A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on the Influence of Integrated Marketing Communication Message Consistency on Consumer Trust in Green Products within the Context of Greenwashing Skepticism

Fiki Hayatuki[1*], Rima Shobrina[1], Sertiningsih[1], Ni Putu Ayu Chandra Utari[1]

[1]Master of Management Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia.

*Corresponding Author:
Fiki Hayatuki, Master of Management Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia.
fikihayatuki19@gmail.com

Abstract: The increasing occurrence of greenwashing has led to growing consumer doubts regarding sustainability claims and has weakened trust in green products. In this context, alignment within Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is an important factor in building and maintaining consumer trust. This study aims to examine in detail the effect of IMC message alignment on consumer trust in green products, particularly in the presence of consumer skepticism arising from greenwashing practices. This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) based on PRISMA guidelines by searching articles published between 2019 and 2025 in the Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar databases. From a total of 90 articles identified, 12 articles were selected for in-depth analysis. The findings indicate that consistent IMC messages across various communication channels, supported by transparency and verifiable evidence such as third-party certifications, can reduce perceptions of greenwashing and enhance consumer trust. In contrast, inconsistent communication that is not aligned with genuine sustainability principles tends to increase consumer skepticism and reduce trust in brands. Overall, the results suggest that consistency in IMC is not merely a technical element of marketing communication but also an ethical approach that plays a crucial role in maintaining the credibility of green products amid increasing consumer skepticism.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing Communication, Consumer Trust, Green Product, Greenwashing, Consumer Skepticism.

Introduction

The growing attention to sustainability has encouraged companies to communicate environmentally friendly claims more intensively. However, when such communication is not aligned with actual practices, greenwashing emerges, which erodes consumer trust and increases consumer skepticism. As a result, sustainability is no longer evaluated solely based on product performance, but also on the credibility of the narratives constructed through marketing communication.
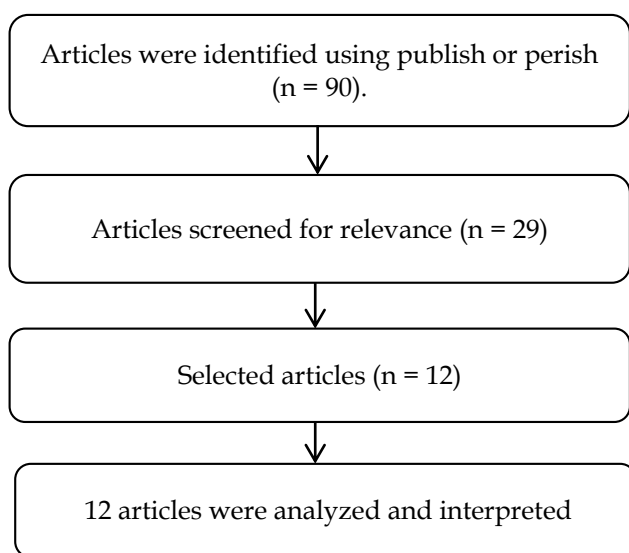
In this context, consumer trust becomes a key element, encompassing perceptions of honesty, transparency, and a company's ethical commitment. Perceived greenwashing has been shown to reduce consumer trust, weaken positive consumer responses, and lead to brand rejection. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is considered strategic because consistent messaging across multiple channels can strengthen the legitimacy of sustainability claims, whereas inconsistency is often interpreted as an indication of greenwashing.

Nevertheless, skepticism does not always have a negative impact. Consistent, evidence-based messages supported by credible certifications have the potential to transform skepticism into trust. However, studies that comprehensively examine the relationship between IMC consistency, consumer trust, and skepticism toward greenwashing remain limited. Therefore, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review to analyze the role of IMC message consistency in building consumer trust in green products amid increasing consumer skepticism.

Method

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, which is a structured approach used to collect, critically evaluate, synthesize, and integrate findings from previous research related to a specific research question or topic. The SLR method aims to examine a particular issue by systematically identifying, evaluating, and selecting relevant studies based on clearly defined criteria. This approach ensures that the review process is systematic, explicit, and replicable, allowing for comprehensive identification, evaluation, and synthesis of existing research conducted by scholars and practitioners. The stages of this research are as follows.

Figure 1. Flow Diagram of the Article Inclusion and Exclusion Proce

First, the research question was formulated as: How does the consistency of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) messages influence consumer trust in green products in the context of skepticism toward greenwashing practices, based on previous research findings?

Second, the data population in this study consists of journal articles that focus on the consistency of Integrated Marketing Communication messages and their relationship with consumer trust in green products within the context of greenwashing skepticism. The literature search was conducted using three main databases: Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The keywords used in the search included integrated marketing communication, consumer trust, green

product, and greenwashing skepticism, with publication years limited to the period from 2019 to 2025.

Third, based on the initial search results obtained through the Publish or Perish software, a total of 90 articles related to the research topic were identified. From these, 29 relevant articles were selected for further screening. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 12 articles were identified as the most relevant and were subsequently analyzed in depth. Figure X presents the flow diagram of the article inclusion and exclusion process during the SLR stages (n = number of articles).

