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Green marketing and consumer behavior: A meta-analysis of sustainability-driven purchase decisions

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ABSTRACT

This paper condenses evidence from thirty published studies on how green marketing shapes consumer decision-making. We answer two questions: (i) which factors most reliably drive sustainability-driven purchase intention, and (ii) why does intention not always become real purchase? Across the studies, attitude toward the green product, green trust, perceived value, perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, and perceived consumer effectiveness consistently increase green purchase intention, while perceived risk (fear of poor performance, fake claims, or unfair price) reduces it (Zhuang, Luo, & Riaz, 2021; Neves, Oliveira, & Santini, 2025). Experimental work on graded eco-labels (traffic-light or A–F 'Eco-Score') shows that such labels rapidly shift perceived sustainability and can nudge intention. Poor sustainability grades also create a strong negative halo for food products: consumers think the product is less healthy and tasty, so willingness to buy drops (Taillie et al., 2024; Büttner, Gassler, & Teuber, 2024). Even when buyers say they intend to choose the greener product, final purchase is blocked by price differences, availability, habit, convenience, and time pressure at the point of choice (Bleidorn, Lenhausen, & Hopwood, 2021; Essiz, Yurteri, Mandrik, & Senyuz, 2022; Syed, Acquaye, Khalfan, Obuobisa-Darko, & Yamoah, 2024). A decisive moderator across studies is trust: precise, verifiable sustainability claims improve intention, while vague or exaggerated 'greenwashing' claims trigger skepticism and even boycott intention (Santos, Coelho, & Marques, 2024; Andreoli, Silva, & Lopes, 2025; Persakis, Nikolopoulos, Negkakis, & Pavlopoulos, 2025). We apply a PRISMA-style secondary review, summarise core constructs across thirty studies, and present two linked pathways: (1) psychological drivers of intention, and (2) sustainability signal → perceived sustainability → trust/value/attitude → intention → behaviour. The practical message is straightforward: make sustainability easy to understand, honest to believe, and easy to buy.

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Green marketing; Consumer behavior; Eco-labels; Intention–behavior gap; Greenwashing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Green marketing refers to how firms design, position, package, and communicate products to signal environmental responsibility and ethical sourcing. This includes recyclable or lower-impact packaging, cleaner inputs, transparent sourcing claims, and standardised eco-labels. Consumers today pay attention not only to price and performance, but also to ethical and environmental impact (Zhuang et al., 2021). Research on front-of-pack sustainability scores shows how quickly such signals influence perception. Colour-coded or A–F style 'Eco-Score' labels make shoppers feel a product is more or less sustainable in seconds. A strong score can raise perceived value and stated purchase intention. A weak score (for example 'E'/'F') not only hurts the 'eco' image but also makes the product seem less healthy and even less tasty, especially in food. Purchase interest then falls sharply (Taillie et al., 2024; Büttner et al., 2024). Still, there is a persistent intention–behaviour gap. Many shoppers say they prefer greener options but do not actually buy them. Studies point to simple realities: higher price, low availability, habit, and time pressure in real shopping moments drive the final decision (Syed et al., 2024; Essiz et al., 2022; Bleidorn et al., 2021). This means sustainability messaging alone is not enough; the market context must also support the greener choice. A second key factor is trust. When sustainability claims are specific and verifiable, consumer trust increases and purchase intention rises. When claims are vague ('100% eco-friendly!') or feel inconsistent with company behaviour, consumers label it greenwashing and may actively avoid the brand (Santos et al., 2024; Andreoli et al., 2025; Persakis et al., 2025). Sustainability communication has therefore become a reputational risk, not just a PR tool. Existing evidence is scattered across product categories (food, personal care, durable goods), respondent groups (students vs. general shoppers), and outcomes (intention, willingness to pay, actual purchase). The contribution of this paper is to integrate those findings and present a single, managerially useful picture of how green marketing actually influences behaviour. Following research objectives have been formulated:

