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GREENWASHING AND FALSE GREEN HALO: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING GREEN MORAL LICENSING IN SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT

Greenwashing has become a significant issue in modern sustainable marketing, especially in emerging consumer markets like India, where increasing environmental consciousness has led to a higher demand for eco-friendly products. Despite a growing corporate focus on green marketing, misleading environmental claims often deceive consumers by creating inflated perceptions of ecological responsibility. This results in the false green halo effect, where consumers assume broader environmental benefits from limited or misleading green signals. Such skewed perceptions may then trigger green moral licensing, a psychological process where individuals justify future unsustainable actions after engaging in what they perceive as environmentally responsible behavior. While previous research has mainly focused on the direct effects of greenwashing on consumer trust, purchase intentions, and skepticism, there has been limited exploration of its deeper psychological impacts and their implications for sustainable consumption. This conceptual paper proposes a theoretical framework that connects greenwashing and green premium pricing with the false green halo and green moral licensing in the Indian consumer context. The study introduces the "Green Justification Loop" concept to explain how misleading environmental claims and premium-priced green products might indirectly lead consumers to rationalize unsustainable behaviors. By incorporating insights from cognitive dissonance theory, the paper provides a new explanation of the psychological pathways involved in deceptive green marketing. The proposed framework contributes to the literature on green marketing and consumer behavior by identifying key areas for future empirical research and offering implications for policymakers and companies aiming to promote genuine sustainable consumption practices in India.

KEYWORDS: Greenwashing; False Green Halo; Green Moral Licensing; Sustainable Consumption; Consumer Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

In response to the rising customer demand for eco-friendly options, firms have begun to adopt sustainable practices. Sustainable practices encompass green marketing tactics aimed at introducing



eco-friendly items to shoppers. One of the major issues in Indian green marketing is greenwashing, where by companies follow deceptive marketing strategies to make extra false green claims in respect of green products & service benefits. Greenwashing is the practice of making misleading or false environmental claims to create a deceptive impression of environmental responsibility Forliano et al. (2025). In general, the term greenwashing encompasses all types of deceptive assertions about business ethics, and disparities between interaction with the environment ("talk") and real-life performance ("walk") Bernini et al. (2024). According to a survey by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), 79% of green promises in Indian ads were either overstated or deceptive, and according to quantitative data 71% of Indian consumers reported having encountered greenwashing. Additionally, according to a report by the consulting firm Accenture, only 29% of Indian consumers believe that businesses are telling the truth about their environmental claims. HUL's use of palm oil has drawn criticism for its false statements regarding the social and environmental effects of its goods. Although the corporation claims to use sustainable palm oil, environmental groups have accused it of failing to ensure a truly sustainable supply chain. Since HUL's "Clean India" campaign promotes cleaning supplies without addressing the root causes of India's sanitation problems, it has also been referred to as greenwashing Arfat (2023). Greenwashing practices negatively influence consumers' purchasing attitudes, behaviour, perceptions, and cause green halo effect. Many studies found the direct relationship between greenwashing and negative word of mouth, breaching green trust, and reducing purchase intention of shoppers, however greenwashing and green halo effect have been analysed by few studies. De Jong et al. tried to understand halo effect by exploring the relationship between greenwashing and product perceived quality by consumers of the firm's activities. In other words, the consumer may use green halo effect attitude to adversely assess the company and, other significant indicators. Greenwashing can intentionally amplification or invention of environmental assertions—erodes trust, obstructs openness, and substantial impediment to authenticity Khan & Hinterhuber (2025). Consumers' inability to understand greenwashing strategies lead consumers to fall into the trap of a false green halo effect. False green halo refers to the tendency, when customers mistakenly believe that goods or businesses have significant environmental benefits based on weak "green" cues, when these benefits are overstated or deceptive, because of greenwashing tactics. The false green halo effect is an external perception in which a singular positive green attribute of a product leads to overall good evaluations, thus prompting internal justification for future environmentally friendly behavior, known as green moral licensing effects Javadi (2023) Nicolau et al. (2022) Shrestha et al. (2025). Therefore, false green halo effect prompts internal justification for future environmentally friendly behavior, also known as green moral licensing effects, because as a cognitive bias, it forces the consumer to believe that at least one green feature of a product, even if it is false, internally motivates him/herself to engage in unethical behavior in the future due to moral licensing effects. As a result, false green halo and green moral licensing are two different but related ideas that highlight the complexity of how green actions can influence consumers' perceptions



and behaviors and potentially harm sustainable future consumption.

