

# The Impact of Social Values, Norms, and Demographics on Consumer Responses to Greenwashing in Fashion: Evidence from a Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract

The phenomenon of greenwashing in the fashion industry poses a serious challenge to global efforts to achieve sustainable consumption. This study aims to systematically review the literature discussing consumer awareness of greenwashing practices, particularly through interactions on social media. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this article identifies five main focuses: (1) the influence of social responsibility attitudes on sustainable purchasing behavior, (2) the role of consumers' personal preferences in shaping their intention to purchase environmentally friendly products, (3) the function of environmental awareness as a mediator between ethical attitudes and green product purchasing decisions, (4) the influence of social norms on sustainable consumption behavior, and (5) the role of gender and age as moderators. The results of the study indicate that consumers with high social values and strong environmental awareness are more likely to reject misleading sustainability claims. Social media has been shown to strengthen the role of social norms and create a discursive space for consumers to assess the authenticity of sustainability messages. Demographic factors such as gender and age also moderate the conversion of attitudes into actions. These findings provide theoretical contributions to the green marketing literature and practical implications for fashion brands in building ethical and credible sustainability communications in the digital era.

**Keywords:** greenwashing, consumer awareness, sustainable behavior, social media, fashion industry.

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## INTRODUCTION:

The fashion industry is currently at a critical juncture in facing the environmental, social, and economic challenges of the 21st century. As the world's second most polluting industry, fashion contributes approximately 10% of total global carbon emissions and 20% of the world's water waste, with projections of increasing consumption and waste continuing to rise if not addressed (UNEP, 2023). This large ecological footprint makes the fashion industry a strategic sector in achieving global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), Goal 13 (Addressing Climate Change), and Goal 9 (Industrial Innovation and Infrastructure), as well as in supporting the target of net-zero emissions by mid-century.

As global pressure mounts, fashion brands are beginning to adopt sustainability narratives through green marketing practices. However, this expansion of sustainability messaging has also given rise to the phenomenon of greenwashing, the practice of misleading consumers through exaggerated, inaccurate, or unverifiable environmental claims. A recent audit report from the Changing Markets Foundation (2024) found that approximately 6 in 10 sustainability claims in the fashion industry are misleading or vague, indicating a growing credibility crisis in sustainability communications.

In today's digital landscape, social media plays a central role in shaping consumer awareness, opinions, and responses to greenwashing issues. Warasthe et al. (2023) found that the risk of greenwashing is increasing because sustainability claims in textile supply chains often do not align with actual practices. Transparency is key to ensuring that green strategies are not merely promotional tools. With over 4.8 billion social media users worldwide (Statista, 2024), online conversations on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have become powerful discursive spaces for assessing public trust, critiquing brands' sustainability messages, and shaping brand image in real time. These interactions not only reflect consumer perceptions but also actively contribute to creating new norms and expectations for environmental transparency and accountability.

In the context of the urgent energy transition, digital transformation, and the global climate crisis, understanding how consumers perceive and respond to greenwashing practices in the fashion industry is crucial. This insight is not only relevant for policy regulation and brand communication strategies, but also crucial for the formation of a culture of intelligent, critical, and empowered consumption. However, academic literature on this issue remains fragmented, with approaches, concepts, and findings spread across various studies and disciplines.

This article aims to fill this gap through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, systematically examining how consumer awareness of greenwashing in the fashion industry has been discussed in academic literature over the past decade. This review aims to identify key themes, methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks, and future research directions, thereby significantly contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of consumer engagement in the fashion sustainability agenda.

Sustainability has become a top priority in the global fashion industry. Pressure on the industry is intensifying as consumer awareness of the climate crisis, textile waste, and unethical production practices grows. The fashion industry currently accounts for approximately 10% of global carbon emissions and 20% of global water waste (UNEP, 2023), making it a significant contributor to environmental degradation. To address this pressure, many fashion brands are competing to project an environmentally conscious image through green marketing strategies.

However, in practice, this strategy is not always executed authentically. The phenomenon of greenwashing, which involves conveying misleading, exaggerated, or unsubstantiated sustainability information or claims, has come under critical scrutiny. A 2024 report by the Changing Markets Foundation revealed that 59% of sustainability claims used by major fashion brands were misleading or unverifiable. This reality indicates a serious gap between brand communication and the implementation of true sustainability values. This situation fuels consumer distrust and weakens collective efforts to build a truly sustainable fashion industry.

