing skepticism toward green marketing practices (Farooq and Wicaksono, 2021). By doing so, companies can reduce reputational risks caused by greenwashing accusations while strengthening their position in the increasingly competitive sustainable product market (Prihatiningrum et al., 2024). Third-party certification is a strategic element that not only increases consumer trust and purchase intent but also creates loyalty and strong long-term relationships (Darnall et al., 2018). By providing clear, credible, and verifiable information, third-party validation helps companies build a positive reputation and win over consumers who are increasingly critical of sustainability issues. This strategy provides significant added value for companies seeking to maintain market share in the evolving sustainability era (Jun et al., 2017).

The Importance of Narrative and Authenticity in Sustainable Marketing

Authenticity in sustainable product marketing plays an important role in building trust and increasing consumer loyalty. Today's consumers are more critical of products that claim to be environmentally friendly and expect transparency in companies' commitment to sustainability. Authentic and consistent narratives in sustainability marketing can create strong positive brand perceptions, and this strategy is increasingly important as consumers tend to be skeptical of sustainability claims without tangible evidence (Tariq, 2024). Research shows that this approach can strengthen emotional connections with consumers, reduce skepticism, and increase trust and brand loyalty in the long term (Tariq, 2024). A study highlighting the impact of authenticity on loyalty found that consumers are more attached to brands that are seen to be consistent and have values that align with their sustainability claims. In the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR), the perception of authenticity enhances brand loyalty by strengthening trust and increasing positive word-of-mouth among global consumers (Safeer and Liu, 2023). Consumers feel that truly authentic companies are consistent in their CSR commitments, and this contributes to a more trustworthy brand reputation.

Authenticity in fashion brands can increase brand attachment and commitment, finding that factors such as innovation and consistency are critical to driving loyalty to sustainable brands (Choi et al., 2015). In interviews with consumers loyal to green brands, they often expressed appreciation for product sustainability being consistently integrated throughout the production process, from raw materials to packaging. This highlights that authenticity is not just about claims but should reflect values that are visible throughout the product line. Consumers tend to be more loyal to brands that they perceive as authentic, especially if they feel that the brand is in line with their identity (Fritz et al., 2017). They identified that aspects such as brand history, clarity in communication, and social commitment are important elements in establishing authenticity. This

trust manifests in loyal behaviour, where consumers actively recommend brands that are perceived as truly supporting sustainability. In the implementation of marketing strategies, authentic narratives have the power to strengthen a brand's position in sustainable markets. Authentic marketing communications can increase positive perceptions of fast-moving consumer goods brands in highly competitive markets (Dwivedi and McDonald, 2018). Consumers value brands that are transparent about their product origins and environmental impacts, so authentic narratives not only impact immediate purchases but also long-term engagement (Yang and Battocchio, 2021). Consistent narratives and authenticity in sustainable marketing provide added value for companies in building a positive image and consumer loyalty (Tariq, 2024). These studies show that truly authentic brands have a greater chance of gaining trust and long-term support from consumers.

The studies described highlight the importance of authentic narratives in creating a solid foundation for corporate sustainability. Authentic narratives, which are based on transparency, integrity and consistency, can build consumer trust. When companies honestly promote sustainability values through authentic communication, they not only attract consumers' attention but also create a strong emotional connection (Huang and Guo, 2021). This connection enables companies to develop a loyal consumer base, even in highly competitive markets. Authentic narratives also play an important role in overcoming consumer scepticism towards sustainability claims. With the rise of greenwashing practices, consumers are increasingly selective in assessing claims made by companies (Agu et al., 2024). In this context, transparency is key to turning scepticism into trust. Research shows that consumers are more likely to support brands that not only make promises but also prove them through concrete actions, such as third-party certifications, open sustainability reports, and measurable environmental initiatives (Gonçalves and Silva, 2021). The trust built from this approach creates a long-term impact in the form of stable brand loyalty. In addition to increasing consumer loyalty, the adoption of authentic narratives also has a positive impact on corporate reputation (Van Loggerenberg et al., 2022). Brands that consistently demonstrate a commitment to sustainability are recognised as pioneers in their industry (Bianco and Venezia, 2019). This not only strengthens the brand's position in the market but also attracts the attention of other stakeholders, such as business partners, investors and local communities. The impact goes beyond the commercial aspect, creating added value that strengthens the company's relationship with society at large.

Authentic narratives also influence changes in consumption culture. When consumers are exposed to messages that promote sustainability, they are more likely to adopt responsible consumption habits (Nacu, 2022). This can create a snowball effect, where the demand for sustainable products and services increases. Thus, companies that practice sustainable marketing not only drive their business growth but also influence global consumption patterns in a more environmentally friendly and ethical direction (Darnall et al., 2018). Furthermore, the long-term impact of authentic narratives can be felt in the form of strengthening companies' relationships with younger generations. Millennials and Gen Z, known to be highly conscious of environmental issues, are more likely to support brands that demonstrate a real commitment to sustainability (Rivaroli et al., 2022). Research shows that these generations seek not only environmentally friendly products but also companies that reflect their social values. As such, authentic narratives that focus on sustainability can help companies create connections with young consumers and ensure the sustainability of their business in the future (Allen and Spialek, 2018). Overall, authentic narratives in sustainability marketing offer a great opportunity for companies to create positive impacts that go beyond financial gains (Muñoz and Cohen, 2018). By practising transparency, consistency and integrity, companies can strengthen consumer trust, encourage loyalty, and create a cultural shift in favour of sustainability (Jestratijevic et al., 2024). This approach not only provides direct benefits to companies but also contributes to collective efforts to create a more sustainable world. In this context, authentic narratives are not just a marketing strategy but also a strategic step towards a better future for all.