Green premium price is one another significant factor that might have false green halo effect and green moral licensing effect on consumers attitudes and behaviour. Consumers are willingness to pay more for a product after becoming aware of greenwashing C. C. Chen et al. (2018) Z. Chen & Lu (2022) Volschenk et al. (2022). Green premium price refers to paying extra for an ecofriendly products and services over traditional product options Gomes et al. (2023). This green premium price may generate the product's "false green halo," making people less aware of other characteristics, even in the absence of data supporting such benefits. For example: If consumers buy green products at a premium, they are likely to perceive them as more ethical due to the additional cost incurred, while overall other green harmful effects of product are overlooked. This false perception paves the way for green moral licensing, a psychological effect where doing (or appearing to do) something good, like purchasing a supposedly "green" product, makes individuals or organizations feel justified in engaging in less ethical or more environmentally damaging behavior elsewhere. Consumers can perceive green licensing after using green products, where previous pro- environmental behaviour undermines next eco-friendly behaviour Wang Tao et al. (2025). Thus, when premium prices generate a misleading green halo, they increase moral licensing by convincing consumers that their expensive purchase is sufficient, undercutting motivation for truly effective, deeper environmental action, and believe it is OK to act unethically or in ways that harm the environment. A study conducted by Dütschke et al. supports this psychological mechanism and found that purchasing a green product for a premium might be viewed as a "moral investment" or as generating moral credits, meeting the consumer's ethical need. This effect can weak real sustainability progress, as consumers become satisfied, and believing money spent equates to meaningful ecological virtue, even when the actual impact is minimal. For example, someone who pays more for an environmentally friendly product may feel entitled to be less conscientious about energy consumption or recycling because they believe they've already "done their part."

The objective to conduct this study is to investigate how consumers' inability to understand greenwashing and paying extra price for green products create false green halo effects which lead to green moral licensing behaviour, and consequently has an impact on green product consumptions in future. This study will also look at a model called the "Green Justification Loop," which refers to how customers utilize greenwashed acts and paying a premium price to justify unsustainable habits. Greenwashing and price premium indirectly creating a cycle, where even aware consumers may detach from green behaviour. Therefore, this study will understand how this cycle works in Indian green markets.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

To conceptualise the constructs, the present study has integrated following existing theories namely

1. Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) provides an important psychological framework for understanding how greenwashing results in green moral licensing via the false green halo effect. This relationship reveals a complicated web of consumer psychology that undervalued true environmental behavior. Three fundamental factors of behavioral intention are included in Ajzen's Theory of Planned conduct: perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, and attitude toward the conduct. These variables substantially predict green purchasing intentions and behaviors in environmental contexts Aziz (2019) Vinothkumar. M (2021) Si et al. (2019). However, when used in greenwashing scenarios, the TPB theory uncovers serious flaws because false environmental claims have the power to influence consumers' views and perceived behavioral control Shojaei et al. (2024). Greenwashing has a direct impact on the TPB components by inflating consumers' perceived behavioral control and positive attitudes toward products. Customers' perceptions of greenwashing as environmentally conscious have a major impact on consumer behavior within the TPB framework. Studies reveal that when customers recognize greenwashing, it has a detrimental effect on their perceptions of eco-friendly items, decreases their propensity to buy, and lowers the perceived quality of the products. On the other hand, if greenwashing goes unnoticed, it can produce fictitious good sentiments that influence consumer behavior without improving the environment Geraldo Da Silva & Cé (2024). According to research, eco-labelling has a strong positive impact on consumers' perceptions of items' health and greatly influences their propensity to buy. Even when there is no link between the environmental claim and other product features, this false green halo spreads beyond individual products to entire brand perceptions, giving rise to what academics refer to as "environmental superiority" assumptions Bettiga et al. (2024) Lanero et al. (2021) Lim et al. (2025). The TPB framework identifies a particular psychological mechanism through Attitude manipulation, social norms influence, perceived behavioural control, and false moral credentials, by which greenwashing results in green moral licensing.



