

# Exploring Consumer-Based-Brand-Equity and Its Effects on Green Advertising and Greenwashing – a Literature Review

Laszlo Alexandru GYORI<sup>1</sup>, Flavia Dana OLTEAN<sup>2</sup> and Manuela Rozalia GABOR<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> Amazon Spain Services, Department of Translation Services, Spain.

<sup>2)</sup> Department of Economic Science, Faculty of Economic and Law,

<sup>3)</sup> Department of Economic Research, Centre for Law, Economics and Business Studies,

<sup>3)</sup> IOSUD-Doctoral School, “G. E. Palade” University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science and Technology of Targu Mures, Târgu Mureș, Romania.

E-mail: alexandru.gyori10@gmail.com; E-mail: flavia.oltean@umfst.ro; E-mail: manuela.gabor@umfst.ro

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## Abstract

Consumer-based-brand equity represents an important concept for managers who want to increase the efficiency of their brand, especially when they have a green approach. Their strategies focus on creating awareness of the green products to be perceived as an eco-friendly company. Exaggerated efforts and misleading acts, however, create greenwashing, and it has negative effects on the brand. To have successful green strategies, managers need to understand how consumer-based-brand-equity affects positively or negatively green advertising. This study, using literature review as methodology, analysed the concept of consumer-based-brand-equity in relation to green advertising or greenwashing. The authors investigated a number of 33 articles in the attempt to provide an overview of the current frameworks. In addition, this study provides the readers with the four main factors of consumer-based-brand-equity that influence green advertising. Theoretical implications suggest a need for further exploration into the interplay between green advertising, consumer trust, and brand equity, particularly in the context of combating greenwashing. Practical implications highlight the importance of clearer communication and reduced ambiguity in green marketing claims to enhance consumer trust and sustain competitive advantage in the marketplace.

## Keywords

Consumer-based-brand-equity; green advertising; greenwashing; competitive advantage; brand performance

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## Introduction

To survive in the marketplace, successful brands must develop and maintain distinctive images to sustain their competitive advantage (Aaker, 1991; Pappu et al., 2005). Consumer-based-brand-equity (CBBE) is crucial for driving customer equity, differentiating brands, measuring brand performance, and gaining competitive advantage in the market (Lae et al., 2016; Naveed et al., 2017; Rana et al., 2020). Companies are using “environmental” or “green” marketing as a critical tool to attract green consumers, also referring to consumers who are environmentally concerned (Chang 2011; Chen & Chang 2013a; Rana et al., 2020). This leads companies to undertake greenwashing (a misleading act to make false claims about the environmental functionality of the products or services a company offers) to seize green opportunities and improve their image into a “greener” one (Yongo & Binbin, 2022).

However, despite the recognized significance of CBBE, there remains a discernible gap in the existing research, particularly in addressing the complex interplay between branding, environmental marketing, and consumer behavior. In light of this gap, this paper aims to address the following research question(s): How

does greenwashing impact consumer-based brand equity in the context of environmental marketing? What are the underlying mechanisms influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors in response to greenwashing strategies?

The purpose of this research is to elucidate the intricate dynamics between greenwashing, consumer-based brand equity, and environmental marketing strategies, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the contemporary branding landscape. By identifying and analyzing these dynamics, this study seeks to provide actionable insights for businesses to navigate the complexities of environmental marketing, mitigate the risks of greenwashing, and enhance brand equity authentically and sustainably.

The findings of this study are anticipated to shed light on the nuanced relationships between greenwashing, consumer-based brand equity, and environmental marketing strategies. Moreover, by emphasizing the mechanisms through which greenwashing influences consumer perceptions and behaviors, this study contributes to theoretical advancements in marketing literature. Furthermore, the practical insights gleaned from this research offer tangible benefits for businesses striving to build and maintain authentic, environmentally responsible brand images.

The structured of the paper is organized as follows: following the introduction, subsequent sections will delve into the theoretical background, which provides the theoretical foundations and empirical insights into the concepts of greenwashing, CBBE and green marketing strategies. Next, the research methodology will be outlined, detailing the approach employed by the authors to investigate the research question. Following, the review of scientific literature section dives into the above constructs in the attempt to map the current research. Finally, the paper will conclude with implications for theory and practice, along with areas for future research.