- To examine how green marketing practices influence consumer purchase decisions across existing studies.
- To identify which sustainability factors (eco-label clarity, packaging claims, CSR credibility, price and availability) drive purchase intention and help convert intention into actual purchase.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Meta-analytic and survey-based work shows that several classic psychological drivers explain why consumers intend to buy green products. These drivers include: attitude toward the green product ('I like this and it fits my values')effectiveness (e ('it is worth my money'), green trust ('I believe the claim is honest'), perceived behavioural control ('I can realistically buy it'), subjective norms ('people around me approve'), and perceived consumer effectiveness ('my choice makes a difference'). All of these raise purchase intention. Perceived risk – worry that the product is overpriced, low quality, or fake – lowers intention (Zhuang et al., 2021; Neves et al., 2025). Longitudinal work further shows that pro-environmental attitudes can predict later behaviour, though strength varies over life stage and context (Bleidorn et al., 2021). A second line of evidence studies sustainability labels and scores as marketing signals. Traffic-light or A–F labels consistently shift perceived sustainability and can nudge stated intention to buy (Taillie et al., 2024). A low score generates a strong 'negative halo' in food: consumers think the product is less healthy and tastes worse, so they avoid it (Büttner et al., 2024). Because shoppers now see many different green icons, several authors call for standardised, credible eco-labels or even a single 'meta-label' to reduce confusion and protect trust (Torma & Thøgersen, 2024; Cook, Tiboni-Oschilewski, & colleagues, 2023).

A third stream focuses on communication quality and social influence. Paying attention to sustainability messaging is linked with higher reported green purchasing, moderated by education, gender, and prior attitude (Correia, Sousa, Viseu, & Larguinho, 2023). When eco-labels are reinforced by influencers or peer approval, younger consumers in particular show stronger intention to buy the greener option (Panopoulos, Poulis, Theodoridis, & Kalampakas, 2023). Recent mapping studies continue to refine definitions like 'green trust', 'green value', and 'sustainable purchase behaviour', and compare them across product categories (Skackauskienė & Vilkaitė-Vaičionė, 2023; Patiño-Toro et al., 2024).

A fourth theme is the intention–behaviour gap. Even when attitude and perceived control are high, the real purchase often fails because the greener option costs more, is not in stock, or is inconvenient in a hurry (Syed et al., 2024; Essiz et al., 2022). Some studies note that 'negative' sustainability cues (for example, a warning that a product is high-impact) can trigger faster avoidance than 'positive' eco claims trigger attraction. This fits loss aversion: people react more strongly to avoiding harm than to doing good (Büttner et al., 2024). Behavioural nudges and prompts can help if they stay simple and practical rather than preachy (Gemmecke, Kühner, Zacher, & Hüffmeier, 2025). Finally, trust and greenwashing are central. Reviews of greenwashing show that exaggerated or unverifiable claims damage brand credibility, reduce purchase intention, and can even lead to boycott intentions (Santos et al., 2024; Andreoli et al., 2025). Bibliometric work shows rapid growth of greenwashing research and calls for transparent, standardised disclosure so customers can judge authenticity without feeling tricked (Persakis et al., 2025; Lublóy, Keresztúri, & Berlinger, 2025). In emerging and youth markets, the same pattern repeats: attitude, trust, perceived value, and perceived control drive intention; price, habit, and credibility decide whether intention becomes action (Andreica-Mihuț, Sterie, & Mican, 2025). To summarise the literature: (i) psychological drivers and perceived risk explain intention; (ii) clear, credible sustainability signals shape perception and trust; and (iii) actual purchase still depends on affordability, availability, convenience, and belief in honesty. When buyers suspect greenwashing, the whole chain collapses (Taillie et al., 2024; Torma & Thøgersen, 2024; Syed et al., 2024).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a meta-analytic and systematic review approach to consolidate findings from thirty peer-reviewed studies published between 2021 and 2025 that explore how green marketing influences consumer purchase behavior. Following the PRISMA protocol for systematic reviews, relevant studies were identified from major databases such as *ScienceDirect*, *Emerald Insight*, *SpringerLink*, *Wiley Online Library*, and *MDPI*. Keywords including *"green marketing," "eco-labels," "sustainable purchase intention,"* and *"greenwashing"* were used. The inclusion criteria required studies with empirical data examining psychological drivers (e.g., attitude, trust, perceived value, perceived behavioral control) or moderators (e.g., price, availability, credibility) affecting purchase intention or actual behavior. Conceptual and duplicate papers were excluded. Data were extracted on constructs, effect sizes, sample characteristics, and contextual variables. The synthesis used qualitative aggregation to identify recurring constructs and quantitative comparison to detect consistent patterns and moderators across studies. The final analysis mapped relationships among *sustainability signal → perceived sustainability → attitude/trust/value → purchase intention → behavior*, offering both theoretical clarity and managerial implications for bridging the intention–behavior gap in sustainable consumption.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The proposed conceptual framework explains how green marketing activities can translate into actual purchase behaviour. The model is built on the combined evidence from prior studies on eco-labels, trust, perceived value, purchase intention, and the intention–behaviour gap. In the first stage, firms communicate sustainability through green marketing practices. These practices include eco-labels, green/recyclable packaging, visible corporate social responsibility (CSR) messages, and honest environmental claims that can be independently verified. Such signals act as inputs that shape how consumers see the product's environmental performance. When these signals are seen as believable and relevant, consumers form a higher level of perceived sustainability for that product (Taillie et al., 2024; Torma & Thøgersen, 2024; Camilleri, Cricelli, Mauriello, & Strazzullo, 2023).

