

The Fight Against Green Skepticism: A Literature Review

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Abstract: Green skepticism is one of the phenomena that weakens the willingness to purchase eco-friendly goods and services, potentially impacting environmental management and market growth for green initiatives. This is a problem for consumers and businesses, presenting harmful repercussions, which can be explained by the fact that they have few means to counter the risks that arise from it. Given the extent of these repercussions on consumers and businesses, it is desirable to deepen and diversify the research perspectives undertaken to combat green skepticism. This could be improved by better identifying its causes, its consequences as well as its determining factors among consumers in order to help them overcome it while proposing some appropriate methods and practices that can contribute to doing so. This research aims to determine the factors likely to have a negative impact on consumers' green skepticism, with a view to combating this phenomenon.

Keywords: *Green Skepticism, Causes and Consequences of Green Skepticism, Green Brand Equity, Message Style, Intrinsic Motives, Green Brand Associations.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Green skepticism appears to be a problem for both consumers (Kifaya, 2023; Silva et al., 2020) and businesses (Silva et al., 2020) and one of the main barriers to purchasing organic (Lavuri, 2022; Kifaya, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023) and eco-friendly products (Kifaya, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023).

Consumers have divergent views on green skepticism (Umanakenan et al., 2022). They may be dissuaded from selecting the most environmentally friendly products from their selection, buying green products for the first time or repurchase them (Nekmahmud and Fekete-Farkas, 2020; Albayrak et al., 2011). According to Pham and Barretta (2024), consumer environmental skepticism poses significant risks for businesses because it can hamper the success of their eco-marketing programs. It indicates a very low level of environmental trust (Guerreiro et al., 2021).

Farooq and Wicaksono (2021) suggest that with an progressively competitive sustainability market, it is important for companies to ensure that consumers do not doubt their sustainability claims; that's why, companies must be conscious of the factors that guide to consumer skepticism, so that they can avoid advertising that evokes it. However, consumer skepticism about eco-friendly products has not

received enough attention from researchers (Umanakenan et al., 2022). Moreover, study in green skepticism is still in its infancy and persists fragmented and incoherent (Silva et al., 2020). According to a review of the existing literature, only a few attempts have been made to explore the deterrents, drivers, and consequences of green skepticism (Leonidou and Skarmeas, 2017; Kifaya, 2023).

This present study aims to shed light on certain gray areas relating to the conceptualization of green skepticism. More specifically, we will focus on identifying factors that can contribute to combating this scourge. Furthermore, the aim of the study is to present the causes and consequences of consumer green skepticism.

II. GREEN SKEPTICISM: DEFINITIONS, CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

➤ *Definition of Green Skepticism:*

Skepticism consists of misrepresenting, misinterpreting or mislabeling products (Tan et al., 2022). It is studied in different disciplines such as, politics, sociology, philosophy and psychology (Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013). In the commercial context, consumer skepticism towards consumer social responsibility (CSR), promotion, advertising, public relations, and green marketing were studied (Akturan and

Tezcan, 2019). Skepticism towards green products corresponds to situational attitudes considered negative towards green products (Li and Cui, 2021).

Several authors have defined green skepticism refers to the tendency of consumers to doubt the environmental performance or environmental benefits of a green product (Kifaya, 2023; Mohr et al., 1998; Goh and Balaji, 2016). It is a situational phenomenon and corresponds to disbelieving or doubting environmental declarations made by companies (Goh and Balaji, 2016). (Goh and Balaji, 2016). According to Leonidou and Skarmas (2017), green skepticism is considered a phenomenon that weakens the propensity to buy pro-environmental products and both energy-efficient. It is a type of situational skepticism in individuals that corresponds to dismissing or questioning environmental declarations made by companies (Akturan and Tezcan, 2019). Luo et al (2020) have defined green skepticism as the doubt a consumer may have about the environmental claims or green product of any firm. Because consumer's sincere intentions and minds may have been unclear and jeopardized, they may have a propensity to question the environmental performance or the ecological benefits of a green product, known as green skepticism (Chuah et al., 2022). The latter is a sort of situational skepticism in which an individual rejects or questions environmental declarations made by companies (Widjaja et al, 2024).

➤ *Causes of Green Skepticism:*

Prior study indicated that there are several drivers causing green skepticism (Akturan and Tezcan, 2019). It is through the desire for a more environmentally friendly way of living and consuming that green products are increasingly popular worldwide, fueled by (Liu et al., 2019; Usharani and Gopinath, 2021). Considered as an innovation, these environmentally friendly products take a long time to be adopted by the wider community and socialize their benefits (Bursan et al., 2020). Various research on environmentally friendly products have been linked to consumer attitudes leading to skepticism, as consumers doubt the content of raw materials and therefore incite doubt in making purchases (Amawate and Deb, 2021).

