

AN INVESTIGATION OF EMOTIONAL BRANDING AS A DRIVER OF TRUST, PURCHASE INTENTION, AND BRAND LOYALTY TOWARDS GREEN PRODUCTS

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Abstract—*The growing environmental degradation caused by industrialization and excessive consumption has intensified interest in green products and sustainable branding. Despite increased environmental awareness, consumers often fail to translate their concerns into actual green purchasing behavior, largely due to skepticism arising from green washing practices. This conceptual study investigates the role of emotional branding in influencing green trust, green purchase intention, and green brand loyalty. Drawing on secondary data from existing literature in green marketing, branding, and consumer behavior, the study develops an integrated conceptual framework grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theory and brand relationship theory. The proposed model positions emotional branding as a key antecedent of green trust, which in turn drives purchase intention and brand loyalty toward green products. The study contributes to green marketing literature by highlighting the emotional foundations of trust formation and long-term consumer–brand relationships. Practical implications for marketers and directions for future empirical research are discussed.*

Keywords: *Emotional branding, green trust, green purchase intention, green brand loyalty, green marketing.*

1. Introduction

Environmental sustainability has emerged as a critical global concern due to the adverse effects of industrialization, urbanization, and unsustainable consumption patterns. These activities have contributed to climate change, pollution, and depletion of natural resources, prompting governments, organizations, and consumers to seek environmentally responsible alternatives. As a result, green products and sustainable brands have gained prominence across industries such as fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), electronics, food, and personal care.

Although consumers increasingly express concern for environmental issues, this concern does not consistently translate into green purchasing behavior. Numerous studies highlight the existence of an attitude–behavior gap, wherein consumers support sustainability in principle but hesitate to purchase green products in practice. One major reason for this discrepancy is the lack of trust in green claims, often caused by misleading environmental messages and green washing practices.

Traditional green marketing strategies emphasize functional attributes such as eco-labels, recyclable packaging, and environmental certifications. While these strategies enhance awareness, they often fail to establish emotional connections with consumers. Branding literature suggests that emotions play a central role in shaping trust, decision-making, and loyalty. Emotional branding, which focuses on building deep emotional bonds between brands and consumers, may therefore serve as a critical mechanism for strengthening trust and encouraging sustained green consumption.

Despite its relevance, emotional branding has received limited attention in green marketing research. Most existing studies focus on cognitive factors such as attitudes, perceived value, and environmental knowledge. This study addresses this gap by developing a conceptual framework that explains how emotional branding influences green trust, green purchase intention, and green brand loyalty.

Green Marketing and Green Products

Green marketing refers to marketing activities designed to minimize environmental harm while promoting sustainable products and practices. Green products are those that are environmentally friendly throughout their life cycle, including production, usage, and disposal. Prior research suggests that green marketing enhances corporate reputation and competitive advantage; however, its effectiveness depends on perceived credibility and authenticity.

Emotional Branding

Emotional branding involves creating meaningful emotional connections between consumers and brands by appealing to feelings, values, and identity rather than functional benefits alone. According to brand relationship theory, emotionally bonded consumers exhibit stronger trust, commitment, and loyalty. In the green context, emotional branding emphasizes moral responsibility, empathy toward nature, and shared environmental values.

Green Trust

Green trust is defined as consumers' willingness to rely on a brand based on beliefs regarding its environmental performance and sincerity. Trust is particularly important in green markets due to information asymmetry and consumer skepticism. Studies consistently show that green trust is a key predictor of green purchase intention and loyalty.

Green Purchase Intention

Green purchase intention refers to a consumer's likelihood of choosing eco-friendly products over conventional alternatives. While environmental concern influences intention, trust and emotional attachment are essential for translating concern into action.

Green Brand Loyalty

Green brand loyalty reflects a consumer's commitment to repeatedly purchase and advocate for a green brand. Loyalty is driven not only by satisfaction but also by emotional attachment and trust. Emotional branding strengthens loyalty by fostering long-term psychological bonds.

2. Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, where emotional branding acts as a stimulus, green trust represents the internal organismic state, and purchase intention and brand loyalty are behavioral responses. Additionally, brand relationship theory supports the role of emotions and trust in sustaining long-term consumer–brand relationships.

