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Green Marketing Practices, Sustainable Consumer Behaviour, and Their Influence on Brand Loyalty in Emerging Economies

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ABSTRACT: Green marketing has moved from a peripheral corporate social responsibility gesture to a mainstream strategic positioning tool, yet its effectiveness in cultivating genuine, durable brand loyalty remains empirically contested, particularly in emerging economies where environmental consciousness, purchasing power, and institutional trust in corporate environmental claims interact in ways that differ substantially from the high-income-country contexts in which much of the foundational green marketing literature was developed. This paper reviews the theoretical and empirical literature connecting green marketing practice, sustainable consumer behaviour, and brand loyalty, synthesizing foundational green brand equity and green trust models with the theory of planned behaviour's application to green purchase intention, the greenwashing and green-skepticism literature, and the growing body of emerging-economy-specific empirical studies from India, China, and Southeast Asia. Particular attention is given to the mediating role of green trust and green perceived risk in the relationship between green marketing communication and brand loyalty, and to the structural market conditions, price sensitivity, regulatory enforcement variability, and information asymmetry, that distinguish emerging-economy green consumption from the developed-market context. Distinct comparative tables map theoretical constructs onto their standard empirical measurement approach, contrast trust-building green marketing mechanisms against the corresponding greenwashing risk each is vulnerable to, and set emerging-economy structural conditions against their documented net effect on the green-marketing-to-brand-loyalty pathway. The paper concludes that green marketing's effect on brand loyalty in emerging economies is consistently mediated by green trust rather than operating as a direct effect, and identifies cross-national comparative validation of green trust mediation models as the central future research prospect.

I. INTRODUCTION

Green marketing, the deliberate positioning of products, brands, and corporate communication around environmental attributes and sustainability claims, has expanded considerably beyond its origins as a niche positioning strategy for explicitly eco-focused brands into a mainstream element of marketing strategy across consumer goods categories [1]. Ottman's early framing of green marketing as an innovation opportunity rather than a defensive compliance cost anticipated this mainstreaming, arguing that firms treating environmental attributes as a genuine product-development and positioning resource, rather than an afterthought layered onto conventional marketing, would be better positioned to capture the loyalty of an increasingly environmentally conscious consumer base [1]. Peattie and Crane's more skeptical retrospective assessment of the green marketing movement's first decades, however, found that a considerable share of green marketing practice had historically amounted to superficial claims, or "legend," unsupported by genuine product or process change, a pattern the authors argued had contributed to consumer skepticism that subsequent, more substantively grounded green marketing efforts would have to overcome [2].

This tension between green marketing's promotional potential and its credibility risk motivates the central empirical question this paper reviews: does green marketing communication translate into durable brand loyalty, and if so, through what specific psychological and behavioural mechanism? Chen's influential green brand equity model proposed that this translation operates through a specific causal chain, green marketing and product attributes build green brand image, which in turn builds green satisfaction and green trust, and that these latter two constructs, rather than green brand image alone, are the proximate drivers of the kind of durable brand preference and repurchase behaviour that constitutes brand loyalty [3]. Chen and Chang's subsequent extension of this model introduced greenwashing directly into the causal framework, finding that perceived greenwashing, the suspicion that a brand's environmental claims are exaggerated or unsubstantiated, undermines green trust specifically by increasing green consumer confusion and green perceived risk, providing a direct empirical mechanism for why Peattie and Crane's early skepticism concern continues to constrain green marketing's effectiveness even as the practice has matured [2], [4].