In India, theory of planned behaviour plays important role in following cases:

1. **Attitude Manipulation:** Surf Excel's "100% natural" claim creates an inflated positive evaluation of the product's environmental benefits, leading consumers to form a favourable attitude toward buying it.
2. **Subjective–Norm Amplification:** Voltas's "all-star" messaging suggests social approval ("everyone's switching to this AC"), heightening perceived peer pressure to purchase.
3. **Perceived Behavioural Control Inflation:** By portraying a single appliance purchase as a major eco-action, Voltas's ad boosts consumers' sense of efficacy ("I can make a real environmental difference by choosing this AC").

2. Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Customers frequently have strong environmental views, but they also must deal with misleading advertising that exaggerates or makes up "green" claims. People experience psychological discomfort (dissonance) when they choose to buy a possibly greenwashed product and their self-perception as environmentally conscious are at odds, according to the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, rationalization tactics are used by consumers to lessen this discomfort without giving up on their purchase or self-perception De Jong et al. (2020). According to Leon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory, psychological discomfort results from holding opposing views. A customer who buys a potentially greenwashed product but appreciates environmental responsibility has dissonance Miller et al. (2015). Customers must either change how they see themselves, reject the product, or justify the purchase to ease this tension. Instead of rejecting their purchase or identity, consumers frequently embrace the fake green halo, which involves extrapolating vague or misleading eco-claims (such as "100% plant-based!") to irrelevant qualities like safety, quality, and healthfulness. Psychological harmony is restored when people reconcile their activities with their self-image by believing the product brings broad environmental advantages. Consumers who believe in the fake green halo are given moral credentials, the impression that they have "done enough" for the environment. These credentials feel as legitimate as real acts of virtue, but they are based on exaggerated or fake eco-benefits. With unjustified moral credentials, consumers feel free to act in ways that are less sustainable—a practice known as "green moral licensing."

For instance, **Meet Ben**, an eco-conscious office worker:

1. **Cognitive Dissonance Trigger**
 - Ben prides himself on reducing plastic waste
 - He buys a "biodegradable" water bottle that's only 5% plant-based (greenwashing).
 - Dissonance: "I care about plastic pollution" vs. "I bought a misleading product."
2. **False Green Halo**
 - To ease discomfort, Ben convinces himself the bottle is fully eco-friendly.



- He also assumes it's safer, sturdier, and healthier—even though those claims are unverified.

3. Moral Credentialing

- Feeling virtuous for his “green” purchase, Ben believes he's done his part for the environment.

4. Green Moral Licensing

- That evening, he skips his usual walk home (to save car emissions) and drives instead.
- He throws other recyclables into general trash, reasoning, “I already made a green choice today.”

3. Self-perception Theory

People often utilize their behavior signals to establish attitudes, norms, and values, according to the self-perception theory. When customers come across greenwashed products, they overgeneralize little environmental indications into a misleading green halo, gain undeserved moral credentials that permit further unsustainable activities, and infer an eco-friendly identity from their own purchase (Self-Perception Theory). Bem explains the self-perception theory: people infer their beliefs by looking at their behavior when they don't have any obvious internal attitudes. The behavioral cue is provided by greenwashing, which is the practice of making false "eco" claims, such as "100% plant-based" labels with very little real green content. By purchasing a greenwashed detergent, a customer constructs or reinforces a pro-environmental self-image through self-attribution by reasoning, "I must care about the environment.". After establishing an eco-conscious identity, consumers apply that inference to unrelated product criteria, such as overall sustainability, safety, quality, and healthfulness. This fake green halo results from people accepting the credibility that comes with higher price points, green images, and ambiguous keywords. Customers feel that the product offers numerous health and environmental advantages, even though it may only have 1% real plant content. This reinforces their sense of responsibility. Consumers who believe in the fake green halo are given moral credentials, the idea that they have "done enough" for the environment Sörqvist et al. (2015). Despite being based on false assertions, these certifications are psychologically like real green acts. Even though there are little to no real benefits, consumers feel good about themselves because they believe they are in line with pro-environmental standards and have the power to have a significant influence. According to the Self-Perception Theory, consumers in India draw conclusions about their own "green" identity from purchases when they encounter deceptive eco-claims from green brands. This creates a misleading green halo, or oversimplified views of the virtues of products, and bestows undeserved moral credentials that subsequently license unsustainable practices (green moral licensing).

In India's rapidly expanding green marketing business, companies in the FMCG, automotive, and personal care industries take advantage of this:

"Plant-Based" product ranges from Hindustan Unilever (with only 2–5% real substance)
“Local bottled-water firms claiming “100% biodegradable” packaging”

Fast-fashion companies who advertise "sustainably sourced" collections but have unclear sourcing relationships Indian consumers who purchase one of these misleadingly "green" products come to the conclusion that "I must care about the environment," which helps them to develop or reinforce an eco-friendly self-image.