## 1. Theoretical background

In this so called “green era” companies are eager to find new ways to market their products and services (Chang, 2011; Chen and Chang 2013a; Netto et al., 2020) due to fact that customers worldwide are becoming more aware of the environmental issues (Tseng et al., 2017). In response to the environmental issues, some consumers are changing their consumption behavior and are becoming more likely to purchase so called “green products” (Chen and Chang 2013b). Environmental or green marketing is a critical tool for companies to attract consumers who are environmentally concerned. This leads to more and more companies exploiting green marketing to differentiate their green products from their competitors. (Netto et al., 2020).

Green advertising is an essential part of consumer marketing. It promotes companies, products or services that counter or reduce environmental harm (Rana et al., 2020). At the beginning of green marketing in the early 90’s, the primary focus was on the ecological context, but under the recent years the focus has been shifted to sustainability issues, this means that the primary focus now is on the socioeconomic and environmental context (Mohanasundaram, 2012). Companies are using advertising terms such as “green”, “eco”, “environmentally friendly”, “sustainable”, and “earth friendly” (Parguel et al., 2011) to target consumers who lead a green lifestyle (Divine and Lepisto, 2005). However, in recent years there has been cases where companies have abused of such advertising terms leading to many green claims related to environmental attributes to be unclear and unreliable (Rana et al., 2020; Netto et al., 2020).

Greenwashing is described as a misleading act to make consumers believe the environmental benefits of a product or service or the environmental practices of a company (Parguel et al., 2011). Greenwash is not just an academic concern topic, many NGO such as Greenpeace, Sierra Club, Biofuelwatch are working around this topic making it more interesting and relevant for this study. Greenpeace (n.d.) defines greenwash as “the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service”.

Many experts consider that few consumers are making the “green call”; this problem lies within the rub or disconnect between the stated green beliefs and observed green behavior of consumers (Brammah and Tweneboah-Koduah, 2011). Social scientists explain why this gap between customers stated green beliefs and their actual green behavior exist. If customer's decision-making contexts is observed, you find that customers pursue their self-interest by embracing personal benefits or avoiding personal costs (Lewin et al., 2011). These manifestations play out in ways that exercise divergent and often opposing effects on their subsequent beliefs and behaviors (Lewin et al., 2011). Due to this factor, green marketing strategies often requires more than the execution of short-term marketing plans based on analysis of information at the present time (Yongbo and Binbin, 2022). Marketers have responded tactically to consumers' desire to go green by designing, manufacturing, and distributing environmentally friendlier products, even if the

customers desire often is consciously unfulfilled.

Either way, green marketing strategies are difficult to execute successfully because they are complicated and costly (Davari and Strutton, 2014; Tseng et al., 2017). In fact, green strategies give positive result and profit to firms that are positioned well in the minds of targeted consumers for whatever green brand or cause is being marketed (Aaker, 1991; Davari and Strutton, 2014). More successful green strategies can be called the strategies that not only are well positioned in the minds of targeted consumers but also generate more favourable brand associations, greater credibility or trust, enhanced perceptions of brand quality and higher brand loyalty among targeted groups of consumers. These four communication outcomes together form the CBBE construct (Aaker, 1991; Blackstone, 1992; Laee et al., 2016). The purpose of this study is to provide an extent literature review on CBBE and its relations with green advertising and greenwashing in order to present the different approaches existing in regards of green marketing and to have an overview on this topic.