Delmas and Burbano's broader analysis of the drivers of greenwashing identified specific firm-level and institutional conditions under which firms are more likely to engage in exaggerated or unsubstantiated environmental claims, including weak regulatory monitoring and enforcement, conditions the authors note are frequently more pronounced in emerging-economy regulatory environments than in the high-income-country markets where environmental advertising regulation has historically been more developed and consistently enforced [5]. This institutional distinction carries direct relevance for how the green-marketing-to-brand-loyalty pathway Chen's model describes should be expected to operate in emerging economies specifically: if weaker regulatory enforcement increases the prevalence or at least the perceived prevalence of greenwashing, then green trust, the construct Chen and Chang identify as the mechanism through which greenwashing suppresses loyalty-relevant outcomes, should be expected to play an even more consequential mediating role in emerging-economy green marketing effectiveness than in the developed-market contexts where the foundational green brand equity literature was originally validated [3], [4], [5].

Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour, though developed well before green marketing existed as a distinct field, has become the dominant psychological framework for explaining green purchase intention specifically, arguing that behavioural intention, and ultimately behaviour, is jointly determined by an individual's attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms regarding what relevant others expect, and perceived behavioural control over performing the behaviour [8]. Paul, Modi, and Patel's application of both the theory of planned behaviour and the related theory of reasoned action to green product purchase intention found that attitude toward green purchasing was the strongest predictor of purchase intention across the constructs tested, with subjective norms and perceived behavioural control contributing significant but comparatively smaller additional explanatory power, a finding subsequently tested and extended across several emerging-economy consumer samples reviewed later in this paper [7], [8].

This paper synthesizes the green brand equity, greenwashing, and theory-of-planned-behaviour literatures with the emerging-economy-specific empirical studies that have tested and extended these frameworks in India, China, and Southeast Asian consumer markets, before examining the structural market conditions that distinguish emerging-economy green consumption from the developed-market contexts in which the foundational theory was built.

Research Objectives

- To review the theoretical models connecting green marketing communication, green trust, and brand loyalty.
- To synthesize the theory-of-planned-behaviour literature as applied to green purchase intention.
- To examine the greenwashing and green-skepticism literature and its specific mediating mechanisms.
- To evaluate emerging-economy-specific empirical evidence on sustainable consumer behaviour and brand loyalty.
- To identify future research priorities for cross-national validation of green trust mediation models.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Green Brand Equity and the Trust-Mediated Loyalty Pathway

Chen's green brand equity model, developed and tested using survey data from Taiwanese consumers, proposed and empirically confirmed that green brand image positively predicts both green satisfaction and green trust, and that these two constructs, rather than green brand image directly, are the proximate predictors of green brand equity, the value a brand accrues specifically from its environmental positioning [3]. This trust-mediated structure directly informed Chen and Chang's subsequent greenwashing extension, which found that perceived greenwashing exerts its damaging effect on green trust indirectly, by first increasing green consumer confusion, the difficulty consumers experience distinguishing genuine from exaggerated environmental claims, and green perceived risk, the consumer's assessment of the likelihood and severity of negative outcomes from purchasing a falsely marketed green product, establishing a specific two-step mediating mechanism rather than a direct greenwashing-to-trust effect [4]. Chen, Lin, and Chang's related study extended this framework further to green word-of-mouth, finding that greenwashing similarly undermines consumers' willingness to recommend a brand to others, a loyalty-adjacent outcome operating through the same green trust and green perceived risk mediating mechanism identified in the authors' earlier work [12].

2.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour Applications to Green Purchase Intention

Ajzen's original theory of planned behaviour framework has been applied extensively to green and sustainable purchase contexts specifically because environmentally conscious purchasing frequently involves a gap between stated attitude and actual behaviour that the theory's perceived-behavioural-control construct is well suited to explain, since consumers may hold genuinely positive attitudes toward sustainable products while still perceiving practical barriers, price, availability, or product performance uncertainty, that constrain actual purchase behaviour [8]. Paul, Modi, and Patel's comparative test of the theory of planned behaviour against the theory of reasoned action for green product purchase intention found that the planned-behaviour model's additional perceived-behavioural-control construct provided meaningful incremental explanatory power beyond the reasoned-action model's attitude and subjective-norm constructs alone, supporting the planned-behaviour framework as the more complete model for green purchase contexts specifically [7]. Han, Hsu, and Sheu's application of the same framework to green hotel choice, a service rather than physical-product green consumption context, found a broadly consistent pattern, with attitude toward choosing a green hotel exerting the strongest influence on choice intention, while also finding that consumers' willingness to pay a price premium for green hotel attributes was considerably more constrained than their expressed attitudinal support for environmental hotel practices, an attitude-behaviour gap with direct relevance to the price-sensitivity considerations especially salient in emerging-economy markets [16].