Keywords

Greenwashing, Green moral licensing, Price premium, False Green Halo, Environmental awareness, Green knowledge, Sustainability, Green behaviour, Pro-environmental behaviour, Green trust, Green purchase intention, Environmental identity, Green cues, Green marketing, Green Product, Green identity.

Word Cloud



Figure 1: Word Cloud



LITERATURE REVIEW

The research in the field of greenwashing, green premium price and green moral licensing is not much explored. Articles published in various Scopus, MDPI, Frontiers, Taylor & Francis, Science Direct covering studies related to greenwashing and green moral licensing, green premium price and green moral licensing were considered to identify major constructs, variables, and factors for this study. The literature review is carried out under following sub-heads:

Ability of Identify Greenwashing

Fella & Bausa conducted two experiments studies on 700 participants to investigate consumers' perceptions regarding green products and ability to identify honest environmentally friendly through categorization theory. The study found, consumers were successfully recognised greenwashing when they were asked to pay attention on greenwashing cues and possible exposures. Neureiter & Matthes tried to find the answer through quota-based sample (N = 658), how well consumers can recognize greenwashing in ambiguous and misleading claims, additionally, in both real and abstract compensatory greenwashing allegations with the help of information process theories and utilizing current as a moderator. The result indicated, consumers perceive vague, false, and abstract compensation claims as greenwashing more than non-green(washed) claims. However, when consumers have a high level of topical environmental knowledge, they can also detect greenwashing in concrete compensation claims. Eng et al. tested base-rate, image, quote, image, and quote on U.S. participants (N = 476) aged 18 to 35, and found that literacy interventions can empower people and improve their capacity to recognize greenwashing. A literacy intervention that included both textual quotes and image exemplars was shown to have the greatest ratings for vividness, which improved literacy outcomes. The association between the intervention and literacy outcomes was also fully mediated by the quote-only condition. Furthermore, the intervention and literacy outcomes were not significantly mediated by either the availability heuristic or cognitive load.

Although India has created a comprehensive regulatory framework and useful checklists to detect greenwashing, substantial enforcement gaps and inadequate consumer understanding enable false green halos to continue existing, ultimately offering moral licenses that compromise real sustainable consumption. India can eliminate fake green halos, reduce green moral licensing, and promote real sustainable consumption based on measurable environmental impact by strengthening enforcement, verification, and awareness. Therefore, this study will try to understanding psychological mechanism of greenwashing and green moral licensing, and fill the awareness gap among Indian consumers.

Factors affecting Greenwashing practices

Using Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, Ali et al. discovered how green marketing strategies influences Algerian consumers' buying decisions through trust in green brands. This green



brand trust built by optimistic advertising, good brand image and destroyed by false ecofriendly claims. Santa & Drews Aravindan et al. Sörqvist et al. explored how companies create deceptive claims to deliver green products in markets and how consumers become victim of this impression. The study recommended the role of environmental education in consumers buying decisions, and awareness of environmental laws and regulations to avoid greenwashing practices. Consumers should carefully watch and consider green words like pure, organic, sustainability, nature etc to avoid greenwashing. Pham et al. investigated how consumers develop green doubt due to greenwashing practices, and revealed that weak-attitude consumers exhibit lower green scepticism in respond to vague or specific ecofriendly advertisements, as compare to strong-attitude consumers who responded opposite behaviour when exposed to a vague advertisement and less likely to pay for products presented in advertisement. Fernandes et al. examined the effectiveness of a literacy to enhance consumer's awareness to understand green advertisement critically. The results of study revealed that consumers are unable to evaluate the extent of genuineness or dishonesty in green advertisements. However, enhancing environmental knowledge among consumers could help them to differentiate and evaluate real environmental claims from deceptive ones.

