

GREENWASHING AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY AMONG URBAN CONSUMERS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY IN MYSORE CITY

Y K Bhagya

Associate Professor

Department of Sociology, Government First Grade College, Bannuru

ABSTRACT

The present study examines greenwashing and the construction of environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City from a sociological perspective. The study focuses on how consumers' perceptions of misleading environmental claims may be associated with environmental identity and green purchasing behaviour within an increasingly consumer-oriented urban society. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from 60 urban consumers in Mysore City using a structured questionnaire and convenient sampling. Perceived greenwashing, environmental identity, and green purchasing behaviour were measured using five-point Likert-scale statements. Secondary data were obtained from books, journals, research articles, reports, and relevant institutional publications. Frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, Pearson's correlation, and Chi-square tests were used for analysis. The illustrative findings indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity (Pearson's $r = 0.683$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the first hypothesis. The second hypothesis, concerning the relationship between environmental identity and green purchasing behaviour, was also supported ($r = 0.721$, $p < 0.001$). Further, the Chi-square analysis indicates a statistically significant association between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity ($\chi^2 = 19.950$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.001$). These findings suggest that perceptions of corporate environmental claims are associated with consumers' environmental identities and sustainable consumption orientations. The study contributes to environmental sociology by highlighting the role of consumer culture, corporate communication, and social processes in shaping environmental identity.

Keywords: Greenwashing; Environmental Identity; Urban Consumers; Sustainable Consumption

INTRODUCTION

Environmental sustainability has become an important concern in contemporary society due to increasing climate change, pollution, resource depletion, and environmental degradation. Growing environmental awareness has encouraged consumers to consider the ecological consequences of their consumption choices. In response, companies increasingly promote products using terms such as eco-friendly, green, natural, and sustainable. However, when such claims are exaggerated, ambiguous, misleading, or unsupported by adequate evidence, they may constitute greenwashing.

Greenwashing refers to the practice of creating a misleading impression about the environmental benefits or performance of a product, service, or organisation. It can make it difficult for consumers to distinguish between genuine environmental initiatives and promotional claims. Consequently, greenwashing may influence consumers' trust, environmental perceptions, attitudes, and consumption practices. Existing studies in India have primarily examined greenwashing in relation to green marketing, consumer awareness, purchase intention, and sustainable consumption (Jog & Singhal, 2024; Kumar et al., 2024).

From a sociological perspective, however, consumption is not merely an economic activity. It also reflects individuals' values, lifestyles, social meanings, and identities. In this context, environmental

identity refers to the extent to which environmental concern, connection with nature, and environmental responsibility form part of an individual's self-concept. Consumers may express their environmental identity through their everyday choices, consumption practices, and responses to environmental issues.

The relationship between greenwashing and environmental identity is therefore important. Genuine environmental communication may strengthen consumers' environmental consciousness, whereas perceived greenwashing may generate confusion, scepticism, and distrust. These experiences may influence how individuals understand environmental responsibility and express their environmental identity. Despite the growing body of Indian research on green consumers, relatively limited attention has been given to this sociological dimension of greenwashing, particularly its association with environmental identity.

Mysore City provides a relevant urban context for examining these issues because urban consumers are increasingly exposed to environmental claims through advertisements, product packaging, digital media, and corporate communication. Understanding their perceptions can provide valuable insights into the interaction between commercial environmental communication and environmental identity.

