Journal of Statistics & Management Systems
ISSN 0972-0510 (Print), ISSN 2169-0014 (Online)
Vol. 29 (2026), No. 10, pp. 1185–1194
Doi: 10.47974/JSMS-1757

Green marketing : The power of authenticity and engagement in driving customer loyalty

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Abstract

As concern for environmental sustainability increases, many firms are using green marketing to connect with environmentally conscious consumers. This conceptual paper examines how green marketing strategies contribute to customer loyalty by building authenticity and encouraging customer engagement. Using Signalling Theory and Relationship Marketing Theory, the study explains how genuine environmental claims help develop trust and reduce scepticism. It also shows how customer engagement, through cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement, converts trust into outcomes such as satisfaction, repeat purchases, and advocacy. The paper highlights the risks associated with greenwashing and offers practical insights for organisations seeking to design credible and effective green marketing practices.

Subject Classification: *90B60, 91B42.*

Keywords: *Green marketing, Authenticity, Customer engagement, Customer loyalty, Sustainability, Greenwashing, Consumer behaviour, Ethical branding.*

1. Introduction

Green marketing has evolved from a niche strategy to an essential approach for connecting with environmentally conscious consumers. Growing awareness of climate change, resource depletion, and waste has led consumers to favour brands that demonstrate genuine environmental responsibility, such as reducing plastic use, sourcing materials responsibly, or adopting renewable energy. Research shows that consumers increasingly weigh a brand's environmental performance in their purchasing decisions [1], and firms increasingly treat sustainability as a strategic source of brand value and growth rather than a cost [2].

However, success depends on authenticity. Exaggerated or misleading claims known as greenwashing can erode trust [3]. This paper explores three core concepts: authenticity (perceived genuineness of green claims

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[4]), customer engagement (cognitive, emotional, and behavioural connections [5]), and customer outcomes (satisfaction, loyalty, repeat purchases, advocacy [6]).

The purpose of this paper is to describe how green marketing strategies foster stronger customer bonds through authenticity and engagement. We examine what green marketing entails, why authenticity builds trust, how engagement strengthens connections, and the resulting customer outcomes. This offers practical insights for businesses aiming to promote eco-friendly products while maintaining credibility.

2. Literature Review

This section synthesises key studies on green marketing, focusing on authenticity, engagement, and loyalty.

Green marketing promotes products based on environmental benefits, such as sustainable materials or reduced waste [7]. Recent research emphasises its role in emerging markets like India and Southeast Asia, where rising ecological awareness drives demand for credible sustainable options [8].

Authenticity mediates green strategies and consumer perceptions. Genuine claims, supported by transparency and third-party certifications, build trust and reduce greenwashing risks [9, 10]. Perceived authenticity has been shown to chain-mediate emotional involvement and engagement behaviours in green consumption [11].

Customer engagement encompasses cognitive (awareness of efforts), emotional (pride in support), and behavioural (sharing/advocacy) dimensions [6]. Interactive campaigns and digital tools enhance participation [12]. These elements drive loyalty, with authentic practices increasing willingness to pay premiums and advocacy [13, 14]. In Asian contexts, green marketing strengthens loyalty when aligned with cultural values [8].

3. Green Marketing Strategies

Green marketing involves promoting products or services based on their environmental benefits, such as using sustainable materials or reducing waste [7]. It is about showing consumers that a brand cares about the planet through actions like eco-friendly product design, sustainable packaging, or ethical branding. For example, Patagonia uses recycled plastic for jackets and shares detailed stories about its supply chain,

appealing to eco-conscious shoppers [15]. Authentic implementation fosters loyalty among value-aligned consumers [3]. Similarly, companies like Ben & Jerry's emphasise fair-trade ingredients and climate-friendly practices in their campaigns [12].

Green marketing is fundamentally about connecting with people who care about the planet and are willing to pay a premium for sustainable products when they trust the brand. Brands that embrace ethical practices — such as fair trade or cruelty-free products — build a loyal consumer base that shares their values. However, authenticity is essential: exaggerating green efforts through greenwashing can seriously damage trust [3]. By staying honest and focusing on real sustainability, brands can turn casual buyers into loyal advocates over the long term.

4. The Role of Authenticity

Authenticity in green marketing means a brand's eco-friendly claims actually match what they are doing—genuine transparency about environmental efforts [4]. Greenwashing is the opposite, as when companies make misleading claims such as labelling products "100% Natural" while using harmful chemicals [17]. Such practices destroy trust and deter customers [3, 18]. Being genuine is critical because trust is the foundation of lasting customer relationships [16]. When a brand's green practices are solid—such as The Body Shop's verified fair-trade sourcing — consumers feel confident buying from them [15]. That trust also encourages consumers to try new eco-products [4]. Third-party certifications and transparency reinforce credibility [9].

Authenticity acts as a mediator between green marketing strategies and customer perceptions. It ensures that strategies such as sustainable packaging translate into positive brand perceptions [7]. Without authenticity, even well-designed green campaigns can fail, as consumers may see them as manipulative [3]. By being transparent, brands turn sceptical shoppers into believers, setting the stage for deeper engagement.