Consumer skepticism is generated by greenwashing, which is a phenomenon considered a popular way to compete, whereby companies try to become more environmentally friendly than they are (Kreczmańska-Gigol and Gigol, 2022). Research indicate that the phenomenon of greenwashing is one of the main factors that enhancing consumers' green skepticism (Farooq and Wicaksono, 2021 ; Leonidou and Skarmas, 2017). Green skepticism is also explained by the corporations' irresponsible environmental behavior (Cotton et al, 2015).

The attitude of consumer skepticism occurs because of incomplete information on packaging, doubts about raw materials, and communications made by the company confuses consumers (Bursan et al 2022). The decline in consumer purchase intentions for environmentally friendly products due to skepticism is explained by the fact that the benefits obtained both to the environment and to health have

not been communicated properly by the company and the price of environmentally friendly products is considered to be more expensive than other products and (Bae, 2018).

This skepticism appears when individuals doubt the effectiveness or authenticity of environmental claims made by companies, leading to a complex landscape of attitudes and beliefs (Goh and Balaji, 2016). It progresses worldwide through poor management of signals provided by companies which are not processed correctly (Farzana et al, 2024). As individuals are more informed about environmental issues, their knowledge influences their attitudes and perceptions toward various practices and products (Ho et al., 2020).

Moreover, a contradiction between the company's actions and advertising and marketing claims can also lead to skepticism among consumers (Bae, 2018). Zarei and Maleki (2018) stipulate that the perception of a discrepancy between producers' declarations and their actual products by consumers also generates a skepticism.

Consumers feel skeptical and deceived when companies exaggerate their environmental claims about their products in their communication efforts on social media (Lavuri, 2022). Moreover, terms such as "bio", "eco-friendly" and "ecological" for green products are incorrectly expressed or blurred (Kazançoğlu and Köse, 2024). This situation, coupled with consumers' current lack of information, leads to distrust and confusion among consumers towards these products (Kumar et al., 2021). According to some research, this skepticism towards green products is explained, to a large extent, by the fact that they are mislabelled, misinterpreted, or misrepresented (Rossi and Francesca, 2023; Rambabu, 2022). One of the reasons is also certification methods and the non-standardization of organic/green production (Tan et al, 2022; Kurnia and Mayangsari, 2020).

➤ *Consequences of Green Skepticism:*

Consumer skepticism give the company a negative image, leading to increased spending (Moutinho et al., 2011) and can have negative impact on consumers' purchase intention (Burgess, 2016; Kim and Oh, 2020). It reduces purchase intentions for environmentally protective products (Leonidou and Skarmas, 2017). Skepticism inhibited the motivation to engage in the company's ecological CSR (Chon and Kim, 2021).

Considered as a key factor that influences consumer behavior in disseminating information, either negatively or positively (Promalessy and Handriana, 2024), green skepticism generates a negative attitude towards green products, which has a negative impact on green purchase behavior and intention (Ulusoy and Barretta, 2016; Wei et al., 2017). It has a negative impact on consumers' purchase intentions of green personal care products (Masayu and Rifelly, 2021) and creates barriers to refining contextual cues that may disable the impact of green brand association on green brand trust (Awamate and Deb, 2021). In line with that, evidence from suggest that consumer skepticism in a product inhibited consumer buying intentions on organic food products (Farzana et al, 2024).

Green skepticism has a negative impact on people's environmental knowledge (Akhondzadeh and Monfared, 2021) and reduces trust in the green brand (Guerreiro and Pacheco, 2021). The majority of research argue that a high level of green skepticism has an impact on perceived consumer-brand relationships (Copeland and Bhaduri, 2020). Due to green skepticism, consumers may feel that firms' brands' environmental attachment becomes weaker and are giving misleading information (Zhang et al, 2021 ; Luo et al, 2020).