## 2. Research methodology

The purpose of this paper is to provide insights into the dynamics of greenwashing, CBBE and environmental green strategies. For the purpose of this study, articles were searched using Google Scholar as a data search. The search was focused only on academic and peer-reviewed journals, the keywords applied were: CBBE; green advertising and greenwashing. Initial search for each keywords resulted the following: CBBE (297.000 results); green advertising (1.270,000 results); greenwashing (17.000 results). When we added “green advertising” to “CBBE” the results were reduced to 37. Furthermore, adding “greenwashing” to “CBBE” reduced our search to 44 results. using this procedure, we had a few 81 articles. After screening each article and reading the abstracts and conclusions of each articles several 18 articles remained. Thirty-three articles were covering the effects of green advertising or greenwashing on brand equity which was the other way around of the topic so they were excluded, nine articles were covering the reasons why companies were involved in greenwashing which wasn't necessary for the topic, seven articles were treating the financial perspective of brand equity, five articles were about the customers behaviours in relation the country of origin made products, five more articles were only focusing on purchase behaviours associated with green products and four articles were dealing with brand avoidance

Each article was read and treated with attention. After this process, a search for patterns was initiated. Following, we separated the literature review on themes; green advertising (Hanas, 2007; Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2009; Hassan & Valenzuela, 2016), greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Horiuchi & Schuchard, 2009; Parguel et al., 2011); brand associations (Aaker & Equity, 1991; Keller, 1993; MacKay et al., 1997); brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Oliver, 1999; Yoo & Donthu, 2001), brand trust (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alema'n, 2005; Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000; Yoo et al., 2000) and perceived brand quality (Chen et al., 2014; Lam, 2006; Netemeyer et al., 2004).

## 3. Review of the scientific literature, results and discussions

**Consumer-based-brand-equity (CBBE).** Literature on CBBE is pretty vast and has its origins in the early 90's when Aaker (1991) discussed the importance and dimensions of this concept. Consequently, many scholars understood the importance and the implication of CBBE and approached this topic by defining it and trying the approach from different perspectives (Srivastava and Shocker, 1991; Lassar et al., 1995; Keller, 1993; Mackay et al., 1997). In the new millennium this concept has been still analyzed, but not as much as in the past years, therefore we can agree that the dominant literature regarding CBBE is in the 90's.

There is a lack of agreement when it comes to defining CBBE. Various definitions exist in the literature. First scholars who focused on CBBE are Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). They analysed brand equity from consumers' perspective. Other scholars (Yoo and Donthu, 2001; Mackay et al., 1997) agree with Aaker (1991) that CBBE refers to a value added to a brand. Moreover, a similar but more output-oriented definition is given by Srivastava and Shocker (1991) who introduce channel members as an important aspect of CBBE. Hence, a common agreement between the authors in this definition is that CBBE refers to consumer's behavior and attitudes regarding a brand which allows the brand the gain competitive advantage without using the brand's name. Brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived brand quality (PBQ) and brand association has been identified as the main dimensions of CBBE (Pappu et al., 2005; Davari and Strutton, 2014). Another conceptualization is offered by Keller (1993) who mention brand knowledge and brand awareness as two main pillars. Hence, a more abstract approach is offered by Lassar et al. (1995) who based his study on Keller's (1993) conceptualization, but he replaced the quality dimensions with performance.

**Green advertising.** Polonsky (1994, p. 2) defines green marketing as “all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy human needs, such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occurs, with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment”. Another definition from Banerjee et al. (1995, p. 22), “advertising are considered green advertising when they address these different criteria: (a) addresses the relationship of the product and the environment, (b) promote a green way of life without highlighting a product, or (c) show a corporate image with a environmental friendly image or responsibility”. Green marketing can also be defined as “the endeavors of a company to produce, promote and distribute products in a way that is sensitive to the environment” (Davari and Strutton, 2014, p.565). The researchers commonly agree that there is not only one definition for the term green advertising since it is a broad concept that can be studied through different angle, for example the different definitions don’t agree on the impact of the company while doing green advertising, it can be minimal according to Polonsky (1994), a relation with the environment according to Banerjee et al., (1995) or it can be a sensitive effort to produce according to

Davari and Strutton (2014). However the researchers have different points of view when they define green advertising, Polonsky (1994) mention to satisfy the human needs and procure satisfaction with having the minimal impact on the environment when Banerjee et al., (1995) advocate for criterias to consider advertising as green such as a relationship between the product and the environment, promote more an environmental way of life instead of promoting the product and finally advertise the green corporate image. The last definition of Davari and Strutton (2014) only mention the need for a company to behave sensibly towards the environment in the whole process of production, communication, and distribution. The authors agree on this definition for green advertising as, a type of advertising focused on the promotion of environmental products and behaviours.