In the digital era, social media has become a strategic arena for consumers to express opinions, voice suspicions, and even expose greenwashing practices by fashion brands.

Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) are now not only promotional channels but also dynamic ecosystems for shaping public opinion and organizing digital movements based on environmental awareness. Through comments, posts, hashtags (#greenwashing, #fastfashion), and viral campaigns, consumers are demonstrating that they are no longer passive recipients of brand messages but are instead becoming key actors in assessing the validity of sustainability claims.

However, amidst this increasingly widespread phenomenon, academic studies specifically examining how consumer awareness of greenwashing is constructed through interactions on social media are still very limited. Most previous literature has focused more on corporate communication strategies, compliance with environmental regulations, or perceptions of eco-labels. Few studies have delved into consumers' discursive practices in digital spaces and how they develop forms of resistance, skepticism, or even advocacy for brands through online narratives.

This article aims to fill this gap by offering a novel contribution: a critical examination of how consumers build awareness of greenwashing practices in the fashion industry, focusing on the conversations and social dynamics that occur on social media platforms. It combines a qualitative approach based on social media data to capture consumer narratives, patterns of expression, and forms of digital participation that have so far been underexplored.

The main contribution of this study lies in its consumer-oriented social media analysis approach, which offers new insights into how perceptions of greenwashing are collectively formed and disseminated in the digital space. Thus, this article is not only relevant for the development of theories on green marketing and sustainability literacy but also offers practical implications for fashion brands, regulators, and environmental activists in designing more ethical and responsive communications to increasingly critical digital consumers. This study aims to answer the following questions:

(1) How do socially responsible attitudes influence sustainable purchasing behavior? (2) What role does a consumer's personal identity play in their intention to purchase environmentally friendly products?

- ## LITERATUR REVIEW

Similarly, Testa et al., (2022) emphasized that consumers with high levels of environmental concern tend to be more sensitive to detecting greenwashing signals. However, this ability is strongly influenced by environmental literacy and prior experiences with brands that are perceived as inconsistent. In this context, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) serves as an important framework for explaining consumers' cognitive processes in processing sustainability claims, both through central (logical, critical) and peripheral (emotional, instant) pathways. Furthermore, a study by Martens & Miranda (2023) explored how social media has changed the way consumers respond to greenwashing. They found that consumers are no longer passive, but rather act as "digital activists" who actively voice skepticism towards brands through comments, reposts, or hashtag campaigns (#greenwashing, #fastfashion). The role of social media as a public discourse space places significant reputational pressure on companies, especially when consumers collectively produce and disseminate counter-narratives to corporate claims.

A detailed analysis based on the Bibliometric Map (co-occurrence network) using VOSviewer shows that the main themes and dominant keywords of Greenwashing and Sustainability are seen as the largest nodes. This indicates that these two terms are the focus of attention in related research. The fashion industry, marketing, and corporate greenwashing also have large node sizes, indicating a focus on the fashion industry and corporate greenwashing practices.

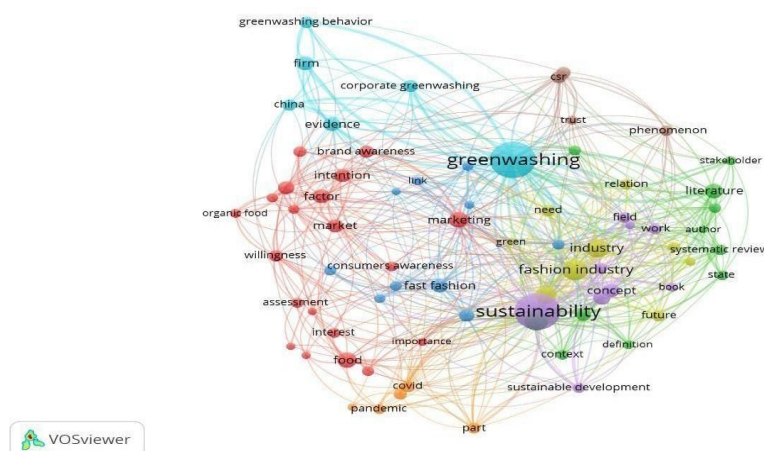


Figure 1. VOSviewer Fashion Greenwashing divides keywords into several colored clusters based on co-occurrence:

### **Blue Cluster (Greenwashing & Corporate Behavior)**

Keywords: greenwashing behavior, firm, corporate greenwashing, evidence, brand awareness, intention. Focuses on corporate behavior, intention, and how greenwashing impacts brand awareness.