Results and Discussion

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) plays an important role in building consumer trust in green products. Communication that delivers sustainability-oriented messages consistently across multiple marketing communication channels enhances brand credibility and reduces consumer doubt. Conversely, when sustainability messages are unclear or not aligned with a company's actual practices and collaborative efforts, such communication tends to be perceived as serious greenwashing, which leads to a decline in consumer trust (Srivastava, 2025).

In addition, skepticism toward greenwashing emerges when consumers express doubts and concerns regarding environmental communications, particularly when companies make claims and commitments to appear environmentally responsible. Several studies confirm that increased perceptions of greenwashing strengthen consumer skepticism, which negatively affects brand trust and consumers' intention to purchase green products (Nguyen et al., 2019). Skeptical attitudes also encourage consumers to evaluate environmental claims more carefully, especially in industries characterized by conflicting sustainability claims, such as the fast fashion industry. However, findings from several studies indicate that skepticism does not always have a negative impact. Under certain conditions, skepticism can function as an evaluative mechanism that encourages consumers to assess sustainability claims more rationally. Consumer trust can be developed when sustainability communication is delivered consistently, with greater transparency, and supported by strong evidence such as certifications, brand reputation, and perceived product quality (Kifaya, 2024). Therefore, the negative impact of skepticism and unfavorable perceptions can be minimized when IMC messages are consistent.

Table 1. Research Findings on the Effect of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Message Consistency on Consumer Trust in Green Products within the Context of Greenwashing Skepticism

Author (Year)	Research Title	Research Method	Research Gap	Research Findings
Alexa et al., (2021)	*Fast Fashion an Industry at the Intersection of Green Marketing with Greenwashing*	Qualitative content analysis of H&M's 2021 sustainability reports	The study reveals a gap between sustainability claims and actual practices in the fast fashion industry but does not examine their impact on consumer behavior and is limited to a single case (H&M).	H&M's green marketing overlaps with greenwashing, characterized by ambiguous claims and a fast fashion business model that promotes overconsumption, making sustainability efforts more symbolic than substantive.
Batara & Sugiarto (2022)	*Exploring The Influence of Viewers Egagement in Live Shopping: A Study on The Impact of Skepticism and Perciieved Emotional Value on Purchase Intention*	Explanatory research design	- Limited explanation of how viewer engagement in live shopping affects purchase decisions - Minimal exploration of the relationship between viewer engagement and consumer skepticism - Lack of distinction between skepticism and perceived emotional value in influencing purchase intention.	- Viewer engagement and perceived emotional value have a positive and significant effect - Viewer engagement and skepticism also show a positive and significant relationship - Skepticism does not significantly affect purchase intention; perceived emotional value positively influences purchase intention.
Fella & Bausa (2024)	*Green or Greenwashed? Examining Consumers' Ability to Identify Greenwashing*	Quantitative approach using consumer perception analysis (categorization theory)	Previous studies insufficiently examined consumers' ability to identify different forms of greenwashing.	- Consumers tend to categorize products as honestly green, greenwashed, or non-green based on available green cues - Skepticism plays an important role in evaluating sustainability claims.
Khoirina et al., (2025)	*Consumer Skepticism: A Systematic Literature Review on its Effects and Future Research Directions*	Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following PRISMA 2020 guidelines	- Limited focus on interpersonal contexts; lack of distinction between functional and dysfunctional skepticism - Insufficient research on skepticism formation in digital and AI-based environments.	Consumer skepticism influences how consumers critically evaluate information, generates distrust and negative emotions, and reduces purchase intention, engagement, and brand trust.
Kifaya (2024)	*Consumer Skepticism Towards Organic Beauty Products Cross Country Research*	Quantitative approach using online surveys	- The role of green skepticism in organic cosmetic purchasing behavior and its relationship with environmental concern and environmental knowledge had not been sufficiently examined in cross-country contexts.	- Green skepticism does not directly affect organic purchase behavior but has an indirect negative effect through full mediation of environmental concern and environmental knowledge, which positively influence purchase behavior in Tunisia, Italy, and France.
Maradita & Maulida (2022)	*Brand Familiarity, Brand Credibility, and Skeptical Attitude in Influencing Consumer Purchase Interest in Dettol Brand Soap Products in Sumbawa City*	- Quantitative causal approach - Non-probability sampling - 96 respondents - Questionnaire-based data collectionkuisioner	Fluctuations in the top brand ranking of bath soap products.	- Brand familiarity does not significantly affect purchase intention - Brand credibility has a positive and significant effect - Skeptical attitude does not significantly affect purchase intention - Simultaneously, brand familiarity, brand credibility, and skepticism significantly influence purchase intention.