2.1 Green Consumer Behavior and Purchase Intention

Green consumer behavior has frequently been examined through the lens of intention-based models, particularly the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). According to TPB, purchase intention is shaped by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, and serves as the most immediate antecedent of actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Empirical applications of TPB in green consumption contexts confirm that favorable environmental attitudes and perceived social pressure positively influence green purchase intention (Albayrak et al., 2013; Yarimoglu & Gunay, 2020).

Nevertheless, recent studies highlight that intention alone does not fully explain green purchasing behavior. Consumers often express strong pro-environmental attitudes without engaging in corresponding purchasing actions, suggesting the presence of additional psychological mechanisms. Scholars increasingly argue that factors such as trust, perceived authenticity, and brand-related perceptions are necessary to bridge the intention–behavior gap (Sharma et al., 2022).

2.2 Environmental Concern and Pro-Environmental Orientation

Environmental concern reflects individuals' awareness of environmental problems and their willingness to support solutions aimed at mitigating environmental harm. The Value–Belief–Norm (VBN) theory explains pro-environmental behavior as a process through which environmental values and beliefs activate personal moral norms, leading to environmentally responsible actions (Stern et al., 1999). Empirical evidence suggests that higher levels of environmental concern positively influence attitudes toward green brands and green purchase intention (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibañez, 2012; Joshi & Rahman, 2016).

However, environmental concern does not consistently translate into purchasing behavior when consumers doubt the credibility of green claims. This limitation underscores the importance of trust and emotional engagement in reinforcing environmentally responsible consumption.

2.3 Social Influence and Normative Pressures

Social influence plays a significant role in shaping consumer decision-making, particularly in collectivist cultures and emerging markets. Subjective norms, defined as perceived social pressure from significant others, have been shown to positively affect green purchase intentions (Ajzen, 1991; Wang et al., 2019). In low-involvement product categories such as FMCG, social networks and cultural norms further reinforce environmentally oriented consumption patterns (Perera et al., 2023).

Despite their influence, normative pressures alone are insufficient to sustain long-term green purchasing behavior without trust in the brand's environmental integrity.

2.4 Green Marketing Signals and Credibility

Signaling theory provides a useful perspective for understanding how firms communicate environmental responsibility to consumers under conditions of information asymmetry (Spence, 1978). Environmental labels, certifications, and sustainability communications function as signals that shape consumers' perceptions of brand credibility (Mahmoud et al., 2017). Consistent and transparent green marketing signals enhance green brand image and trust, whereas misleading signals erode consumer confidence (Papadas et al., 2017).

2.5 Green Brand Image, Affect, and Attitude

Green brand image represents consumers' cognitive evaluations of a brand's environmental commitment and performance (Chen, 2010). A favorable green brand image has been shown to reduce perceived environmental risk and enhance purchase intention (Chen & Chang, 2012). Beyond cognitive evaluations, emotional responses toward green brands—referred to as green brand affect—play a critical role in shaping consumer behavior. Positive emotions derived from a brand's environmental performance strengthen purchase intention and deepen consumer-brand relationships (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

2.6 Green Trust as a Central Mechanism

Green trust refers to consumers' willingness to rely on a brand based on beliefs regarding the credibility, reliability, and sincerity of its environmental claims (Chen & Chang, 2012). Trust is particularly important in green markets due to limited consumer ability to verify environmental performance directly. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that green trust enhances green purchase intention and fosters green brand loyalty, especially in contexts characterized by high skepticism and price sensitivity (Sharma & Foroapon, 2019)

2.7 Green Brand Loyalty and Long-Term Relationships

Green brand loyalty reflects consumers' commitment to repeatedly purchase and advocate for environmentally responsible brands. Prior studies indicate that perceived environmental responsibility strengthens loyalty through trust and brand image (Martínez & del Bosque, 2013). Emotional attachment further reinforces loyalty by creating enduring psychological bonds that extend beyond functional satisfaction (Martínez, 2015; Tingchi Liu et al., 2014).

2.8 Synthesis and Research Direction

The reviewed literature highlights the importance of cognitive, normative, and environmental factors in shaping green consumer behavior. However, existing research pays limited attention to the emotional processes through which trust and long-term loyalty are developed. Integrating emotional branding into green marketing research offers a promising approach for addressing trust deficits and explaining sustained green consumption. Building on this synthesis, the present study proposes a conceptual framework positioning emotional branding as a key antecedent of green trust, green purchase intention, and green brand loyalty.