### **Red Cluster (Market & Consumer)**

Keywords: stakeholder, literature, relationship, phenomenon, systematic review, state, author.

### **Green Cluster (Stakeholder & Literature)**

Relates to theoretical approaches, literature review, stakeholder roles, and discussion of the greenwashing phenomenon.

### **Yellow Cluster (Industry & Concept)**

Keywords: fashion industry, industry, concept, context, definition. Explains the concepts of greenwashing and sustainability in the context of industry, specifically fashion.

### **Orange Cluster (Pandemic Context)**

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, part, discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on market behavior and sustainability trends.

### **Purple Cluster (Sustainable Development)**

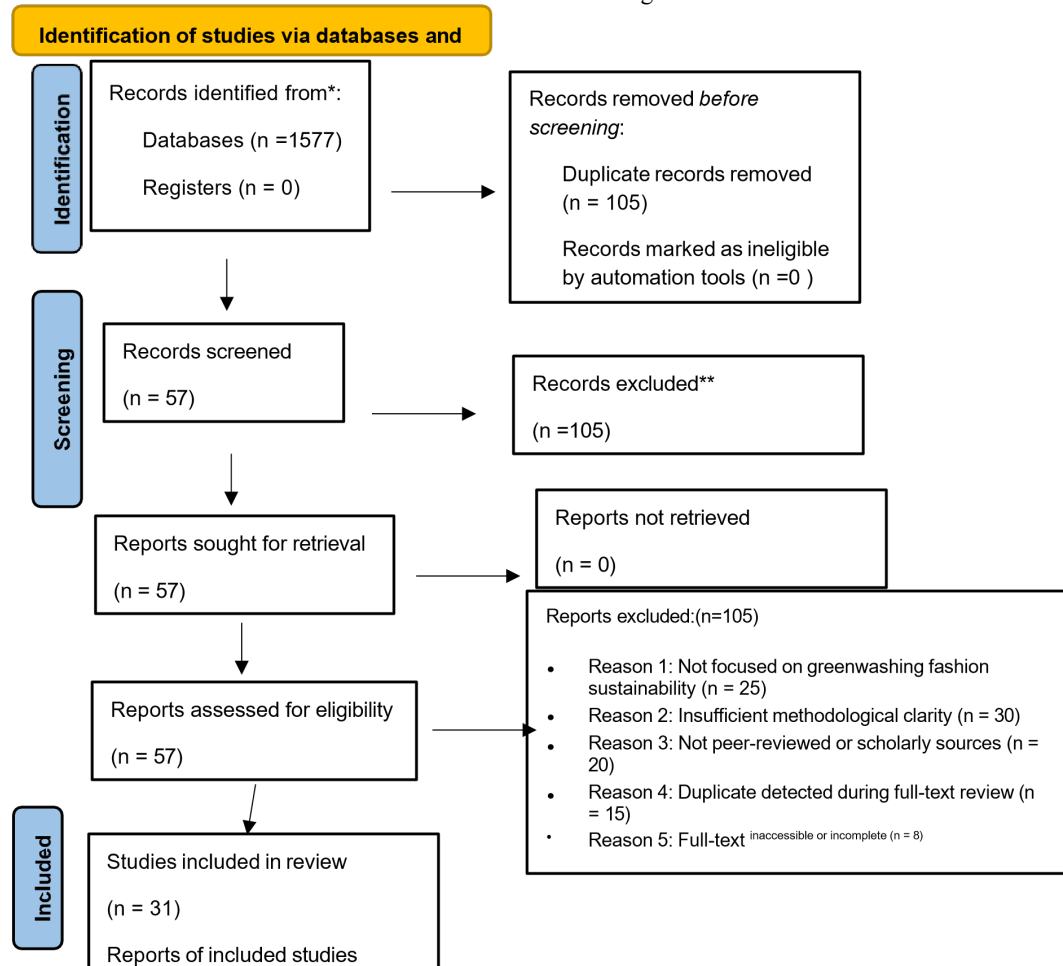
Keywords: sustainable development, future, definition, focus on sustainable development and future vision.