Greenwashing Leads to a False Green Halo Effect

Greenwashing is a practice of overstating environmental claims, and creating a misleading green halo by leveraging cognitive biases, which cause people to assume broad positive traits from unconfirmed "green" indicators. Thorndike (1920) was the first to identify the halo effect, which is the way that one prominently good feature affects how other characteristics are perceived. When it comes to environmental claims, the "green halo" causes customers to make assumptions about a product's overall quality, sustainability, and healthfulness based on superficial or minimal eco-attributes, such as a label that reads "plant-based," which covers only 1–5% of the product's actual composition Nicolau et al. (2022). This halo effect not only misleads purchasing decisions, but it also serves as the foundation for moral licensing and decreased sustainable behavior. Büttner et al. showed how small green signals, like third-party ratings, create a halo effect, influencing consumers' evaluations of a company's sustainability based more on its overall environmental image than on information related to a particular product. Geraldo Da Silva & Cé also discovered that, even in cases where customers were highly involved, greenwashing scenarios (using ambiguous phrases like "eco-friendly") resulted in notable improvements in purchase intention and perceived product quality in the automotive industry.

Effects of Greenwashing on Consumers

Braga Junior et al. investigated greenwashing perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs in green products purchase decisions with a sample of 880 supermarkets weekly or biweekly consumers living in São Paulo city, Brazil and found that recognition of greenwashing in products lead to loss of loyalty,



satisfaction, benefits, and avoidance of products' consumption. Srisathan & Naruetharadhol employed a theoretical framework grounded in asymmetric information theory, and discovered that customers' perceptions of greenwashing for carbon-based products significantly raise their level of green scepticism, which in turn causes adverse selection in the market for organic products. Mullen & Benoît Monin, synthesised the literature on moderators of moral consistency versus licensing effects and revealed that consumers shown consistency in behaviour when they established a link in between their initial behaviour and their values, and exposed to licensing effects when they strongly considered their previous behaviour, unless this behaviour threatens their unforgettable identity. Jog & Singhal assessed the greenwashing understanding in Indian consumers' green purchase behaviour and the effects of receptivity to green advertising, environmental consciousness, and personal norms are modelled using structural equations. This study focused on personal care goods, and a structured questionnaire was utilized to collect data and test the proposed model. The 250 questionnaires were sent using a selective sampling strategy to adults and educated consumers. The study's first major finding is that Indian consumers' comprehension of greenwashing moderates the association between RGC (Receptivity to Green Advertising) and GPB. This suggests that customers with a better awareness of greenwashing are more likely to support GPB. The second major result is that consumers' greenwashing awareness increase their carefulness regarding the purchase of ecofriendly items. Neureiter & Matthes found that after experiencing greenwashing perceptions, brand evaluations and flight shame are affected.

Some studies have not found greenwashing impact on consumers' green product buying willingness. The study conducted on 120 post-millennials respondents born in 1996–2018 through an online survey by Alfausta Amallia et al. found that green brand image of the company overweight greenwashing and motivates consumers to buy green products in developing countries. However, in emerging economies product price and accessibility of the product are more significant factors than ecofriendly claims. Vilkaitė-Vaitonė discovered the outcome of the level of greenwashing awareness on intention to make green purchases in tourism industry by collecting first hand data from 693 travellers with the help of structural equation modelling (SEM). The study revealed that greenwashing perception has no direct effect on sustainable consumption, but has an impact on green trust. Green trust is unable to mediate the relationship between greenwashing and green purchase intention; however green trust was a prime variable to determine sustainable choices.

Moral licensing and Individual Behaviour

Song et al. investigated the moderated effect of ethical licensing in between environmentally friendly behavioural intention and actual behaviour by conducting an online self-reported survey of 1000 individuals. The investigation found, high levels of moral licensing associated with immoral environmental practices, and lower level of intention conversion into action. Sun & Shi demonstrated