5. Customer Engagement

Engagement involves cognitive awareness, emotional connection, and behavioural actions [5]. Interactive efforts—such as social media challenges, community events, and impact-tracking apps—foster participation [6]. When authentic, engagement strengthens bonds and loyalty [16]. Cognitive engagement occurs when someone takes notice of a

brand's green efforts, such as checking out how they use renewable energy. Emotional engagement is the pride consumers feel when supporting a brand that is making a positive environmental impact. Behavioural engagement refers to observable actions and interactions with the brand, such as sharing content on social media, participating in brand-sponsored activities, recommending the brand to others, or engaging in advocacy behaviours [6]. It reflects a deeper level of commitment, transforming passive interest into active participation. Companies can boost engagement through interactive campaigns. Social media challenges, like Nike's sustainability-focused running events, encourage consumers to participate and share their eco-actions [6]. Community initiatives, such as tree-planting days sponsored by brands like Seventh Generation, make customers feel part of a movement [5]. Apps that track a product's environmental impact also keep consumers involved [12]. These efforts turn green marketing into a two-way conversation, strengthening the bond between brand and customer. Engagement bridges green strategies to loyalty by making consumers active participants [16]. When authenticity is present, engagement feels natural, encouraging customers to stick with the brand and spread the word [5].

6. Impact on Customer Outcomes

Effective green marketing, backed by authenticity and engagement, leads to positive customer outcomes. Satisfaction is the starting point: consumers feel good when their purchases align with their environmental values, such as choosing a reusable water bottle over single-use plastic [12]. This satisfaction fosters brand loyalty, where customers repeatedly choose the brand over competitors [16]. For example, fans of Burt's Bees stay loyal because of the brand's consistent natural ingredients [15]. Repeat purchases are a key outcome, as loyal customers buy more frequently, boosting sales [6]. Advocacy is another benefit — satisfied customers recommend the brand to friends or post about it online, acting as unpaid promoters [5]. Additionally, eco-conscious consumers are often willing to pay a premium for green products when they trust the brand [13]. However, without authenticity, green marketing can lead to negative outcomes. Greenwashing creates scepticism, causing customers to question the brand's motives [3]. This can result in backlash such as boycotts or negative reviews, as seen with Volkswagen's diesel emissions scandal, which damaged trust and sales [19]. Lack of engagement also risks losing customers after one purchase, missing out on loyalty [6].

Authentic and engaging green marketing is essential to avoid these pitfalls and achieve lasting results.

7. Methodology

This is a conceptual review paper synthesising secondary sources, theories (Signalling Theory and Relationship Marketing Theory), and empirical examples from literature. No primary data collection was conducted; insights derive from peer-reviewed studies and industry reports.

8. Conceptual Framework

The proposed model illustrates the flow of green marketing's impact: green marketing strategies (e.g., eco-products, ethical branding) lead to perceived authenticity when consumers believe the efforts are genuine [9]. Authenticity then drives customer engagement, as consumers think, feel, and act on the brand's green message [5]. Engagement ultimately results in positive customer outcomes—such as satisfaction, loyalty, repeat purchases, and advocacy [6]. If authenticity is weak, green marketing may directly lead to negative outcomes like scepticism or distrust [3]. This framework, rooted in Signalling Theory (trust through clear signals) and Relationship Marketing Theory (trust builds bonds), highlights the importance of authenticity and engagement in sustainable success. The proposed flow is: green marketing strategies → perceived authenticity → customer engagement (cognitive, emotional, behavioural) → positive customer outcomes (satisfaction, loyalty, repeat purchases, advocacy).

9. Future Research Directions

To deepen the understanding of green marketing's impact, future studies should explore its dynamics across different contexts and methodologies. First, cross-cultural research could examine how green marketing strategies perform in regions like Asia or Africa, where environmental attitudes vary, addressing the limited generalisability of current findings [3]. Second, longitudinal studies tracking consumer responses over time would reveal how authenticity and engagement evolve, especially as sustainability awareness grows [21]. Third, experimental designs could test causality, such as how specific eco-labels influence trust or engagement, providing stronger evidence for the

proposed framework [5]. Additionally, investigating moderators like environmental knowledge or brand familiarity could clarify why some consumers respond more positively to green campaigns [22, 23]. Finally, exploring green marketing in industries like technology or hospitality would uncover new applications, helping brands tailor strategies to diverse markets.

10. Conclusion

Green marketing is a powerful way for brands to connect with eco-conscious consumers, but its success hinges on authenticity and engagement [20]. Strategies like sustainable packaging or fair-trade products attract shoppers, but only if they feel genuine; otherwise, greenwashing can spark distrust [3]. Engagement turns trust into action, creating loyal customers who buy repeatedly and advocate for the brand [5]. The key insight is that authentic and engaging green marketing leads to positive outcomes like satisfaction and loyalty, while inauthenticity risks backlash [6]. Businesses should adopt transparent practices—verified labels, participatory campaigns—to align environmental goals with commercial success [24]. Future research should test the framework empirically in diverse contexts, including India and emerging markets. Marketers can develop narratives that resonate with consumers, fostering brand advocacy. As sustainability grows, mastering authenticity and engagement will help brands contribute to a better planet while building thriving businesses. Overall, this paper demonstrates that green marketing effectively connects brands with eco-conscious consumers when grounded in authenticity and engagement. Authentic strategies attract consumers, while engagement converts trust into loyalty, satisfaction, repeat purchases, and advocacy. Inauthentic efforts risk distrust and backlash.

Acknowledgement

The authors declare no financial grants or external funding for this research. The authors are grateful to their respective institutions for providing academic support.

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Received November, 2025