One of the most widely used theoretical frameworks to explain consumer behavior regarding greenwashing is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991). This theory states that the intention to perform a behavior is influenced by three main factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived control over the behavior. In the context of greenwashing, attitudes toward sustainability and perceptions of brand credibility significantly influence the intention to purchase fashion products claiming to be environmentally friendly. If consumers perceive the claims to be inauthentic or misleading, negative attitudes will develop, inhibiting purchase intentions. Research by Gupta & Ogden (2009) and Nguyen et al., (2020) demonstrates that social norms also play a significant role in shaping sustainability behavior. Consumers are more likely to purchase sustainable products if they perceive social pressure from those around them (family, community, social media). Meanwhile, perceived behavioral control, or consumers' perceptions of their ability to distinguish between genuine green brands and greenwashing, is a key determinant of whether purchase intentions will translate into actual behavior.

TPB-based studies also highlight the mediating role of variables such as green trust, green skepticism, and environmental knowledge in strengthening or weakening the relationship between attitudes and behavior. For example, a study by Chen & Chang (2013) showed that green trust plays a significant role in countering the negative influence of greenwashing on purchase intentions. When consumers have a high level of trust in a brand's ecological credibility, they are more likely to remain loyal despite allegations of greenwashing. Meanwhile, a quantitative study by Nyilasy et al., (2022) examined the role of brand legitimacy in moderating the effect of greenwashing on purchase decisions. They found that when consumers perceive a brand to have a strong sustainability track record, the negative impact of greenwashing can be minimized. However, if this perception is weak, greenwashing can actually worsen the brand's image.

To conduct the investigation, this study applied the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology (Moher et al., 2009). PRISMA guidelines were applied to ensure the robustness and reliability of the systematic review and a transparent selection process was carried out. Keywords used to focus the investigation related to greenwashing, fashion industry, green marketing, consumer awareness, sustainability, and theory of planned behavior. The search was conducted using Boolean syntax, including the AND, OR operators, and punctuation, which were applied to the titles and abstracts, resulting in a collection of papers. An initial identification of 1557 articles was carried out, 105 were removed from duplication, and the eligible ones were screened again to 57 articles, and the final screening was 31 (Gomes, S, 2023). The research sources were articles, a careful screening process based on relevance, language, keywords such as fashion greenwashing, green marketing, fashion sustainability, social media, apparel and textile industry, and cognitive dissonance.

Table 1. Fashion Greenwashing Prism



## RESULT

### 1. How does social responsibility affect sustainable purchasing behavior? (RQ 1)

Social responsibility plays a crucial role in shaping sustainable purchasing behavior, particularly in the context of the fashion industry, which is increasingly under fire for greenwashing practices. According to Garg and Yakshi (2024), consumers with a strong social orientation tend to be more concerned about the social and environmental impacts of their purchasing choices. Within the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework, ethical attitudes toward sustainability are a key predictor of sustainable purchasing intentions. Consumers who are aware of their social responsibility will exhibit a preference for products that reflect moral values, such as social justice, ethical production, and environmental sustainability (Garg & Yakshi, 2024).

Furthermore, Krstić (2025) shows that this social attitude transforms into a self-identity known as green self-identity. Consumers who see themselves as environmentally responsible individuals are more likely to purchase sustainable fashion products. This identity is formed through exposure to sustainability messages and ethical communications from brands, ultimately increasing their intentions and concrete actions in environmentally friendly consumption (Krstić, 2025). Kim (2023) also confirms that consumers with high social values are more sensitive to discrepancies between brand image and actual practices on the ground. They not only reject products from brands that engage in greenwashing but also actively voice criticism through social media, demonstrating that social responsibility is not merely passive but also encourages collective action (Kim, 2023).

2. What is the personal role of consumers in their intention to purchase environmentally friendly products? (RQ2)

The consumer's personal role is crucial in shaping the intention to purchase eco-friendly products, especially when personal motivation is based on values of sustainability, ethical responsibility, and deep self-identity. Cortazar et al., (2025) showed that intrinsic factors such as green self-identity and personal environmental concern play a significant role in increasing the intention to purchase sustainable products, as consumers want to reflect their values and self-image through socially and environmentally responsible consumption. This is in line with the findings of Benhissi and Hamouda (2025) who indicated that perceived value and understanding of slow fashion product attributes such as locality, fairness, and functionality positively influence purchasing decisions, as long as consumers are not confused due to a lack of information.

Meanwhile, Rehman et al., (2025) emphasized that perceived behavioral control and personal attitudes toward sustainability are important predictors of purchase intention within the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework, reinforcing that purchasing decisions are influenced not only by external factors but also by personal perceptions of the ability and responsibility to make ethical decisions. However, Font et al. (2025) warned that information overload from excessive sustainability claims can distort value perceptions and actually raise suspicions of greenwashing, ultimately reducing purchase intentions, especially among consumers who have high expectations for the integrity of sustainability information. The intention to purchase environmentally friendly products is strongly influenced by consumers' personal factors, including values, identity, ethical perceptions, and cognitive abilities to critically and reflectively process sustainability information.