that consumers' greenwashing observation has an impact on green buying intentions, and this relationship mediated by consumers' perceived betrayal and moderated by consumers' environmental accountability. The study collected 220 online questionnaires and conducted regression analysis by using SPSS24.0 and Amos24.0 to test the hypothesis. The result found that lower ecofriendly products' buying intention caused due to higher level of greenwashing perception, as consumers' emotional bond has deceived. Gholamzadehmir et al. studied the circumstances under which previous pro-eco-friendly behaviour creates a "license" to engage in less pro-ecological behaviour by exploring environmental attitudes as a moderator of the effect of people's past pro-environmental behaviour on their future activities. The results of the study revealed that individual with more pro-environmental attitudes and with past sustainable behaviour memories were more constant with moral licensing effect. Authors like Burger et al. Reimers et al. Sorrell et al. Dütschke et al. investigated the rebound effect of moral licensing. Meijers et al. found that consumers with a strong environmental identity are more likely to continue acting sustainably, while those with a poor environmental identity show uneven post-purchase licensing effects. Noblet & McCoy investigated licensing behaviour, and discovered that remembering one's own past sustainable behavior had a big influence on a person's decision in a future policy scenario. Millar et al. used data from New York taxi industry and provided the first real-world study through cross-domain test of the condition that environmentally friendly behaviour induces moral licensing and found the evidence which consistent with moral licensing. Xiong et al. explored when and why consumers observed a licensing effect or consistency effect in following pro-ecofriendly decisions after their initial pro-environmental behaviour using self-construal as a moderator in three experimental studies. Consumers having interdependent self-construal are more probable to follow their original pro-environmental behaviour due to pro-environmental self-perceptions, which further supports self-consistency effect. Independently self-construed people, on the other hand, are more likely to see early pro-environmental behavior as a step toward a pro-environmental aim, which is subsequently followed by a licensing effect. Lalot et al. anticipated governance effects whether people will show behavioural reliability or self-licensing. Four experimental studies (N = 1184) supported the hypothesis that regulatory focus moderates the impact of past pro-environmental behaviour on behavioural intentions. The study revealed that past optimistic behaviour deteriorated pro-environmental intentions in contrast with past undesirable behaviour has self-licensing effect. However, some studies found no licensing impact on consumer's behaviour. Rabaa et al. tested the moral licensing statement with three pre-registered experiments (total n = 2315), and discovered that, in contrast to what was predicted from the literature on moral licensing, no detrimental impacts were observed on later climate-friendly behavior.

Operational Definition

Greenwashing Exposure (Independent Variable):

Greenwashing refers to selectively disclosing favourable information about a company's



environmental or social performance without disclosing negative information, resulting in an unduly positive corporate image. It is the dishonest practice of giving a misleading or inflated image of environmental responsibility, and undermines real sustainability initiatives Lyon & Maxwell (2008). Persakis et al. defined greenwashing as false evidence of half-truth, a merely representative ecological effort without practical action, and an overemphasis of environmental claims. Greenwashing is a deflecting attention to small issues might result in 'green speak' statements that satisfy stakeholder needs for sustainability without taking actual action Siano et al. (2017).

False Green Halo

Green halo effect means, enhanced sense of quality, flavour, or efficacy of "green" labelled items Santa & Drews (2023). For example, when compared to identical, non-eco-friendly alternatives, people believe that food products that are labelled as "eco-friendly" taste better.

improved opinion of the performance, flavour, or quality of goods with "green" labels Sörqvist et al. (2015). Therefore, a false cognitive bias is progress when consumers develop excessively untrue favourable assessments of a brand or product based on superficial or misleading environmental indicators, frequently resulting from deceptive marketing practices (greenwashing) that inflate perceived ecological advantages.

Green Moral Licensing (Dependent Variable)

Moral licensing denotes the phenomenon wherein individuals who first engage in virtuous activity thereafter exhibit immoral, unethical, or otherwise problematic conduct Blanken & Zeelenberg (2015). Green moral licensing has positive as well as negative impact on green consumption behaviour. In recent study Yu et al. explored the relationship between buying green items and consumption intention and found that buying eco-friendly products increases the desire for decadent consumption.

Green Premium Price

Green Premium pricing is an approach used by businesses to increase the perceived quality of products and build a luxury brand image by pricing them higher than the market average Jayachandran (2022).

Sustainable Consumption

Sustainable consumption is the idea of using resources and goods responsibly and sustainably so they can satisfy our needs both now and in the future without harming the environment Davies (2022).

Mediator Variables

Green Trust

The term "green trust" refers to the beliefs and expectations of individuals that are derived from the



trustworthiness, ability, and positive image of eco-friendly product manufacturers, as well as the subsequent propensity to trust the enterprises and products Wu & Long (2024).

Green Brand Image

A brand image is the impression that consumers get when they see a logo, tagline, or other brand-related items Vanessa & Ariestya (2024). It is created in consumers' mind because of their awareness regarding green products and brands.

Green Scepticism

Green scepticism is the mistrust regarding the ecofriendly products claims made through advertisements and promotions Akhondzadeh et al. (2021) and it has adverse impact on trustworthiness of green ads Leonidou & Skarmeas. Dionysis (2015).