2.3 Green Marketing Mix and Firm-Level Strategy

Leonidou, Katsikeas, and Morgan's analysis of "greening the marketing mix" extended green marketing theory beyond communication and positioning alone to examine how environmental considerations can be integrated across all four traditional marketing mix elements, product, price, place, and promotion, finding empirically that firms integrating environmental considerations coherently across multiple marketing mix elements simultaneously achieved stronger market performance outcomes than firms treating green positioning as a promotional overlay on an otherwise conventional marketing mix [10]. Dangelico and Vocalelli's systematic review of green marketing definitions and strategic practice reached a consistent conclusion through a different methodological lens, synthesizing the accumulated definitional and strategic literature to identify a coherent set of green marketing strategy steps, spanning green product development, green pricing, green distribution, and green

communication, and specifically cautioning that green communication pursued without corresponding substantive change in the other three areas constitutes precisely the kind of practice Peattie and Crane's earlier "legend" critique and the subsequent greenwashing literature identify as damaging to consumer trust [2], [4], [11]. Fraj-Andrés, Martínez-Salinas, and Matute-Vallejo's empirical analysis of environmental marketing orientation and firm performance found that firms with a genuinely internalized environmental marketing orientation, reflected in organizational culture and strategic commitment rather than promotional messaging alone, achieved measurably better organizational performance outcomes, providing firm-level performance evidence consistent with the consumer-level trust and loyalty mechanisms reviewed above [15].

2.4 Brand Loyalty Theory and Its Application to Green Branding

Oliver's foundational conceptualization of consumer loyalty distinguished a deeply held commitment to repurchase a preferred product or brand consistently, despite situational influences and competitive marketing efforts that might induce switching behaviour, from more superficial repeat-purchase behaviour that reflects habit or convenience rather than genuine preference commitment, a distinction with direct relevance to evaluating whether green marketing produces durable brand loyalty or merely short-term purchase behaviour contingent on continued promotional reinforcement [13]. Aaker's brand equity framework situated loyalty as one among several core brand equity dimensions, alongside brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations, and specifically identified brand loyalty as the dimension most directly linked to a brand's sustained competitive advantage and reduced vulnerability to competitive marketing activity, a framework the subsequent green-brand-specific literature reviewed in Section 2.1 adapted directly to the environmental positioning context [14]. Suki's empirical study of green product purchase intention found that green brand attitude and green brand knowledge both significantly predicted purchase intention, and further found that this relationship was moderated by the strength of consumers' underlying environmental concern, suggesting that the green-marketing-to-loyalty pathway is not uniform across all consumers but is stronger among consumers with pre-existing environmental concern, a segmentation-relevant finding for firms designing green marketing strategy [17].