Natasya et al., (2023)	*The Effect of Greenwashing Perception, Green Word of Mouth, and Green Marketing on H&M Purchase Intentions in Jakarta*	- Quantitative explanatory study - Purposive sampling - Online survey of 200 H&M consumers - SEM-PLS (SmartPLS)	Limited scope (single brand and city) and excessive focus on marketing statistics, with insufficient structural critique of contradictions between fast fashion business models and sustainability claims.	- Greenwashing perception reduces purchase intention - Green marketing increases purchase intention through weak green WOM, reflecting low consumer awareness and indicating that green marketing may be largely symbolic.
Nguyenviet et al., (2024)	*Vietnamese consumer's perspective on green beauty care products: Exploring the impact of animal welfare concerns and skepticism toward green advertising*	Quantitative approach using PLS-SEM	Limited understanding of how skepticism toward green advertising affects trust and purchase intention alongside animal welfare concerns.	- Green brand trust and consumer attitudes positively influence green behavioral intention - Skepticism toward green advertising reduces brand trust and willingness to pay - Animal welfare concerns increase purchase intention and WOM - Attitudes do not mediate the effects of skepticism or animal welfare concern.
Sakinah & Gayatri (2024)	*Consumen Skepticism Toward Cause Related Marketing; An Analysis on Product Quality and Satisfaction of Muslim Consumers in Indonesia*	- Quantitative descriptive - Cross-sectional - Sample of 300 respondents	- Limited studies on CRM skepticism among Muslim millennial consumers - Lack of integrated models combining psychological factors, product quality, and religiosity - Limited analysis of situational factors driving skepticism.	- Unclear CRM communication strengthens skepticism; perceived corporate social motives are the strongest drivers of skepticism - Product quality and satisfaction act as key mediators - Nonprofit organization reputation influences skepticism - Religiosity strengthens the effect of skepticism.
Srivastava (2025)	*Greenwashing vs. Green Trust: A Review Study of Consumer Perceptions and Responses to Sustainability Claims in Marketing*	Systematic Literature Review (PRISMA); thematic analysis of 30 studies (2013–2025)	Lack of integrated synthesis of greenwashing, skepticism, and green trust across contexts.	- Greenwashing perceptions increase skepticism, confusion, and perceived risk, thereby reducing trust - Trust can be strengthened through consistent, transparent communication and third-party certification.
Nguyen et al., n.d.(2019)	*Greenwash and Green Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Green Skepticism*	Quantitative study using online survey and SEM	Limited understanding of how greenwashing reduces green purchase intention through green skepticism.	- Greenwashing negatively affects green purchase intention, with green skepticism acting as a mediator - Consumer information and knowledge moderate the relationship between greenwashing and purchase intention.
Yu et al., (2023)	*The Influence of Greenwashing Perceptions on Consumer Purchase Intentions in the Chinese Fashion Industry*	Quantitative online survey of 350 respondents; SEM analysis	Limited understanding of how greenwashing perceptions affect purchase intention through green skepticism and brand loyalty.	- Greenwashing perceptions have a significant negative effect on purchase intention - Green skepticism mediates the relationship, while brand loyalty moderates the effect.

A synthesis of previous studies indicates that consistency in Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) messages is essential for fostering consumer trust in environmentally friendly products, particularly in situations where consumer skepticism is heightened due to greenwashing practices. Inconsistent messages and discrepancies between communicated claims and actual environmental practices have been shown to reinforce perceptions of greenwashing and erode consumer trust (Natasya et al., 2023). Moreover, many studies

emphasize that consumer skepticism plays a significant role in explaining why greenwashing leads to decreased trust and reduced purchase intention. Fragmented communication tends to intensify suspicious attitudes, whereas IMC that is aligned, transparent, and supported by verifiable evidence can mitigate skepticism and enhance consumer confidence (Srivastava, 2025).

These findings are supported by research demonstrating that consumers are becoming increasingly critical and capable of identifying misleading green claims based on the communication cues they receive. As a result, the effectiveness of green marketing largely depends on message alignment across all media channels and the perceived honesty of the brand (Khoirina et al., 2025). Therefore, IMC message consistency should not be viewed merely as a technical matter, but rather as an ethical and reputational strategy that is crucial for reducing the negative effects of greenwashing and maintaining the legitimacy of green products amid growing consumer pessimism.

Conclusion

The conclusions drawn from the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) highlight the importance of maintaining consistent Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) messages in building consumer trust in green products as a means of resisting the negative effects of greenwashing within IMC practices. The reviewed studies indicate that messages associated with greenwashing tend to be more prevalent than messages about green products that are maintained clearly, consistently, and coherently across all communication channels.

Previous research demonstrates that consumer trust is strengthened through transparent, sustainable, and verifiable support, as well as through statements that are aligned with actual practices, which help to counter perceptions of greenwashing. Conversely, restrained or weakened trust in brands is often reinforced by communication inconsistency and unsupported claims. Consumer doubt and skepticism function as mechanisms for rational evaluation of sustainability claims. In this context, sustainably and ethically managed IMC has the potential to transform consumer skepticism into trust. Therefore, IMC serves not only as a marketing communication instrument, but also as a strategic and ethical tool for preserving the credibility and integrity of green product marketing.

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