Perceived Product Value

It is the net value (benefit) that, being a buyer, customer get after interaction with seller. Customers always concerned about this value, as a key factor for customer satisfaction Samudro et al. (2020).

Perceived Product Quality

The consumer's assessment of a product's overall excellence or superiority is known as perceived quality Zeithaml (1988). Perceived quality had both direct and indirect effects on purchase intentions, and chase intentions and involvement influenced purchase intentions indirectly through satisfaction and perceived quality Tsiotsou (2017).

Perceived Financial Risk

It is the risk when customers think, they might face financial loss due to unnecessarily spending money on purchasing products Yang et al. (2016) and perceived financial risk has significant positive impact on attitudes regarding ecofriendly products Sheikh et al. (2023).

Moderator Variables

Environment Knowledge

It is the individual's mental capacity to realise environmental or sustainability connected problems including air, water and land pollution, energy usage and efficiency, and re cycling and waste generation, and their significances to society and physical environment Chan (2001) Yadav & Pathak (2016).

Environmental Attitude

Environmental attitudes have been characterized as a psychological inclination exhibited by judging



the natural environment with some degree of favour or disfavour Milfont (2007),

Environmental Concern

In the research on green marketing, environmental concern is stressed as a critical cognitive measure for predicting one's environmentally friendly behavior over time. In general, it maintains persons' awareness of environmental problems and their willingness to remedy the situation Kim & Choi (2005) Prakash & Pathak (2017).

Gap of the study

Existing studies related to greenwashing and moral licensing effects have limited false green halo effect and sustainable consumption coverage in Indian contexts. Studies covered various aspects such as impact of greenwashing on willing to pay premium price, impact of greenwashing on consumers' purchase intention through multiple theories like; theory of planned behaviour, stimulus-response framework, however the link between greenwashing and green moral licensing through false green halo effect and consequently impact of these variables on sustainable consumption has been rarely covered in India. Therefore, this research will try to fulfil following objectives and seek answers to the following questions:

Research Objectives

- RO1: To examine the impact of greenwashing on green moral licensing through false green halo.
- RO2: To analyse moderating role of environmental consciousness in the relationship of greenwashing exposure and green moral licensing.
- RO3: To understand the role of greenwashing in sustainable consumption.
- RO4: To investigate the impact of green premium price on green moral licensing through false green halo.
- RO5: To analyse moderating role of environmental consciousness in the relationship of green premium price and green moral licensing.
- RO6: To understand the role of green premium price in sustainable consumption.

Research Questions

- RQ1: How does consumer's inability to understand greenwashing trigger green moral licensing?
- RQ2: Does consumer's inability to understand greenwashing trigger weak sustainable consumption/behaviour through green moral licensing?
- RQ3: How does paying a green premium price, regardless of actual environmental benefit, create moral licensing effects?
- RQ4: Does Paying green premium price trigger weak sustainable consumption/behaviour through green moral licensing?



Research Hypotheses

- RH1: Exposure to greenwashing significantly leads to false green halo effect through green trust.
- RH2: Exposure to greenwashing significantly leads to false green halo effect through green brand image.
- RH3: Exposure to greenwashing significantly leads to false green halo effect through green scepticism.
- RH4: Exposure to false green halo significantly leads to green moral licensing.
- RH5: The relationship between greenwashing exposure and green moral licensing is moderated by consumers perceived personal environmental attitudes, environmental knowledge, and environmental concern.
- RH6: Exposure to greenwashing significantly leads to weak sustainable consumption/behaviour through green moral licensing.
- RH7: Paying green premium price significantly leads to false green halo effect through perceived product quality and value.
- RH8: Paying green premium price significantly leads to false green halo effect through perceived financial risk.
- RH9: Exposure to false green halo significantly leads to green moral licensing effect.
- RH10: The relationship between green premium price and green moral licensing is moderated by consumers perceived personal environmental attitudes, environmental knowledge, and environmental concern.
- RH11: Paying green premium price significantly leads to weak sustainable consumption/behaviour through green moral licensing.

Outcome of the study

This study would prove that exposure to greenwashing and green premium price do not just destroy trust and reduce the level of attention in green claims but can actively lead consumers to behave less sustainably—through the mechanism of moral licensing in future Pasquotto & Minciotti (2023). These findings would inform both policymakers and businesses on how to prevent the counterproductive consequences of deceptive green marketing, promote greenwashing awareness among consumers. and promote authentic pro-environmental behavior.

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