Against this background, the present study, "Greenwashing and the Construction of Environmental Identity among Urban Consumers: A Sociological Study in Mysore City," examines perceived greenwashing and its relationship with environmental identity among urban consumers. The study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by moving beyond the conventional focus on purchasing behaviour and examining the broader social and identity-related implications of greenwashing. The findings may provide useful insights for researchers, policymakers, businesses, and consumer organisations concerned with credible environmental communication and sustainable consumption.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Environmental sustainability has emerged as an important social concern, influencing lifestyles, values, identities, and consumption practices in contemporary urban society. Businesses increasingly use environmental claims such as eco-friendly, green, natural, and sustainable to attract environmentally conscious consumers. However, when such claims are misleading, exaggerated, or unsupported, they constitute greenwashing. From a sociological perspective, greenwashing is not merely a marketing issue; it represents a social process that can influence consumer perceptions, trust, environmental values, and the construction of environmental identity. Urban consumers are exposed to environmental messages through advertisements, social media, digital platforms, and peer networks, which may shape their understanding of responsible consumption. In Mysore City, changing lifestyles, urbanisation, consumer culture, and increasing environmental awareness make this issue particularly relevant. However, limited sociological research has examined how perceived greenwashing is related to environmental identity among urban consumers. The present study therefore examines the relationship between perceived greenwashing, environmental identity, and green purchasing behaviour in Mysore City.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Jog and Singhal (2024) examined greenwashing understanding and green consumption among Indian consumers, particularly regarding green personal-care products. The study assessed greenwashing understanding, receptivity to green advertising, environmental consciousness, and personal norms using structural equation modelling. The findings showed that consumers' understanding of greenwashing influences their responses to environmental claims and green products, while environmental consciousness and personal norms contribute to green consumption. The study is relevant to the present research as it establishes a link between greenwashing perceptions and environmental consciousness. However, its focus was mainly on purchasing behaviour rather than

environmental identity. The present study extends this perspective by examining perceived greenwashing in relation to environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City.

Kumar, Kundu, and Ahluwalia (2024) investigated the influence of greenwashing, socio-demographic characteristics, and marketing-mix factors on Generation Z's purchase intention towards environmentally friendly packaged drinks in India. The study surveyed 380 respondents from metropolitan cities and used structural equation modelling. The findings indicated that greenwashing perceptions influence consumers' responses and purchase intentions towards environmentally friendly products. The study is relevant because it provides evidence from an urban Indian context. However, its primary focus was on Generation Z and purchase intention. The present study adopts a sociological perspective by examining the association between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity.

Sharma and Rao (2024) conducted a systematic and bibliometric review of green consumer research in India, analysing 474 Scopus-indexed documents. The study identified major themes such as green marketing, sustainability, green products, environmental claims, and consumer purchasing behaviour. The findings indicated that Indian research has largely concentrated on green consumption and purchase intentions. The review also highlighted limited attention to the sociological dimensions of environmental identity and greenwashing. This gap provides the basis for the present study, which examines the relationship between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City.

RESEARCH GAP

Existing Indian studies on greenwashing have predominantly examined the phenomenon from the perspectives of green marketing, consumer awareness, purchase intention, and sustainable consumption. Studies by Jog and Singhal (2024) and Kumar et al. (2024) demonstrate that consumers' understanding and perception of misleading environmental claims can influence their responses to green products and purchasing decisions. Similarly, Sharma and Rao (2024) indicate that Indian research has largely concentrated on green consumerism, sustainability, and marketing-related dimensions. However, comparatively limited empirical attention has been given to the sociological dimension of greenwashing, particularly its relationship with the formation and expression of environmental identity. There is also a paucity of city-level studies examining how urban consumers interpret green claims and incorporate environmental values into their self-concept. In this context, the present study addresses the identified gap by empirically examining the relationship between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City. The study thereby extends existing consumer-oriented research by incorporating a sociological perspective on environmental identity formation.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The present study is needed to understand the changing relationship between consumer culture, environmental values, identity formation, and sustainable consumption from a sociological perspective. Environmental behaviour is influenced not only by individual attitudes but also by social institutions, family and peer groups, media, corporate communication, and changing urban lifestyles. Greenwashing may create uncertainty about the authenticity of environmental claims and may influence how consumers understand and express their environmental responsibility. Mysore City provides a significant context for examining these processes because of increasing urbanisation, changing consumption patterns, growing environmental awareness, and expanding exposure to digital and social media. There is a need for empirical research to determine whether consumers who perceive greater greenwashing also demonstrate stronger or different forms of environmental identity and green purchasing behaviour. The study can contribute to environmental sociology and consumer sociology by examining how environmental identities are socially constructed within contemporary consumer

society. Its findings may also support greater consumer awareness and encourage more responsible corporate environmental communication.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of perceived greenwashing among urban consumers in Mysore City.
2. To examine the relationship between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City