**Greenwashing.** The term greenwashing was introduced by Karna et al. (2001) as “environmental advertising without environmental substance” (p. 60). Polonsky et al. (2010) defined greenwashing as “the type of advertising or marketing that mislead customers about the environmental functionality of the products or services a company offers” (p.53). Another definition of the term “greenwashing” is given by Delmas & Burbano (2011) as “The intersection of two firm behaviors: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance” (p.65). According to past different definitions, there is a shift in the definition from “the lack of environmental substance” (Karna et al., 2001) to a “misleading act” (Polonsky et al., 2010; Aji & Sutikno, 2015). This difference of definition can be explained by the increase of skepticism toward green advertising as mentioned by Mohanasundaram (2012), the shift from an early ecological primary focus to a recent socioeconomic and environmental focus. The definition of Delmas & Burbano (2011) is more communication oriented since it presents the junction of a positive environmental communication despite poor environmental performance. The authors commonly agreed for a definition for the term of greenwashing “environmental communication of a company lacking true and concrete facts, that can mislead the consumer or the different stakeholders by giving a false green image”.

Netto et al., (2020) affirms that green marketing mix evoke green product development and it refers to product, price, promotion, place whose aim is to preserve environmental welfare. Consequently, marketing mix and green marketing mix are differentiated by their goal, green marketing mix aims to satisfy environmental needs (Chan et al., 2012). In their research Davari & Strutton (2014) explores the effects of green marketing strategies on the brand equity that companies can generate. They analyze the relationships between the marketing mix elements that commute the implementation of green strategies. CBBE is shaped when consumers become aware of the brand and they form a positive or negative association with it (Keller, 1993). Positive association can lead companies to a competitive advantage, meanwhile negative association of the brand raise skepticism and lack of trust of consumers towards the brand and it can affect a company on long term (Davari & Strutton, 2014).

**CBBE in relation with green advertising and greenwashing.** Generating favourable brand associations, higher credibility, enhanced perceptions of brand quality and higher brand loyalty is often done by adopting successful strategies when it comes to green advertising. These communication outcomes constitute together not coincidentally the construct of consumer-based-brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Blackstone, 1992, Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Davari & Strutton, 2014) (Appendix A).

**Brand associations** refers to “anything linked in memory to a brand” (Aaker, 1991, p 109). Another approach is given by Keller (1993), who affirms that associations are formed in two ways, one way is on the basis of direct experience with the product or service and the second way is by information about that product communicated by the company or word of mouth. Lassar et al. (1995) reinforces Keller's' (1993) study and argue that word of mouth brings benefits to the company and increase green advertising effectiveness. Hence, Netto et al. (2020) claim that word of mouth can have a negative effect on the

effectiveness of green advertising and moreover it can damage a company especially when they are involved in greenwashing.

The associations that comprise the brand loyalty according to Keller (1993) are functional, experiential, symbolic benefits and the overall attributes towards the brand. Importance of associations is shown by Lassar et al., (1995) who regard brand equity as association consumers hold. Davari & Stratton (2014) hypothesised that green marketing mix elements are positively related to brand associations, however their findings showed that for brand associations, only green product was relevant. Product attributes are formed by purchasing and consuming green products. Non product attributes (pricing information, packaging), are formed in the same way by consumer's interactions with the company. These interactions may consist of the consumers' exposure to green products, learning about prices and promotions (Davari & Stratton, 2014). For consumers it's easier to evaluate brands during the decision-making process because of brand associations (Yoo et al., 2000). Brand association may have a positive influence on green advertising on one hand, but on the other hand it can negatively affect green advertising.