III. FACTORS TO FIGHT AGAINST GREEN SKEPTICISM

➤ *Green Skepticism and Green Brand Equity:*

Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) suggest that all of the marketing activities, either done unsuccessfully or successfully, add a value to the brand and as a result lead to a consumer response, which is conceptualized as brand equity. Yoo and Donthu (2001) have defined Brand equity is the difference in consumer response between an unbranded product and a flagship brand, when both have the same level of marketing stimuli and attributes. This difference in consumer response is generated by marketing activities. Green brand equity is a set of liabilities and brand assets about environmental concerns and green commitments associated with a brand, its name and its symbol, which reduce or increase the value provided by a service or a product. Although the issues associated with green marketing and sustainability are necessary, there is little study into green branding (Huang et al., 2014). Chen (2010, p. 310). It is a crucial tool to accomplish competitive advantage since it permits companies to strongly position their products in green markets (Butt et al., 2017). Brand assets are critical because they can generate sustainable competitive advantageous (i.e. information systems, channel relationships,) and they provide protection against competitors (i.e. trademarks, patents,) (Akturan, 2018)

Conventional marketing literature confirms that brand equity has a positive effect on consumers' willingness to pay more (Akturan and Tezcan, 2019; Keller, 1993), marketing success (Lane and Jacobson, 1995; Simon and Sullivan, 1993; Ambler, 1997), and long-term cash flow and future profits (Srivastava and Shocker, 1991).

Green brand equity was initially described in 2010 as a group of brand liabilities and assets associated to a company's environmental challenges and objectives (Raza et al, 2025). It results in a positive response in the market and stems from ecological marketing activities (Akturan and Tezcan, 2019). Almost each marketing activity have an impact on brand equity, but especially activities that lead to brand loyalty, positive brand image, perceived quality, positive links are important, these elements are defined as the main dimensions of brand equity, along with the brand's tangible assets (Aaker, 1997). Strong green brand equity is the consequence of result of the positive perceptions of associations, image, and quality. Akturan and Tezcan (2019) revealed that green brand equity negatively affects green skepticism. Therefore, it was hypothesized that;

H1: Green brand equity has a negative impact on green skepticism

➤ *Green Skepticism and Message Style (Narrative vs. Non-Narrative):*

Messages can be styled as non-narratives or narratives (Kim et al, 2022). Non-narrative messages communicate via facts, explanations, and arguments (Padgett and Allen, 1997). It presented as factual arguments or explanations and may contain many forms, but they exclude the use of narratives (Escalas, 2004; Padgett and Allen, 1997).

In contrast, narrative messages often include anecdotes and testimonials and utilize storytelling formats (Shen et al., 2015). It presented in episodic memory, anecdote, often featuring a testimonial, or a story-like format (Shen et al., 2015; Escalas, 1998; Hinyard and Kreuter, 2007).

Vivid details in narratives and relatable characters make the message more concrete, leading to reduced levels of skepticism and increased message persuasion (Van Laer et al., 2014; Chang, 2009; Escalas, 2004), particularly when anecdotes or testimonials based on real-life experiences are used (Dal Cin et al., 2004).

Narratives effectively convey important concepts by grounding them in specific experiences or examples, rendering them more easier and concrete to comprehend (Escalas, 2004). Additionally, narrative green messaging can increase consumers' intention to participate in the hotel's green efforts through making the message more relevant (Dessart and Pitardi, 2019). Kim et al (2023) revealed that narrative (vs. non-narrative) style messages reduce skepticism. On that basis, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Message Style (Narrative vs. Non-Narrative) negatively affects green skepticism

➤ *Green Skepticism and Intrinsic Motives:*

The concept of intrinsic motivation defines inner motivation, that feeling specific to each individual which makes them want to act because it makes sense and provides them with personal satisfaction, independently of any external reward. It refers to the desire to succeed, driven by the pleasure and personal satisfaction associated with achieving a goal (Ryan and Deci, 2020). Parguel et al (2011) indicate that extrinsic motivations are associated with increasing one's own well-being while intrinsic motivations are selfless actions aimed at doing good.

Three forms of intrinsic motivation are currently distinguished. The first is intrinsic to stimuli: the person is motivated by the sensations they experience during the activities undertaken. The second is intrinsic to knowledge: the person performs the activity for the pleasure of acquiring new knowledge. The third is intrinsic to accomplishment: the person experiences the satisfaction of having achieved something.

According to Leonidou and Skarmas (2017), consumer skepticism decreases if they perceive that the company's green walk and green talk are a disinterested action. These authors suggest that intrinsic motives negatively affect green skepticism. Therefore, it was hypothesized that;

H3: Intrinsic Motives negatively affects green skepticism

➤ *Green Skepticism and Green Brand Associations:*

Brand associations can be non-product associated (i.e. user image, usage, price) or either product related (Keller, 1993). For example, consumers may associate the brand Pepsi with “caffeine”, “refreshing” and “young,” and may choose this brand (Akturan, 2018).

The brand attributes, benefits and attitudes generate an information source and are stored in the consumers' minds and (Keller, 1998). Aaker (1991) indicated that brand associations can be anything recorded into the category of “liabilities and brand's assets” in the memory.