Table 3 Research findings on the impact of authentic narrative in sustainable marketing

Aspects Evaluated	Main Findings	Reference
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Influence on Consumer Loyalty	Consumers exposed to authentic narratives showed a 42% increase in loyalty compared to generic sustainability claims without concrete evidence.	(Tariq, 2024)
Reduction of Consumer Scepticism	Consumer scepticism towards brands decreased by 35% after consumers received a consistent and transparent narrative regarding sustainability practices.	(Khandai et al., 2023)
Effect on Word-of-Mouth	Consumers who feel confident in authentic narratives are more likely to recommend brands to others, with up to a 30% increase in word-of-mouth.	(Mim et al., 2022)
Effects on the Younger Generation (Gen Z)	68% of Gen Z consumers prefer brands with transparent sustainability narratives that support social issues over brands that focus solely on products.	(Rivaroli et al., 2022)
Changes in Consumption Patterns	59% of consumers stated that sustainability narratives influenced their decision to reduce their consumption of environmentally unfriendly products.	(Khandai et al., 2023)

Authentic narratives have become an important cornerstone in building deep and sustainable relationships between brands and consumers, especially in an era where sustainability is a major concern for many (Tariq, 2024). The table above illustrates that the impact of authentic narratives is not only limited to the communication aspect but also extends to various strategic marketing dimensions, such as loyalty, word-of-mouth, and consumption patterns (Mim et al., 2022). This finding underscores the importance of transparency and consistency in sustainability value-based marketing, which is not only a tactical tool but also a catalyst for broad consumption culture change (Dwivedi and McDonald, 2018). The 42% increase in consumer loyalty shows that authentic narratives have the power to strengthen the emotional connection between brands and consumers (Tariq, 2024). The trust built through authentic narratives provides a solid foundation for consumers to feel confident that the brands they choose not only prioritize profit but also contribute to tangible sustainability efforts (Brach et al., 2018). This is very important because loyalty is not only measured by repeat purchases but also by consumers' willingness to continue to support the brand in the long term, even in the midst of increasingly fierce competition (Khandai et al., 2023). This loyalty can be a significant competitive advantage, especially for companies that want to maintain relevance in a changing market. The 35% reduction in consumer skepticism through authentic narratives is also a sign that consumers are not only looking for attractive sustainability claims but also tangible evidence of company actions (Ge et al., 2022). Consumer skepticism is often born out of a mismatch between claims and reality, which reinforces the importance of authentic narratives as a tool to bridge consumer expectations with the reality offered by companies (Chen and Chang, 2013). Consumers who feel confident in sustainability narratives that are based on integrity are more likely to trust brands, which in turn creates a solid foundation for a mutually beneficial relationship.

The positive effect on word-of-mouth reinforces the argument that consumers who believe in authentic narratives become not only customers but also active advocates for brands (Rivaroli et al., 2022). With up to a 30% increase in positive recommendations, companies using authentic narratives have a great opportunity to expand their market reach through organic communication by consumers (Mim et al., 2022). Word-of-mouth has a greater impact than traditional advertising because it reflects real experiences and credibility that other marketing strategies struggle to match (Dwivedi and McDonald, 2018). This gives a new dimension to the role of authentic narratives as a means to exponentially expand brand influence. Data also shows that Gen Z, known as a generation with high social and environmental awareness, prefers brands with authentic narratives that support sustainability issues (Tariq, 2024). As many as 68% of them are likely to choose brands that consistently demonstrate a commitment to sustainability compared to brands that only focus on products (Rivaroli et al., 2022). This generation, projected to be the dominant consumer group in the next decade, wants transparency and value alignment between brands and social issues. This provides a great opportunity for companies to build long-term relationships based on shared values while ensuring their future business viability.

In addition to their direct impact on loyalty and word-of-mouth, authentic narratives also play a role in driving a cultural shift toward more responsible consumption. 59% of consumers

reported that sustainability narratives influenced their decision to reduce consumption of environmentally unfriendly products (Ge et al., 2022). This suggests that authentic narratives not only benefit companies but also contribute to a collective movement to create better consumption behaviour change. By creating relevant and honest narratives, companies can become agents of change in society while strengthening their image as pioneers in sustainability efforts (Dwivedi and McDonald, 2018). Authentic narratives in sustainability marketing are not just a communication strategy but also a transformational tool that can create a profound impact on various aspects, both for the company and society at large. By adopting this approach, companies not only increase their consumer loyalty and brand reputation but also contribute to the creation of a more responsible and sustainable world. This approach provides the foundation for a mutually beneficial relationship, which allows companies to remain relevant and become leaders in the global sustainability era (Helgeson et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the importance of authenticity and consistency in sustainable marketing narratives in building consumer trust and loyalty. As consumers become more aware of environmental issues, green marketing strategies that are not backed by concrete evidence or consistent sustainability commitments can generate skepticism and reduce consumers' purchase intentions. In this case, third-party validation and ongoing transparency are critical elements to overcome the negative perceptions that often arise from greenwashing. The results of this study support that consumers tend to respond positively when companies present evidence-based sustainability narratives and integrate environmental values consistently in all aspects of their operations. An honest and transparent narrative not only increases trust in green products but also builds a stronger emotional connection between consumers and brands, encouraging long-term loyalty. This research emphasises that the success of sustainable marketing depends not only on green claims but also on companies' demonstrated commitment and concrete actions, manifested through clear, structured, and continuous communication. As a recommendation, companies that want to succeed in the sustainable market are advised to adopt authentic marketing practices and avoid greenwashing. By building relevant narratives supported by third-party evidence, companies can reduce skepticism and strengthen consumer loyalty. In an increasingly competitive marketplace, this approach can help companies maintain their reputation and create a real positive impact, both for the environment and for increasingly conscious and critical consumers.

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