2.5 Emerging-Economy-Specific Evidence

Biswas and Roy's exploratory study of green product consumer behaviour across emerging economies of the East found that while environmental awareness among emerging-economy consumers had risen substantially, this awareness translated into actual green purchase behaviour considerably less consistently than in developed-market samples, with price sensitivity and skepticism regarding the genuine environmental benefit of marketed "green" products identified as the two most significant constraining factors, directly paralleling the greenwashing-driven green trust concerns Chen and Chang identified theoretically [4], [18]. Yadav and Pathak's application and extension of the theory of planned behaviour to green purchase behaviour in India, a large emerging-economy sample, found that the standard planned-behaviour constructs, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, each significantly predicted green purchase intention, but that the model's explanatory power increased substantially when an additional environmental-concern construct was incorporated, suggesting that the standard theory-of-planned-behaviour model, developed and validated predominantly in developed-market contexts, benefits from extension to capture emerging-economy-specific psychological drivers not fully captured by the original three constructs [8], [19]. Joshi and Rahman's broader review of green purchase behaviour determinants, synthesizing evidence across multiple national contexts including several emerging economies, identified price, availability, and trust in environmental claims as the three most consistently reported barriers to green purchase behaviour translating into actual loyalty-relevant repeat purchase, directly connecting the attitude-behaviour gap Han, Hsu, and Sheu identified in a developed-market hospitality context to a broader, cross-national pattern with particular salience in price-sensitive emerging-economy markets [16], [20]. Prakash and Pathak's study of eco-friendly packaged product purchase intention among young Indian consumers found that this demographic segment, despite exhibiting comparatively strong environmental attitudes, remained highly sensitive to price premiums associated with eco-friendly packaging, reinforcing the price-sensitivity barrier Biswas and Roy, and Joshi and Rahman both identified as a distinctly consequential constraint in emerging-economy green consumption relative to the developed-market samples underlying much of the foundational green brand equity and theory-of-planned-behaviour literature [18], [20], [21].

2.6 Research Gap

While the green brand equity and greenwashing literature reviewed in Section 2.1 has established a robust trust-mediated causal model connecting green marketing to loyalty-relevant outcomes, and the emerging-economy-specific studies reviewed in Section 2.5 have independently documented price sensitivity and green-claim skepticism as particularly consequential barriers in these markets, comparatively few studies directly test Chen and Chang's full green-trust and green-perceived-risk mediation model using emerging-economy samples specifically, leaving open whether the mediating mechanism validated predominantly in Taiwanese and other developed-market consumer samples operates with comparable strength, or with a different structure, in the price-sensitive, institutionally variable regulatory environments Delmas and Burbano identify as characteristic of many emerging economies [4], [5], [18], [19]. This review addresses this gap by organizing the reviewed evidence within a comparative framework spanning theoretical construct, measurement approach, and emerging-economy-specific moderating condition.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research design synthesizing peer-reviewed marketing, consumer behaviour, and cross-cultural business literature addressing green marketing, sustainable consumer behaviour, and brand loyalty. Reviewed studies were compared along four axes: theoretical framework applied (green brand equity, theory of planned behaviour, or brand loyalty/equity theory); measurement approach (survey-based construct scales, choice experiments, or firm-performance data); geographic sample (developed-economy or emerging-economy consumer samples); and whether the study addresses greenwashing or green trust explicitly as a mediating mechanism.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Theoretical Constructs and Their Standard Measurement Approach

Table 1 maps the core theoretical constructs reviewed in Section 2 onto the measurement approach the literature has standardly used to operationalize each, a structure emphasizing construct-to-measurement translation rather than a chronological study summary.

Table 1: Core Constructs and Standard Empirical Measurement Approaches

Construct	Conceptual Definition	Standard Measurement Approach	Key Source
Green brand image	Consumer perceptions of a brand's environmental commitments and performance	Multi-item Likert survey scale (perceived environmental commitment, performance)	Chen [3]
Green trust	Willingness to rely on a brand based on its environmental credibility	Multi-item Likert scale on reliability/dependability of environmental claims	Chen [3]; Chen & Chang [4]
Green perceived risk	Expected negative consequences of purchasing a falsely marketed "green" product	Risk-perception scale items on functional/environmental performance uncertainty	Chen & Chang [4]
Perceived greenwashing	Consumer suspicion that environmental claims are exaggerated or unsubstantiated	Greenwashing perception scale (claim-substantiation skepticism items)	Chen & Chang [4]; Delmas & Burbano [5]
Attitude toward green purchase	Individual's favorable/unfavorable evaluation of green purchasing	Semantic differential/Likert attitude scale (TPB-based)	Ajzen [8]; Paul, Modi & Patel [7]
Perceived behavioural control	Perceived ease/difficulty of performing green purchase behaviour	Self-efficacy/control-belief scale items (TPB-based)	Ajzen [8]
Brand loyalty	Deeply held commitment to repurchase despite competitive influence	Repurchase intention + resistance-to-switching scale items	Oliver [13]; Aaker [14]

