Research Article

# Who Delivers Green Messages Matters: The Role of Trust and Perceived Manipulation in Green Purchase Intention

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*Abstract: This study examines how marketing content sources human influencers, brand-generated content, and AI-assisted content influence green purchase intention through trust and perceived manipulation. As digital marketing increasingly relies on diverse content sources, consumers may respond differently depending on the credibility and perceived persuasive intent of the message. Using a quantitative approach, this research employs a cross-sectional survey of social media users who have been exposed to green product marketing content. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to test direct and indirect relationships among the variables. The findings indicate that content source significantly influences consumer trust, which in turn reduces perceived manipulation and enhances green purchase intention. Perceived manipulation was found to negatively affect purchase intention and to act as a mediating mechanism between trust and green purchase intention. This study contributes to the green marketing and digital communication literature by proposing a serial mediation model that explains the psychological process underlying consumer responses to different marketing content sources. Practically, the results suggest that marketers should prioritize trust-building strategies and transparency when utilizing influencer or AI-assisted content to promote environmentally friendly products.*

*Keywords: AI-assisted content; content source; green purchase intention; perceived manipulation; trust*

## 1. Introduction

The rapid growth of digital marketing has significantly transformed how brands communicate with consumers, particularly through social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Marketing communication is no longer dominated by traditional brand-generated messages, but increasingly relies on various content sources, including human influencers, brand-created content, and AI-assisted content (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Schouten et al., 2020). While these content sources provide greater reach and efficiency, they also introduce new challenges related to credibility, authenticity, and persuasive intent.

In the context of sustainability, green marketing aims to encourage environmentally responsible consumption by emphasizing ecological benefits and ethical values (Peattie & Crane, 2005). However, consumers often exhibit skepticism toward green claims, particularly when promotional messages are perceived as exaggerated or misleading, a phenomenon commonly referred to as greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Such skepticism may weaken the effectiveness of green marketing campaigns, especially when the message source lacks transparency or credibility.

Content source plays a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions and responses. Human influencers are often perceived as more relatable and trustworthy due to parasocial interaction and perceived social presence (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In contrast, brand-generated content is frequently associated with higher persuasive intent, which may trigger consumer resistance. The emergence of AI-assisted content further complicates this dynamic, as consumers may

question its authenticity, ethical implications, and underlying commercial motives (Longoni et al., 2019; Gursoy et al., 2023). These differences suggest that content source can significantly influence psychological evaluations such as trust and perceived manipulation.

Trust is a fundamental element in marketing relationships and plays a vital role in reducing uncertainty and perceived risk, particularly in sustainability-oriented consumption contexts (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Chen, 2010). Higher levels of trust can enhance consumers' willingness to accept marketing messages and increase purchase intention. Conversely, perceived manipulation reflects consumers' beliefs that marketing communications are intentionally designed to influence them in an unfair or deceptive manner, which can activate persuasion knowledge and resistance behaviors (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Campbell & Kirmani, 2000). When perceived manipulation increases, consumer trust tends to decline, negatively affecting behavioral intentions.

Despite the growing relevance of these constructs, empirical studies that simultaneously examine trust and perceived manipulation as mediating mechanisms between content source and green purchase intention remain limited. Previous research on green purchase intention has predominantly focused on individual factors such as environmental concern, perceived value, and attitudes (Joshi & Rahman, 2015; Wang et al., 2021), while communication-related variables and emerging content technologies have received comparatively less attention. Moreover, existing studies often analyze trust or perceived manipulation independently, rather than as interconnected psychological processes within a single explanatory framework.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the influence of marketing content source on green purchase intention, with trust and perceived manipulation serving as mediating variables. Using a quantitative approach and Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), this research aims to explain the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer responses to different marketing content sources in green marketing communication. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on green marketing, digital communication, and persuasion knowledge, while providing practical insights for marketers in designing credible, ethical, and effective sustainability campaigns.

## 2. Literature Review

### Marketing Content Source

Marketing content source refers to the origin of marketing messages delivered to consumers, including human influencers, brand-generated content, and AI-assisted content. In digital marketing environments, consumers increasingly evaluate not only the message itself but also who delivers the message, as the source provides important cues regarding credibility and persuasive intent. Source credibility theory suggests that message effectiveness is influenced by perceptions of expertise, trustworthiness, and authenticity associated with the source (Hovland et al., 1953). Human influencers often generate higher engagement due to perceived social presence and parasocial interaction, which can enhance message acceptance. In contrast, brand-generated content is commonly associated with explicit commercial motives, potentially triggering consumer skepticism. The emergence of AI-assisted content introduces a new dimension, as consumers may question its transparency, authenticity, and ethical implications, particularly in persuasive communication contexts (Gursoy et al., 2023). These differences highlight the importance of content source as a determinant of consumer psychological responses.