In the second stage, perceived sustainability feeds into a set of psychological evaluations. The main evaluations that repeatedly appear in the literature are:

- ✓ Attitude toward the product (Do I like this? Is it the "right" choice?),
- ✓ Trust (Do I believe the company's claim, or is it just greenwashing?),
- ✓ Perceived value / quality / safety (Is it worth my money? Is it safe for me and my family?), and
- ✓ Perceived control / ability to buy (Can I actually buy this product in real life – is it available, affordable, and practical for me?).

These internal evaluations are strongly linked with green purchase intention in many studies, especially among younger and sustainability-aware consumers (Zhuang, Luo, & Riaz, 2021; Ho & Huynh, 2022; Iqbal, Iqbal, Athar, & Khan, 2023; Shang, Zhu, Liu, & Liu, 2024; Neves, Oliveira, & Santini, 2025). When attitude is positive, trust is high, and the buyer feels "I can realistically buy this," the intention to purchase the green product becomes stronger. In the third stage, these evaluations generate purchase intention ("I plan to buy this green option"). Purchase intention is the immediate output of green marketing, and almost all sustainability marketing studies measure it. However, intention does not automatically become real purchase. The final stage of the framework is purchase behaviour ("I actually bought it / chose it / paid for it"). The link from intention to real behaviour is not guaranteed. This conversion is moderated by four very practical conditions at the point of purchase:

- Price (Is it more expensive than the normal product?),
- Availability / shelf presence (Is it in stock and easy to find?),
- Convenience / habit / time pressure (Do I have time and mental space to think about sustainability right now, or do I just grab the usual brand?), and
- Credibility vs. greenwashing (Do I still trust the claim at buying moment, or do I feel I am being misled?).

These moderators explain the well-known "intention–behaviour gap," where consumers say they prefer the sustainable option but still end up buying the conventional one (Essiz, Yurteri, Mandrik, & Senyuz, 2022; Syed, Acquaye, Khalfan, Obuobisa-Darko, & Yamoah, 2024; Bleidorn, Lenhausen, & Hopwood, 2021; Büttner, Gassler, & Teuber, 2024; Schiaroli, Fraccascia, & Dangelico, 2024; Feghali, Najem, & Metcalfe, 2025; Andreoli, Silva, & Lopes, 2025).