3. Apakah kesadaran lingkungan berperan sebagai mediator antara sikap etis dan keputusan membeli produk hijau. (RQ3)

Environmental awareness has been identified as a crucial mediator between consumers' ethical attitudes and purchasing decisions for green products. Research by Fernandes et al. (2025) confirms that consumers with strong ethical values exhibit high sensitivity to sustainability issues, but environmental awareness plays a role in directing these values into concrete behavior, such as purchasing environmentally friendly products. This study shows that when consumers are aware of the ecological impact of their consumption, they are more likely to translate their intentions into actual purchases.

Kovac and Dunkovic (2025) add that in the fashion industry, environmental awareness acts as a bridge, strengthening the influence of moral values on consumption decisions. Individuals who consider ethics an important value tend to develop critical environmental perceptions, and this is where purchase intentions for green products emerge. Garcia-Ortega and Galan-Cubillo (2025) demonstrate the significant role of environmental awareness as a mediator strengthening the relationship between environmental responsibility and eco-conscious consumption. This study emphasizes the importance of education and exposure to sustainability information in shaping awareness that can guide ethical choices toward green consumption behavior.

Rosch (2025), through a quantitative study based on a structural model, explicitly tested the mediating role of environmental awareness. The results showed that this variable had a significant partial mediation effect between ethical attitudes and green product purchase intentions, making its presence crucial in explaining the conversion of values into action. Serrat (2025) in his systematic review emphasized that consumer environmental awareness is a crucial element in many models of ethical behavior, including the TPB and VBN (Value-Belief-Norm). This study suggests that without a sound environmental understanding, ethical attitudes may not be strong enough to drive concrete action.

Thakur (2025) confirmed that consumer perceptions of a company's environmental commitment shape individual awareness of sustainability issues. This awareness then acts as a

cognitive-affective mediator that influences purchasing decisions, demonstrating a mediation pattern between corporate image, attitudes, and behavior.

Chakraborty et al., (2025) explain that environmental awareness serves as a psychological bridge between institutional norms and personal ethical attitudes in encouraging green consumption behavior. This emphasizes that awareness is not only a consequence of attitudes but also a reinforcing mechanism in the decision-making



process. Finally, Vy and Thanh (2025) highlight the context of developing countries, where environmental awareness is often shaped by corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices. Highly ethical consumers tend to respond positively to CSR through increased awareness, which then influences their intention to purchase green products. Based on the eight studies above, environmental awareness has been shown to act as a mediator that transforms ethical attitudes into sustainable consumption actions, both in individual and collective contexts, and within both local and global frameworks.

#### 4. How do social norms influence consumers' decisions to consume sustainable products? (RQ4).

Social norms play a crucial role in shaping consumer decisions about sustainable products. Ries et al. (2025) highlighted that descriptive norms, i.e., perceptions of what others are doing, significantly influence intentions to purchase environmentally friendly products. When consumers believe that those around them are also purchasing green products, they are more likely to adjust their behavior to conform to those norms. This demonstrates the role of social pressure in shaping consumer awareness and action. A study by Hewitt and Parker (2025) showed that social norms operate through a process of social identification, where consumers tend to adopt behaviors deemed acceptable or valued by their reference group. In the context of sustainability, individuals who identify as part of an environmentally conscious community will be more motivated to make sustainable purchases to maintain their social image.

Mathai et al. (2025) strengthen this argument by showing that injunctive norms—perceptions of what society deems right—encourage consumers to act ethically. In their experiments, social norms proved effective in guiding purchasing decisions, even when personal considerations such as price were a constraint. Behre et al. (2025) also found that social campaigns emphasizing adherence to green norms increased consumers' perceptions of collective responsibility, which in turn strengthened their purchase intentions for sustainable products. This suggests that social norms serve as a powerful persuasive tool. Meanwhile, Tao and Ryan (2025) and Rehman et al. (2025) caution that social norms can also be manipulated through greenwashing practices. When companies present the impression that sustainability is the industry norm when, in fact, this is not the case, consumer perceptions can be misled and purchasing decisions can be biased. This underscores the importance of transparency in sustainability communications as a reinforcement of authentic social norms. Social norms play a dual role as both drivers and guides of sustainable consumption behavior. Their effectiveness depends on the clarity of the message, the credibility of the source, and the alignment between personal values and social expectations.