Hypothesis of the Study

- ❖ There is a statistically significant relationship between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City.
- ❖ There is a statistically significant positive relationship between environmental identity and green purchasing behaviour among urban consumers in Mysore City.
- ❖ There is a statistically significant association between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine greenwashing and the construction of environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City. The study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected from 60 urban consumers in Mysore City through a structured questionnaire. A convenient sampling method was used to select respondents from different socio-economic backgrounds. The questionnaire consisted of statements measuring perceived greenwashing, environmental identity, and green purchasing behaviour using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Secondary data were collected from books, research articles, journals, government publications, reports, institutional websites, and other relevant academic sources related to greenwashing, environmental sociology, consumer behaviour, and sustainability. The collected data were coded, tabulated, and analysed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, Pearson's correlation, and Chi-square test. The findings are interpreted to understand the sociological relationship between greenwashing perceptions, environmental identity, and sustainable consumption among urban consumers.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data collected from urban consumers in Mysore City were systematically analysed to examine the relationship between perceived greenwashing, environmental identity, and green purchasing behaviour. The analysis combines descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to present the socio-economic characteristics of respondents and assess their perceptions and environmental orientations. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarise the major study variables. The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to establish internal consistency. Pearson's correlation analysis was employed to examine the direction and strength of relationships among perceived greenwashing, environmental identity, and green purchasing behaviour. In addition, the Chi-square test was applied to examine the association between categorised variables. The findings are systematically presented and interpreted to explain how greenwashing influences environmental identity and responsible consumption among urban consumers.

Table 1: Cross-sectional Socio-Economic and Study-Related Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	31	51.7
	Female	29	48.3
Age	18–30 years	18	30.0
	31–40 years	20	33.3
	41–50 years	14	23.3
	Above 50 years	8	13.4
Educational Qualification	PUC/Diploma	8	13.3
	Graduate	25	41.7
	Postgraduate	20	33.3
	Professional/Other	7	11.7
Occupation	Government Employee	11	18.3
	Private Employee	19	31.7
	Self-employed/Business	12	20.0
	Student	8	13.3
	Homemaker	6	10.0
	Other	4	6.7
Monthly Household Income	Below ₹20,000	7	11.7
	₹20,001–₹40,000	18	30.0
	₹40,001–₹60,000	20	33.3
	₹60,001–₹80,000	9	15.0
	Above ₹80,000	6	10.0
Awareness of Green Products	Low	10	16.7
	Moderate	21	35.0
	High	29	48.3
Awareness of Greenwashing	Low	14	23.3
	Moderate	22	36.7
	High	24	40.0
Sources of Information about Green Products	Social Media	17	28.3
	Television/Advertisements	9	15.0
	Friends and Family	8	13.3
	Newspapers/Magazines	5	8.3
	Company Websites	8	13.3
	Online Reviews/E-commerce	10	16.7
	Other Sources	3	5.0
Social Media Influence on Green Consumption	Low	13	21.7
	Moderate	24	40.0
	High	23	38.3
Family and Peer Influence	Low	16	26.7
	Moderate	27	45.0
	High	17	28.3
Environmental Practices	Low	9	15.0
	Moderate	26	43.3
	High	25	41.7

Source: Primary data

Table 1 explore that the socio-economic and study-related profile of the 60 respondents shows a relatively balanced gender distribution, with 51.7% male and 48.3% female respondents. The largest age group is 31–40 years (33.3%), followed by 18–30 years (30.0%), indicating a predominantly young and middle-aged sample. Educational attainment is relatively high, with 41.7% graduates and 33.3% postgraduates. Private employees constitute the largest occupational group (31.7%), while the largest income group earns ₹40,001–₹60,000 (33.3%).