3. Statement of the Problem

Despite growing environmental awareness, consumers remain skeptical of green brands due to greenwashing and inconsistent environmental claims. Existing green marketing strategies focus predominantly on rational appeals, neglecting emotional engagement. Consequently, trust deficits persist, limiting purchase intention and loyalty toward green products. There is a need to understand how emotional branding can address these challenges by strengthening trust and influencing consumer behavior.

4. Research Objectives

- To examine the role of emotional branding in green marketing
- To analyze the influence of emotional branding on green trust
- To investigate the impact of emotional branding on green purchase intention
- To explore the relationship between emotional branding and green brand loyalty
- To assess the mediating role of green trust

5. Research Gap

A review of existing literature reveals that:

- Emotional branding is underexplored in green marketing research
- Findings on green brand image and affect are inconsistent
- Trust antecedents are insufficiently explained
- Integrated models combining emotions, trust, and loyalty are scarce

This study addresses these gaps through a comprehensive conceptual framework.

6. Hypotheses Development

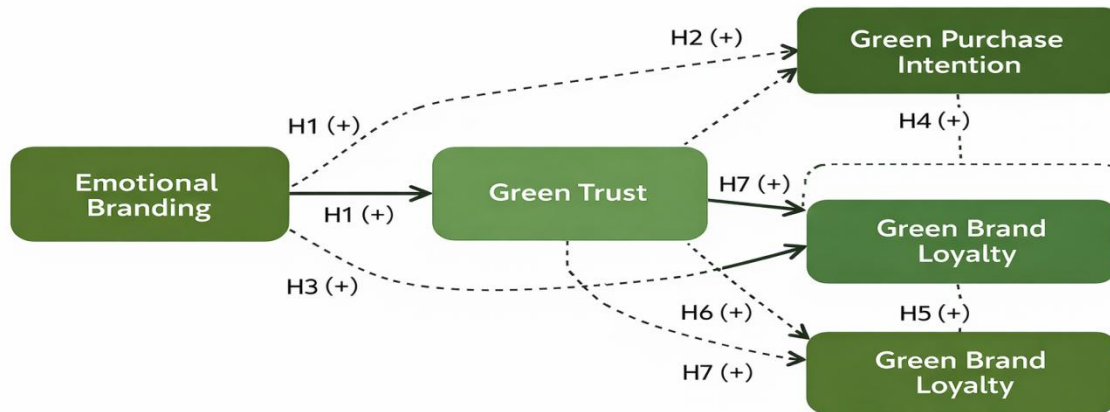
- H1: Emotional branding positively influences green trust.
- H2: Emotional branding positively influences green purchase intention.
- H3: Emotional branding positively influences green brand loyalty.
- H4: Green trust positively influences green purchase intention.
- H5: Green trust positively influences green brand loyalty.
- H6: Green trust mediates the relationship between emotional branding and green purchase intention.
- H7: Green trust mediates the relationship between emotional branding and green brand loyalty.

7. Research Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual research design based on secondary data analysis. Relevant literature was collected from peer-reviewed journals, books, and academic databases. A thematic synthesis approach was used to identify relationships among constructs and develop the proposed framework.

8. Conceptual Framework

The proposed model positions emotional branding as the primary antecedent influencing green trust, which in turn drives green purchase intention and green brand loyalty. Direct paths from emotional branding to purchase intention and loyalty are also proposed.



9. Theoretical Contributions

- Extends green marketing literature by integrating emotional branding theory
- Clarifies the emotional foundations of green trust
- Explains inconsistencies in prior empirical findings
- Proposes a comprehensive framework for future empirical testing

10. Managerial Implications

- Firms should focus on authentic emotional storytelling
- Emotional engagement can reduce skepticism and greenwashing perceptions
- Trust-based branding strategies enhance long-term loyalty
- Emotional branding can differentiate green products in competitive markets

11. Limitations and Future Research

As a conceptual study, this research lacks empirical validation. Future studies should test the proposed model using quantitative methods such as SEM or PLS-SEM, explore cultural differences, and conduct longitudinal research.

12. Conclusion

This study highlights emotional branding as a crucial driver of trust, purchase intention, and loyalty toward green products. By emphasizing emotional engagement alongside environmental responsibility, firms can foster stronger consumer relationships and promote sustainable consumption. The proposed framework offers a robust foundation for advancing green branding research.

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