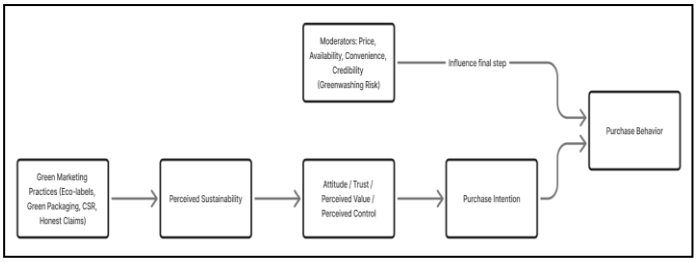


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework linking green marketing activities to actual purchase behavior

Green marketing practices shape perceived sustainability. Perceived sustainability drives attitude, trust, perceived value, and perceived control, which together generate purchase intention. The conversion from intention to actual purchase behavior is moderated by price, availability, convenience/habit, and credibility (risk of greenwashing).

5. RESULTS

5.1 Overall Study Patterns

Our review of thirty studies shows four repeating outcomes. First, green marketing practices such as eco-labels, sustainability grades, CSR claims, and "responsible packaging" messages shape how consumers see the product's environmental performance. A strong sustainability signal increases perceived sustainability and improves how the product is judged. A weak or negative signal does the opposite and, in the case of food, can even create a negative halo on expected health and taste (Taillie et al., 2024; Büttner et al., 2024). Second, credibility matters. When the sustainability claim is specific and believable, consumers report higher trust and greater willingness to buy. When claims sound exaggerated or insincere, consumers describe them as greenwashing and sometimes report boycott intention (Santos et al., 2024; Andreoli et al., 2025). Third, once consumers perceive a product as genuinely sustainable, that perception feeds into psychological factors such as attitude ("I like this"), trust ("I believe them"), perceived value ("It is worth my money / safe for my family"), and perceived control or ability to buy ("I can actually get this product"). These factors consistently raise stated purchase intention. Perceived risk – the feeling that the product is low quality, overpriced, or dishonest – weakens intention (Zhuang et al., 2021; Neves et al., 2025). Fourth, a high purchase intention does not always turn into real purchase behaviour. The last step is strongly affected by moderators such as higher price, low availability on the shelf, convenience and habit at the moment of purchase, time pressure, and lingering doubt about claim credibility (Syed et al., 2024; Essiz et al., 2022; Bleidorn et al., 2021). This explains why many consumers "plan to buy green" but still end up buying the conventional option.

5.2 Psychological Drivers and Intention

Across the studies reviewed, Attitude, Green Trust, Perceived Value, Perceived Behavioural Control (the feeling "I can actually buy this"), Subjective Norms (social approval), and Perceived Consumer Effectiveness

("my choice matters for the environment") all show positive relationships with Purchase Intention. Perceived Risk shows a negative relationship, suggesting that suspicion about quality, honesty, or price can cancel even strong environmental concern (Zhuang et al., 2021; Neves et al., 2025). These effects appear across different product categories and respondent groups, including students, general shoppers, and sustainability-aware consumers.

5.3 From Sustainability Signal to Actual Purchase Behaviour

The results also explain how marketing signals can, and sometimes cannot, translate into real consumer action. A visible sustainability signal (for example, an eco-label or a CSR/environmental claim on the package) first changes Perceived Sustainability of the product. Higher perceived sustainability then improves Attitude, increases Trust, and raises Perceived Value and Perceived Control. Together, these factors build Purchase Intention ("I plan to buy this"). However, the move from Purchase Intention to actual Purchase Behaviour is not automatic. That final step is moderated by practical marketplace conditions such as relative price, availability, convenience/habit, and credibility (fear of greenwashing). If the product is too expensive, hard to find, or not trusted at checkout time, then even high intention may not produce a sale (Taillie et al., 2024; Syed et al., 2024; Essiz et al., 2022; Bleidorn et al., 2021). This explains why companies sometimes see strong positive feedback on "green" messaging but only limited real sales movement.