4.2 Trust-Building Mechanisms and Their Corresponding Greenwashing Risk

Table 2 contrasts specific green marketing mechanisms firms use to build green trust against the corresponding greenwashing risk the literature associates with each mechanism when implemented superficially, a risk-paired structure distinct from Table 1's construct-measurement mapping.

Table 2: Trust-Building Green Marketing Mechanisms and Corresponding Greenwashing Risk

Green Marketing Mechanism	Intended Trust-Building Function	Associated Greenwashing Risk if Superficial	Supporting Evidence
Eco-label/certification display	Signals third-party-verified environmental performance	"Label-only" claims without underlying certification substance	Dangelico & Vocalelli [11]
Green product reformulation	Demonstrates substantive environmental product improvement	Marginal formulation change marketed as major environmental achievement	Leonidou, Katsikeas & Morgan [10]
Environmental advertising claims	Communicates brand environmental commitment to consumers	Vague or unsubstantiated claims ("eco-friendly," "natural") increasing green confusion	Chen & Chang [4]; Peattie & Crane [2]
Green supply chain/sourcing disclosure	Signals upstream environmental accountability	Selective disclosure omitting less favorable supply chain practices	Delmas & Burbano [5]
Environmental marketing orientation (organization-wide)	Reflects internalized, culture-level environmental commitment	Promotional messaging disconnected from actual organizational practice	Fraj-Andrés, Martínez-Salinas & Matute-Vallejo [15]
Price premium justified by environmental benefit	Signals genuine cost of environmentally superior production	Premium charged without proportionate environmental benefit, heightening price-sensitivity skepticism	Biswas & Roy [18]; Prakash & Pathak [21]

4.3 Emerging-Economy Structural Conditions and Their Effect on the Loyalty Pathway

Table 3 departs from the construct- and mechanism-level structure of Tables 1 and 2 to set specific structural conditions characteristic of emerging economies against their documented net effect on the green-marketing-to-brand-loyalty pathway.

Table 3: Emerging-Economy Structural Conditions and Their Effect on Green Marketing–Brand Loyalty Pathway

Structural Condition	Nature of Condition	Documented Effect on Pathway	Supporting Evidence
Price sensitivity	Lower average discretionary income relative to developed markets	Weakens attitude-to-purchase-behaviour translation; strong attitude does not reliably yield purchase	Biswas & Roy [18]; Han, Hsu & Sheu [16]; Prakash & Pathak [21]
Variable regulatory enforcement	Inconsistent monitoring/penalization of unsubstantiated environmental claims	Increases plausibility and prevalence of greenwashing, heightening green perceived risk	Delmas & Burbano [5]

Rising but uneven environmental awareness	Environmental concern growing but unevenly distributed across segments	Strengthens pathway for high-concern segments; limited effect for low-concern segments	Suki [17]; Yadav & Pathak [19]
Limited product availability/verification infrastructure	Fewer accessible third-party certification and verification resources	Increases green consumer confusion, complicating trust formation	Chen & Chang [4]; Joshi & Rahman [20]
Younger, digitally engaged consumer demographic	Relatively young population with high social media exposure	Amplifies both green word-of-mouth potential and greenwashing-exposure/backlash risk	Chen, Lin & Chang [12]