### Trust in Marketing Communication

Trust is a fundamental construct in relationship marketing and refers to a consumer's belief in the reliability, integrity, and credibility of a message or its source (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust reduces uncertainty and perceived risk, enabling consumers to form positive evaluations and behavioral intentions. In digital environments, where information asymmetry is high, trust plays a critical role in shaping consumer decision-making. In green marketing contexts, trust becomes even more salient because consumers often lack the expertise to verify environmental claims. Prior research indicates that higher trust enhances consumers' acceptance of green messages and strengthens their willingness to support environmentally friendly products (Chen, 2010). Therefore, trust functions as a key psychological mechanism linking marketing communication to consumer behavior.

### Perceived Manipulation

Perceived manipulation reflects consumers' beliefs that marketing messages are designed to influence them in an unfair, deceptive, or exaggerated manner (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000). Persuasion knowledge theory explains that consumers develop cognitive frameworks that allow them to recognize and evaluate persuasive attempts, which in turn influence their responses to marketing messages (Friestad & Wright, 1994). In digital and influencer marketing, perceived manipulation becomes more salient due to the blurred boundary between authentic content and paid promotion. AI-assisted content may further intensify such perceptions, as algorithm-driven persuasion can reduce perceived human agency and transparency. When consumers perceive high levels of manipulation, they are more likely to resist persuasion and evaluate marketing messages negatively (Boerman et al., 2017).

### Green Purchase Intention

Green purchase intention refers to a consumer's willingness and likelihood to purchase products that are environmentally friendly or sustainable. It is a key predictor of actual green purchasing behavior and has been widely studied in sustainability and consumer behavior literature. Green purchase intention is influenced by various psychological and contextual factors, including attitudes, trust, perceived credibility, and ethical considerations (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). In green marketing communication, consumers' intentions are shaped not only by product attributes but also by how environmental messages are communicated and perceived. Trust in the message source and perceptions of manipulation can significantly affect whether consumers translate pro-environmental attitudes into purchase intentions. As such, green purchase intention represents an important outcome variable for evaluating the effectiveness of marketing communication strategies in sustainability contexts.

### Hypothesis Development

Marketing communication effectiveness is strongly influenced by the source of the message, as consumers actively evaluate the credibility, intention, and authenticity of marketing content. In the context of green marketing, the source of content becomes particularly important because environmental claims are often difficult to verify, increasing consumer reliance on heuristic cues such as trustworthiness and perceived intent.

### Content Source and Trust

According to source credibility theory, consumers are more likely to trust messages delivered by sources perceived as credible, expert, and authentic (Hovland et al., 1953). Human influencers, for example, may foster higher trust through perceived similarity and parasocial interaction, whereas brand-generated or AI-assisted content may elicit different levels of trust depending on perceived transparency (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Gursoy et al., 2023). Therefore, the source of marketing content is expected to significantly influence consumer trust.

H1: Marketing content source has a positive effect on trust.

**Trust and Green Purchase Intention**

Trust plays a central role in relationship marketing by reducing uncertainty and perceived risk (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In green consumption contexts, trust enables consumers to believe environmental claims and translate favorable evaluations into behavioral intentions (Chen, 2010). When consumers trust the marketing message and its source, they are more likely to express a higher intention to purchase green products.

H2: Trust has a positive effect on green purchase intention.

**Trust and Perceived Manipulation**

Drawing on persuasion knowledge theory, consumers who trust a message source are less likely to activate skepticism or perceive persuasive attempts as manipulative (Friestad & Wright, 1994). High trust reduces suspicion toward marketers' intentions, thereby lowering perceived manipulation (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000).

H3: Trust has a negative effect on perceived manipulation.

**Perceived Manipulation and Green Purchase Intention**

Perceived manipulation reflects consumers' beliefs that marketing messages are designed to influence them unfairly or deceptively. When perceived manipulation is high, consumers tend to resist persuasion and develop unfavorable responses toward the promoted product (Boerman et al., 2017). In green marketing, such perceptions may weaken purchase intention due to heightened ethical sensitivity.