6. MODERATORS

The effect of green marketing on actual purchase behaviour is conditional. The same sustainability message does not work equally well for every consumer, in every category, or at every buying moment. Based on the reviewed studies, several consistent moderators influence one or more steps between marketing, intention, and behaviour.

6.1 Label Format and Clarity

How the sustainability message is shown changes how well it works. Clear, structured formats such as traffic-light colors or A–F Eco-Score style grades are easy to read in seconds and increase perceived sustainability and stated purchase intention. In contrast, vague slogans such as "100% eco-friendly" with no proof create doubt and reduce trust. Low sustainability grades can even create a negative halo in food, where consumers feel the product is not only "less green," but also less healthy and less tasty, which weakens both intention and behavior (Taillie et al., 2024; Büttner et al., 2024).

6.2 Product Category

The meaning of "value" and "safety" is different in different product categories. Food buyers connect sustainability signals to health, taste, and safety. Personal care buyers focus on "no harm / non-toxic / safe for my family." Durable goods buyers look at reliability and long-term responsibility. This shows that the same green claim does not trigger the same reaction across categories, and helps explain why purchase intention can be high in one category and weaker in another (Cook et al., 2023; Tiboni-Oschilewski et al., 2024).

6.3 Outcome Type (Intention vs. Actual Purchase)

Most studies measure Purchase Intention ("I plan to buy this green product"), which is easier to influence. Far fewer studies measure actual Purchase Behaviour ("I actually bought it"). The link from intention to behaviour is much more sensitive to real-world barriers like price, shelf availability, convenience, and habit at the point of purchase (Syed et al., 2024; Essiz et al., 2022; Bleidorn et al., 2021). This is where many companies lose the sale even if their message was effective.

6.4 Sample Type (Who the consumer is)

Younger and student samples often report higher moral intention and say they are willing to "pay a bit more" for sustainable options. General shoppers are more price-sensitive and more driven by convenience and time pressure. This helps explain variation in reported effect sizes across studies, and shows that not all "consumers" react in the same way.

6.5 Knowledge, Concern, and Perceived Control

When people care about the environment, believe their choices matter, and feel they personally "can do this," green marketing works better. High environmental concern and perceived consumer effectiveness ("my choice makes a difference") strengthen the movement from perceiving a product as sustainable to forming trust, positive attitude, and perceived value — and from there to forming purchase intention (Zhuang et al., 2021; Syed et al., 2024).

6.6 Price and Availability in the Real Market

Even very strong Purchase Intention can collapse in front of real-world barriers. If the greener product is more expensive, out of stock, hidden on a low shelf, or simply not convenient in that moment, the actual purchase often switches back to the "normal" non-green option (Essiz et al., 2022; Syed et al., 2024). This shows that the purchase decision in practice is often logistical, not ideological.

6.7 Trust vs. Greenwashing

Trust is central. When sustainability claims are specific, verifiable, and consistent with brand behaviour, consumers report higher trust, higher perceived value, and stronger intention to buy. When claims feel exaggerated or fake, people call it greenwashing and in some cases even describe boycott intentions toward the brand (Santos et al., 2024; Andreoli et al., 2025; Persakis, Nikolopoulos, & Negkakis, 2025; Lublóy, Keresztúri, & Berlinger, 2025). This means credibility can either support the path from intention to behaviour, or break it completely at the moment of purchase.