#### 5. o what extent do gender and age moderate the relationship between social responsibility attitudes and green consumption behavior? (RQ5)

Several studies have shown that demographic characteristics such as gender and age play a moderating role in the relationship between socially responsible attitudes and green consumption behavior. A study by Kamasauske and colleagues (2024) found that women showed a stronger relationship between socially responsible attitudes and intention to purchase environmentally friendly products than men. This is understandable because women tend to have higher empathy and social responsibility values, making them more responsive to environmental sustainability issues.

A study by Hejlova and Hlavacek (2025) revealed that age segmentation also had a significant influence. Consumers from generations Z and millennials demonstrated a high awareness of corporate social responsibility, but this did not necessarily translate into consistent green consumption behavior. Conversely, older age groups (Generation X) tended to be more stable in linking social values to concrete actions, as they were more exposed to long-term consumption practices and social accountability.

Liu and colleagues (2025) added that in the context of sustainable fashion, millennial women play a significant role as catalysts for green consumption change because they are more active in sharing sustainability information through social media. However, age still plays a role in strengthening or weakening the conversion from attitude to action, depending on the level of environmental literacy. Furthermore, a study by Khan et al. (2025) showed that gender and age also moderate how consumers perceive the authenticity of a brand's social responsibility communication. Brands targeting women and the productive age group must adapt social responsibility narratives that are more emotional and transparent to drive green consumption behavior.

Khan et al. (2025) showed that female and young adult consumers are more sensitive to greenwashing signals, so brands' social responsibility must be conveyed authentically and in line with the expectations of these groups. A strong attitude of social responsibility will not have a strong impact if the brand message is not trusted by certain gender groups. Zhong et al. (2025) in their study on "perceived green value" stated that age has a significant influence as a

moderator between social values and green purchasing behavior, where older consumers show higher loyalty to brands with a good social reputation. Kishan & Zubir (2025) stated that gender differences create variations in sensitivity to environmental risks and moral values. Women more often associate social responsibility with actual behavior, while men tend to require stronger rational or economic incentives. Mayasari et al. (2025) emphasized that the influence of gender and age must be understood within a cross-cultural framework. For example, in developing countries, young women tend to be actively involved in promoting sustainable brands, but are also vulnerable to the effects of greenwashing if they are not equipped with sufficient literacy. Gender and age not only influence levels of awareness and concern for social responsibility, but also serve as filters that determine the extent to which these attitudes translate into actual consumption behavior. Gender and age act as important moderators that shape the strength of the relationship between socially responsible attitudes and green consumption behavior. Women and older age groups tend to show stronger relationships, but this is highly dependent on cultural context, education, and belief in sustainability messages.

## CLOSING

This study highlights the important role of various psychological and social factors in shaping consumers' green awareness and consumption behavior, particularly in relation to the phenomenon of greenwashing in the fashion industry. First, social responsibility attitudes are proven to be a key foundation driving consumers to make sustainable purchases. However, the strength of this influence is highly dependent on the support of other mediating and moderating factors. Second, consumers' personal factors, such as individual values, moral beliefs, and self-perception as part of the sustainability solution, significantly influence their intention to purchase environmentally friendly products.

Third, environmental awareness emerges as a cognitive-affective mediator that strengthens the relationship between ethical attitudes and green purchasing decisions. Consumers who are aware of the environmental impact of their consumption are more likely to act in alignment with their ethical values. Fourth, social norms are also proven to be a powerful external factor influencing consumption preferences, particularly in a digital environment that allows for the rapid formation of collective opinions. Finally, analysis of gender and age reveals that these demographic characteristics moderate the relationship between social attitudes and consumption behavior, with women and older age groups showing greater consistency in converting values into actions.

## Suggestions for Further Research

Future research is recommended to integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches in analyzing the dynamics of consumer perceptions of greenwashing, particularly through machine learning-based social media analysis and sentiment analysis. Furthermore, cross-cultural exploration needs to be expanded to understand how local norms and social structures influence perceptions of greenwashing globally. Researchers are also encouraged to test the theory of planned behavior (TPB) framework combined with trust, skepticism, and digital literacy variables as a predictive model of green consumption behavior. Longitudinal studies can also provide a deeper understanding of how policy changes, social campaigns, and greenwashing scandals influence consumer preferences over time.

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