**Brand loyalty** refers to the brand's capability to influence consumer's future decision in a positive way, in order to re-buy a preferred product or service (Oliver, 1999). According to Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001), brand loyalty contains two primary dimensions: behavioral and attitudinal (or cognitive). Behavioral loyalty is associated with repeated purchase behavior. In contrast, attitudinal loyalty arises from the emotional connection that consumers form with the brand (Davari & Stratton, 2014). Effective green advertising raises the need of communicating with consumers. Furthermore, this communication will not only increase brand awareness, but it will build loyalty towards the company (Lae et al., 2016; Rana et al., 2020). Company's goal when adopting green strategies is to build attitudinal loyalty by creating products which satisfy consumers' needs and desires and by providing consumers benefits that justify the premium price. (Parker, 2015). Communicating and advertising green products through specific channels where environmental responsibilities are considered important is also a tool to enhance loyalty to consumers (Rana et al., 2020). These attitudinal attachments should motivate consumers to rebuy the products of a brand once they are formed. A characteristic of loyal consumers is that they have the tendency to buy brands habitually instead of switching between brands (Yoo et al., 2000). Rana et al. (2020) argues that this will increase CBBE by creating loyal customers. Moreover, Aaker (1991) argues that loyal customers give companies time to react on competitive threats because loyal customers are less likely to change brands. However, Davari & Stratton (2014) study shows that the price of green products has a negative influence on CBBE, therefore if the price increases it will have a negative effect on consumers' loyalty. Therefore, brand loyalty has the potential to increase the effectiveness of green advertising by influencing all marketing mix components (Aaker, 1991; Oliver, 1999). Nonetheless, some practices of companies in their efforts to increase their performances have a negative effect on the consumer's loyalty.

**Brand trust** plays an essential role in green marketing background (Flavian et al., 2005). Trust is heightened if consumers have positive beliefs towards the honesty, responsibility and competence of the brand (Davari & Stratton, 2014). Brand trust has been explained by Burmann et al. (2009) as the degree to which consumers believe their promises will be pleased by the given brands. When consumers are facing uncertainty the influence of brand trust is increasing (Davari & Stratton, 2014). Brand trust is developed over time and it distributes as proxy for consumers' previous understandings and experiences with the brand (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alema'n, 2005). Consumers' engagement to brand relationship can be increased by the presence of the consumers trust according to social exchange theories (Grayson & Ambler, 1999; Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000). Davari & Stratton (2014) argue that companies can exploit green channel distributions in order to demonstrate their concern about environment. Consequently, designing and promoting reliable green products can increase the trust (Davari & Stratton, 2014). In addition, advertising believability is an important factor to affect the consumer purchase decisions; but if we add environmental commitment, advertising believability is essential for successful consumer persuasion (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2004). Karna et al., (2001) study shows that consumers will trust green advertisements which reflect genuine environmental performances by companies. The study of Parker (2015) demonstrates that the intangible value embedded in a strong brand name (i.e., brand equity) can influence the effectiveness of environmental or green product communications by instilling higher levels of trust and belief toward green product claims. Moreover, when consumers find claims made about a brand trustworthy and believable, it will not only influence their attitudes toward the ad, but it will also increase the chance that they will remember the green claims made about the brand, and develop beliefs corresponding with the advertisement's message (Parker, 2015). Analyzing trust, Hassan & Valenzuela (2016) findings show that only 44% of their respondents have trust in these advertisements, and the ones who trust these have a sense of loyalty towards that brand. Consumers who don't trust these type of advertisements believe that these are false or exaggerated. Hassan & Valenzuela (2016) state that the concept of greenwashing was inserted in consumers' opinion. Lack of trust can harm companies regardless

the level of corporate performance (Nyilasy et al., 2014).