Brand associations are not only used by the marketers to differentiate and extend brand, to create positive feelings and attitudes toward brands but also used by consumers to retrieve and organize information about the brands (Low and Lamb, 2000). Positive, strong, and unique associations increase brand equity and fortify a brand (Keller, 2001).

Experiences, feelings, perceived benefits, and attitudes are stored in the memory as associations as brand-linked knowledge (Keller, 2003; Broniarczyk and Alba, 1994). According to Akturan (2018), brand associations are not always positive. Any kind of experience or information, whether negative or positive, is stored in the mind and associated with the brand (Keller, 2001). consumers perceptions about the disbelief of the firms' green actions reduce if they hold positive and strong associations in their mind (Akturan and Tezcan, 2019).

In the context of green marketing, in general, consumers' perceptions about a brand and attitudes toward the environment are present as separate nodes in the mind (Akturan, 2018). A green positioning strategy aims to emotional brand associations or form functional (Hartmann et al., 2005). According to Akturan and Tezcan (2019), green brand associations negatively affect green skepticism.

Therefore, it was hypothesized that;

H4: Green brand associations has a negative impact on green skepticism

Thus, through the theoretical analysis of these factors, we propose the following model:

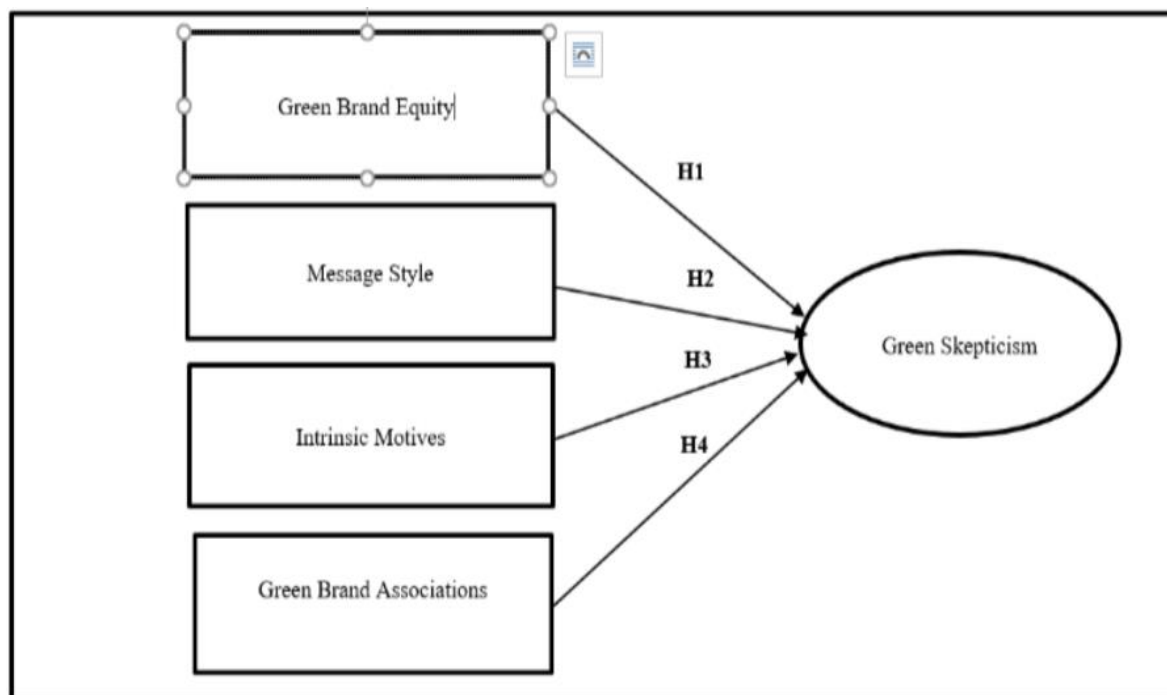


Fig 1: Proposed Research Model

IV. CONCLUSION

The purpose of our article lies in the objective of contributing to the understanding of the phenomenon of green skepticism. It aims to synthesize existing research on green skepticism. First, we presented a literature review on the definition, causes, and consequences of this phenomenon. Second, we identify a set of determinants that contribute to

countering green skepticism namely: Green Brand Equity, Message Style (Narrative vs. Non-Narrative), Intrinsic Motives, and Green Brand Associations.

On a theoretical level, this research provides theoretical and practical enrichment to pre-existing theoretical work on green skepticism. On a practical level, this study aims to explain the causes and practices that help policymakers,

marketers, and retailers to encourage the purchase of environmentally friendly products and combat green skepticism.

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