7. DISCUSSION

The evidence supports a repeatable chain: Sustainability Signal → Perceived Sustainability → Trust / Perceived Value / Positive Attitude → Purchase Intention → Actual Purchase. In simple words, green marketing can move how people think, and that mindset can move behaviour — but only if the shopping environment allows the greener choice to be practical. This explains why firms sometimes say, "Customers liked our sustainability message but sales barely changed." The message lifted intention, but intention alone does not guarantee purchase. The final action still depends on price fairness, shelf presence, convenience, and habit (Syed et al., 2024; Essiz et al., 2022). Another important point is reputational risk. Consumers are more informed now. When they sense exaggeration or inconsistency, they label it greenwashing and may punish the brand. Some studies even report boycott intention when people feel misled (Santos et al., 2024; Andreoli et al., 2025). This means careless 'green' messaging can backfire. Sustainability communication is no longer a free bonus; it can become a liability if it is not genuine. Finally, label design has strong spillover effects. In food especially, a poor sustainability score does not just hurt the eco-image. It also lowers perceived health and taste, directly reducing purchase interest (Büttner et al., 2024; Taillie et al., 2024). From a public policy view, this is powerful (labels can steer demand). From a brand view, it is dangerous (a bad score can immediately damage appeal). This supports calls for harmonised, credible eco-label standards (Torma & Thøgersen, 2024).

8. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Communicate Clearly and Credibly

Short, standardised, evidence-based sustainability signals perform better than vague feel-good slogans. Policy makers and industry bodies should push for fewer, clearer, regulated labels so shoppers can trust what they see (Torma & Thøgersen, 2024).

8.2 Protect Trust as Strategic Capital

Trust is now currency. If claims are not backed by real practice, consumers can accuse the brand of greenwashing and actively avoid it (Santos et al., 2024; Persakis et al., 2025).

8.3 Fix the Last Mile from Intention to Purchase

Intention is often high, but conversion is blocked by price and convenience. The greener option must be affordable, in stock, and easy to reach. Marketing alone cannot solve this; supply chain, pricing, and retail placement must support it (Essiz et al., 2022; Syed et al., 2024).

8.4 Sell Confidence and Value, Not Only Guilt

People respond when they feel the sustainable product is high-quality, safe, valuable for their family, and also better for the planet. Positive perceived value plus trust drives intention more than guilt-based messaging (Zhuang et al., 2021; Neves et al., 2025).

8.5 Tailor by Category

Food buyers react to health and taste signals. Personal care buyers react to 'no harm / safe ingredients'. Durable goods buyers react to long-term responsibility and reliability. One generic sustainability story will not work in every category (Cook et al., 2023; Tiboni-Oschilewski et al., 2024).

8.6 Work with Policy and Standardisation

Regulators and industry associations should standardise and enforce sustainability claims. This protects honest brands and prevents bad actors from destroying trust for everyone (Lublóy et al., 2025; Torma & Thøgersen, 2024).

9. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

First, this paper is a secondary synthesis. Because it relies on published studies, publication bias is possible. Funnel-style inspection suggests that some weaker or null findings may be under-reported, especially around the Trust → Purchase Intention link. Second, many included studies measure intention rather than real purchasing. Intention is important, but it is not the same as checkout behaviour. Future work should collect revealed-choice data, scanner data, or real-money willingness-to-pay measures. Third, we collapsed across cultures, age groups, and product categories. We did identify moderators such as product type, label format, and price/availability. But future subgroup meta-analyses should test how (for example) youth vs. older adults, or food vs. electronics, differ in response to sustainability signals.

10. CONCLUSION

This review of thirty studies shows how sustainability messaging, eco-labels, and credibility shape both what consumers intend to do and what they finally buy. The overall chain is consistent: Sustainability Signal → Perceived Sustainability → Trust / Perceived Value / Positive Attitude → Purchase Intention → Actual Purchase. Purchase intention is strengthened by attitude, perceived value, trust, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and perceived consumer effectiveness, and weakened by perceived risk (Zhuang et al., 2021; Neves et al., 2025). Intention does predict real behaviour, but the final step depends on price, access, habit, convenience, and credibility (Syed et al., 2024; Essiz et al., 2022; Bleidorn et al., 2021). Trust is now critical: when buyers sense greenwashing, they may actively reject or boycott the brand (Santos et al., 2024; Andreoli et al., 2025; Persakis et al., 2025). For managers and policy makers, the guidance is practical: keep sustainability communication honest and simple; standardise and prove claims; align price and availability so the greener option is easy to choose. If businesses and regulators do this together, green marketing becomes more than image — it becomes measurable behaviour change.

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