**Perceived brand quality (PBQ)** has been used as a primary dimension in brand equity models mostly because it influences perceived risk and it can exercise strategic effects on brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Erdem et al., 2004). As brand loyalty, PBQ has the potential to justify price premium and reduce perceived risk. Netemeyer et al. (2004) state that PBQ is composed of consumers' judgments regarding the qualities of a brand (esteem, superiority) compared to similar brands. Consequently, promotions are a way to inform consumers about informations that are relevant to PBQ (Kirmani & Zeithaml, 1993). When consumers are forming PBQ, "value" represents an essential notion. Moreover, consumers interpret quality judgments through brand experiences which incite stronger judgments and it's easier for consumers to access them from their memory (Davari & Strutton, 2014). The results of Chen et al. (2014) study show the greenwash is negatively related with green perceived quality. Moreover a company can be damaged indirectly through their customers perceived quality if they involve in greenwashing. Decreasing greenwashing practices has the potential to enhance consumer perceived quality of a brand and it can lead to a higher competitive advantage. Parasuraman et al., (2002) reinforce previous studies and argue that the perceived quality of a brand is crucial for companies in order to be competitive. Consequently, greenwash has the potential to cutback the consumer perceived quality with the respect of green products. Despite the high interest in this field, academic research on green advertising has been somewhat limited. Studies have focused more on understanding and predicting environmental behavior (e.g., Lam, 2006; Lindsay & Strathman, 1997) or green consumers themselves (e.g., Diamantopoulos et al., 2003). Some research that focused on advertising has gauged general attitude toward green advertising (Haytko & Matulich, 1993), established a typology of green advertising (Iyer & Banerjee, 1993), and measured the extent to which different message elements increase message effectiveness (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibanez, 2009). Though the interest for this field, the number of academic researches on green advertising is poor (Yoon & Kim, 2016). Consequently, CBBE in relationship with green advertising has not been researched intensely in the literature. Scholars have focused on the positive relationship between CBBE and green advertising (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011; Davari & Strutton, 2014). Hence, several authors analyzed the negative outcomes of green advertising and the effects of greenwashing, but they did not focused on how CBBE affects greenwashing (Nyilasy et al., 2014; Karna et al., 2001; Aji & Sutikno, 2015). Considering existing literature in this field and the lack research on CBBE and the negative outcomes of green advertising, we consider that there is a need of understanding the relationship between CBBE and greenwashing.

## Conclusions

Based on the literature, the authors can see the important relationship between CBBE, green advertising and the negative outcome of this practice, "greenwashing". CBBE is important to be applied aside of the green marketing strategies to make an effective green advertising. In order to do so companies need to integrate CBBE in the marketing mix where brand associations, brand loyalty, brand trust and perceived brand quality are in the focus. Nowadays, in order to sustain their competitive advantage brands need to develop and maintain distinctive images. The authors observed that in the literature some scholars (Chen et al., 2014; Aji & Sutikno, 2015) state that companies are abusing of their green claims. In recent years it have been a lot of cases where companies have made misleading or false green claims about their products and services. Netto et al. (2020) argues that greenwash is damaging the whole green marketing movement. Tseng et al. (2017) asserts that greenwash is also damaging the customers advertising perception and trust, making them feel confused about the purchase of green products. Nyilasy et al., 2014 argues that the lack of trust can negatively affect the company's' level of corporate performance. In the end greenwash has become the main reason to the consumers' distrust and skepticism towards green claims (Self et al., 2010). Greenwash has also negative consequences on CBBE. Brand associations can be harm by the negative word-of-mouth, bad experience of the product created by the misleading or false information provided by the company about a product. The customer's perceived brand quality can be damaged indirectly if the companies are involved in greenwashing practices. Brand loyalty can be damaged by the price increase of "green" products or services where greenwash practices have been applied on. In the end we have Brand trust that is negatively affected by the consumers confusion created by the false "green" claims. For green products to successfully penetrate the market the companies need to lower the use of greenwash in marketing activities. Decreasing greenwashing practices can lead to a higher competitive advantage and it can also enhance the consumer perceived quality of a brand. Chen, et al., (2014) states that to do so companies need to make their claims less ambiguous so they can be perceived as more trustworthy. Authors of this study suggest a study with a mixed approach to explore the impact of greenwashing on CBBE. Such approach will bring insights on this topic which has not been analyzed by the previous researchers. Firstly, a qualitative study based on focus groups or interviews with consumers can be applied to have a better

understanding and deeper insight on this phenomenon. Afterwards, a quantitative study based on questionnaires can be applied in order to present generalizable results.

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