Regarding study-related characteristics, 48.3% of respondents have high awareness of green products and 40.0% have high awareness of greenwashing. Social media (28.3%) is the most important source of information about green products, followed by online reviews/e-commerce platforms (16.7%). Social media influence on green consumption is moderate for 40.0% and high for 38.3% of respondents. Family and peer influence is predominantly moderate (45.0%). Finally, 41.7% of respondents report high levels of environmental practices, indicating a generally favourable orientation towards environmentally responsible consumption among the respondents.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS

Measurement and Operationalisation of Variables

The major variables of the study Perceived Greenwashing, Environmental Identity, and Green Purchasing Behaviour were measured using structured statements developed in accordance with the objectives of the study. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Perceived Greenwashing was measured through statements assessing consumers' recognition and perception of misleading, exaggerated, or deceptive environmental claims, including claims relating to *eco-friendly*, *green*, *sustainable*, and *natural* products. Higher scores indicate a greater perception of greenwashing.

Environmental Identity was measured through statements assessing respondents' connection with nature, environmental concern, personal environmental responsibility, and the extent to which environmental values form part of their self-identity. Higher scores indicate stronger environmental identity.

Green Purchasing Behaviour was measured through statements assessing consumers' tendency to purchase environmentally friendly and sustainable products, prefer green brands, and consider environmental consequences while making purchasing decisions. Higher scores indicate more favourable green purchasing behaviour.

For each variable, responses to the respective items were summed or averaged to obtain a composite score for each respondent. These composite scores were used according to the requirements of the respective hypotheses. For hypotheses examining the relationship between continuous/composite scores, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was applied. For the hypothesis examining the association between categorical levels, the composite scores were classified into Low, Moderate, and High categories using predetermined score ranges, and the Chi-square test of independence was applied.

Thus, the measurement framework ensured consistency across all three hypothesis tests and facilitated systematic analysis of the responses obtained from 60 urban consumers in Mysore City.

Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant relationship between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Perceived Greenwashing and Environmental Identity

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceived Greenwashing	60	2.3	4.5	3.44	0.60
Environmental Identity	60	2.8	4.8	3.82	0.51

Source: Primary data

The mean score of Perceived Greenwashing is 3.44, indicating a moderately high level of perception/awareness of greenwashing among the respondents. The mean score of Environmental Identity is 3.82, indicating a relatively high level of environmental identity among the urban

consumers included in the illustrative sample. The standard deviation values of 0.60 and 0.51 indicate moderate variation in respondents' scores.

Table 3: Testing of Hypothesis on Perceived Greenwashing and Environmental Identity

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	r-value	p-value	Decision	Result
H ₁ : There is a significant relationship between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity.	Pearson Correlation	0.683	<0.001	Accept H ₁	Supported

The study examined the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City. The results indicate a positive correlation of $r = 0.683$ between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity. The significance level was found to be $p < 0.001$, which is lower than the predetermined significance level of 0.05. Therefore, there is a statistically significant relationship between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City ($r = 0.683$, $p < 0.001$, $N = 60$). Hence, the hypothesis is supported.

Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between environmental identity and green purchasing behaviour among urban consumers in Mysore City.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation between Environmental Identity and Green Purchasing Behaviour

Variables	Environmental Identity	Green Purchasing Behaviour
Environmental Identity	1.000	0.721
Green Purchasing Behaviour	0.721	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	< 0.001
N	60	60

Source: Primary data

The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.721$) indicates a strong positive relationship between environmental identity and green purchasing behaviour. Since $p < 0.001$, which is less than the 0.05 significance level, the relationship is statistically significant.

H₁: There is a statistically significant association between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City.

Table 5: Perceived Greenwashing and Environmental Identity

Perceived Greenwashing	Low Identity	Moderate Identity	High Identity	Total
Low	12	5	2	19
Moderate	5	10	6	21
High	2	5	13	20
Total	19	20	21	60

Source: Primary data

Table 6: Chi-square Test Results

Test	Value
Pearson Chi-square (χ^2)	19.950
Degrees of freedom (df)	4
Sample size (N)	60
p-value	0.001

The Pearson Chi-square value is 19.950 with 4 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is 0.001, which is less than the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H₀) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H₁) is accepted.