4.4 Discussion

Read together, Tables 1 through 3 support the paper's central claim that green trust functions as the pivotal mediating mechanism in the green-marketing-to-brand-loyalty pathway, and that this mediating role is, if anything, more consequential in emerging-economy contexts than in the developed-market samples on which the foundational green brand equity model was built. Table 1 establishes the standard constructs and measurement approach the field has converged upon, providing the conceptual vocabulary Table 2 then applies to specific marketing mechanisms, showing that nearly every trust-building mechanism firms use carries a corresponding greenwashing risk when implemented without substantive backing, precisely the pattern Chen and Chang's mediation model formalizes theoretically [3], [4], [11]. Table 3's structural-condition mapping indicates that emerging economies amplify this risk specifically through weaker regulatory enforcement and more limited verification infrastructure, consistent with Delmas and Burbano's institutional analysis of greenwashing drivers, while simultaneously constraining the loyalty pathway through price sensitivity even when green trust is successfully established, a distinct and compounding barrier not present to the same degree in the developed-market contexts where much of the foundational theory-of-planned-behaviour and green brand equity literature originated [3], [5], [8], [18]. Yadav and Pathak's finding that an environmental-concern construct improves the theory of planned behaviour's explanatory power specifically in an Indian sample suggests that emerging-economy consumers' green purchase decisions may be shaped by psychological drivers not fully captured by models validated predominantly in developed markets, reinforcing the case for the emerging-economy-specific model extension and validation this paper's future work section recommends [8], [19]. Taken as a whole, the evidence indicates that green marketing's effectiveness at building brand loyalty in emerging economies depends jointly on successfully establishing green trust, itself vulnerable to the institutional and verification-infrastructure conditions Table 3 catalogues, and on overcoming a price-sensitivity barrier that persists even where green trust is genuinely established, a dual constraint the developed-market-originated theoretical models reviewed in Section 2 do not fully anticipate [4], [16], [18].

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature connecting green marketing practice, sustainable consumer behaviour, and brand loyalty, with particular attention to emerging economies. The evidence indicates that green marketing's effect on brand loyalty operates predominantly through a green trust mediating mechanism rather than as a direct effect of environmental positioning or communication alone, and that this mediating mechanism is vulnerable to greenwashing perceptions that increase green consumer confusion and green perceived risk. Emerging-economy structural conditions, particularly price sensitivity, variable regulatory enforcement, and limited verification infrastructure, both heighten the greenwashing risk this mediating mechanism must overcome and introduce an additional, largely independent price-sensitivity barrier constraining the translation of positive green brand attitude into actual loyalty-relevant purchase behaviour. Collectively, this evidence indicates that green marketing strategies validated in developed-market contexts cannot be assumed to transfer directly to emerging economies without accounting for these distinct structural conditions and their compounding effect on the trust-mediated loyalty pathway.

VI. FUTURE WORK

Future research should prioritize direct, comparative testing of Chen and Chang's full green trust and green perceived risk mediation model across matched developed-economy and emerging-economy consumer samples, to establish empirically whether the mediation structure validated predominantly in developed markets holds with comparable strength, or requires structural modification, in emerging-economy contexts. Further work is needed to extend Yadav and Pathak's environmental-concern construct extension of the theory of planned behaviour to a broader set of emerging economies beyond India, to establish whether this extended model generalizes across the diverse institutional and cultural contexts emerging economies encompass. Continued research should also examine whether targeted regulatory interventions, strengthening the environmental-claim substantiation requirements Delmas and Burbano identify as weak in many emerging-economy contexts, measurably improve green trust and, in turn, brand loyalty outcomes, providing a policy-relevant test of the institutional mechanism this review identifies as a key emerging-economy-specific barrier. Finally, future work should investigate segment-specific price-premium tolerance for verified, substantively green products among emerging-economy consumers, extending Prakash and Pathak's young-consumer findings to a broader demographic range, to establish whether price sensitivity constitutes a durable structural barrier or one that diminishes as verification infrastructure and consumer green literacy continue to develop.

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