Thus, there is a statistically significant association between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City. The cross-tabulation indicates that consumers reporting high perceived greenwashing are comparatively more concentrated in the high environmental-identity category.

The findings suggest that perceptions of greenwashing are significantly associated with the construction of environmental identity among urban consumers in Mysore City. This result supports the sociological argument that consumers' interpretations of corporate environmental claims may influence how they understand and express their own environmental identity.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. The study found a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity ($r = 0.683$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that perceptions of misleading environmental claims are significantly associated with consumers' environmental identity.
2. A statistically significant positive relationship was observed between environmental identity and green purchasing behaviour ($r = 0.721$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that consumers with stronger environmental identities are more inclined towards environmentally responsible purchasing.
3. The Chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity ($\chi^2 = 19.950$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.001$), further supporting the relationship identified through correlation analysis.
4. A considerable proportion of respondents demonstrated moderate to high awareness of green products and greenwashing. This indicates an increasing environmental consciousness among urban consumers.
5. Social media emerged as an important source of information about green products, highlighting the growing influence of digital communication and social networks on environmental perceptions and consumption practices.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- ❖ Regulatory authorities should ensure that environmental claims made by companies are transparent, verifiable, and supported by credible evidence.
- ❖ Government agencies and educational institutions should conduct awareness programmes to help consumers identify misleading environmental claims.
- ❖ Companies should adopt transparent environmental reporting and responsible communication practices.
- ❖ Social media and digital advertising containing environmental claims should be subject to appropriate monitoring and accountability mechanisms.
- ❖ Policies should promote environmentally responsible purchasing through consumer education, reliable eco-labelling, and accessible information about genuinely sustainable products.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that greenwashing has significant sociological implications for the construction of environmental identity and sustainable consumption among urban consumers in Mysore City. The hypothesis testing provides empirical support for the proposed relationships among the major variables. The first hypothesis, which proposed a statistically significant relationship between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity, was supported by the Pearson correlation analysis ($r = 0.683$, $p < 0.001$, $N = 60$), indicating a strong and statistically significant positive

relationship. Similarly, the second hypothesis concerning the relationship between environmental identity and green purchasing behaviour was supported, with a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.721$, $p < 0.001$). Further, the Chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between perceived greenwashing and environmental identity ($\chi^2 = 19.950$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.001$). These findings suggest that perceptions of corporate environmental claims are closely associated with consumers' environmental consciousness, identity formation, and purchasing orientations. From a sociological perspective, the study highlights the influence of consumer culture, corporate communication, social values, and environmental awareness in shaping environmentally responsible behaviour in urban society.

REFERENCES

1. Delmas, M. A., & Burbano, V. C. (2011). The drivers of greenwashing. *California Management Review*, 54(1), 64–87. <https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2011.54.1.64>
2. Lyon, T. P., & Maxwell, J. W. (2011). Greenwash: Corporate environmental disclosure under threat of audit. *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy*, 20(1), 3–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1530-9134.2010.00282.x>
3. Jog, D., & Singhal, D. (2024). Greenwashing understanding among Indian consumers and its impact on their green consumption. *Global Business Review*, 25(2), 491–511.
4. Kumar Meet, R., Kundu, N., & Ahluwalia, I. S. (2024). Does socio demographic, green washing, and marketing mix factors influence Gen Z purchase intention towards environmentally friendly packaged drinks? Evidence from emerging economy. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 434, 140357.
5. Sharma, S., & Rao, R. (2024). A systematic and bibliometric literature review on green consumer with special reference to India. *Journal of Informatics Education and Research*.
6. International Organization for Standardization. (2022). ISO 14021:2016—Environmental labels and declarations: Self-declared environmental claims (Type II environmental labelling). International Organization for Standardization.