H4: Perceived manipulation has a negative effect on green purchase intention.

**The Mediating Roles of Trust and Perceived Manipulation**

Trust and perceived manipulation represent key psychological mechanisms through which marketing content source influences green purchase intention. A credible content source can increase trust, which in turn enhances purchase intention. Simultaneously, higher trust may reduce perceived manipulation, indirectly strengthening behavioral intention. Integrating both mediators provides a more comprehensive explanation of consumer responses to marketing communication.

H5: Trust mediates the relationship between marketing content source and green purchase intention.

H6: Perceived manipulation mediates the relationship between marketing content source and green purchase intention.

H7: Trust and perceived manipulation sequentially mediate the relationship between marketing content source and green purchase intention.
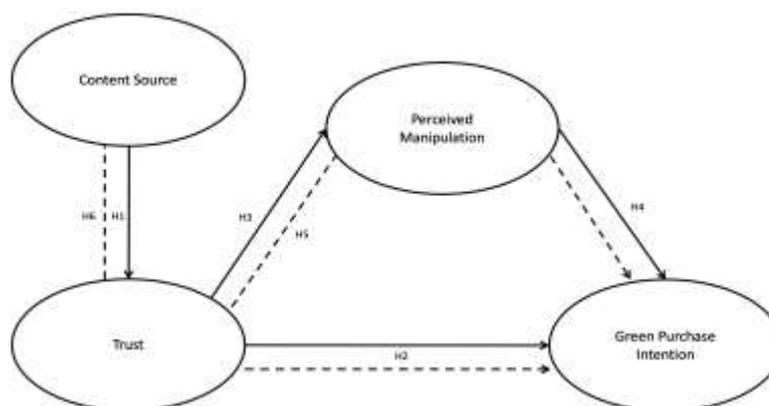
**Framework**



Figure 1. Research Paradigm

## 3. Method

### Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach. The design is suitable for examining causal relationships among latent variables and testing the proposed research model and hypotheses.

### Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of social media users who have been exposed to green product marketing content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. The sample is selected using purposive sampling, with the following criteria: (1) respondents are active social media users, and (2) respondents have seen marketing content related to environmentally friendly products. A minimum sample size of 150 respondents is targeted to meet the requirements for Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (Hair et al., 2019).

### Data Collection

Data are collected through an online questionnaire distributed via social media channels. All measurement items are adapted from prior validated studies and measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### Measurement of Variables

The study includes four main constructs: marketing content source, trust, perceived manipulation, and green purchase intention. Each construct is operationalized using multiple indicators adapted from established literature to ensure content validity.

### Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis is conducted using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS software. The analysis follows a two-stage approach: (1) evaluation of the measurement model through reliability and validity tests, including outer loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity; and (2) evaluation of the structural model by examining path coefficients, coefficient of determination ($R^2$), effect size ($f^2$), predictive relevance ($Q^2$), and hypothesis testing using bootstrapping procedures.

## 4. Results And Discussion

This study aims to conceptually explain how marketing content source influences green purchase intention through the mediating roles of trust and perceived manipulation. Drawing on source credibility theory and persuasion knowledge theory, the proposed framework highlights the importance of psychological mechanisms in shaping consumer responses to green marketing communication, particularly in digital environments dominated by influencer and AI-assisted content.

From a theoretical perspective, the model suggests that marketing content source serves as a critical antecedent in determining how consumers evaluate marketing messages. Different content sources may signal varying levels of credibility, authenticity, and persuasive intent, which in turn shape consumer trust. Consistent with relationship marketing theory, trust is expected to function as a key relational asset that reduces uncertainty and encourages favorable behavioral intentions, especially in sustainability-oriented consumption contexts.

At the same time, the framework emphasizes perceived manipulation as an opposing psychological force that may undermine the effectiveness of marketing communication. When consumers perceive marketing messages as manipulative, they are more likely to activate persuasion knowledge and resist persuasive attempts. This mechanism is particularly relevant in green marketing, where consumers are often sensitive to ethical issues such as greenwashing and exaggerated environmental claims. The inclusion of perceived manipulation provides a more

nuanced understanding of why certain marketing content sources may fail to generate positive consumer responses despite high visibility or engagement.

The proposed sequential mediation mechanism further enriches the discussion by suggesting that trust and perceived manipulation are not independent processes but are theoretically interconnected. Higher trust may reduce consumers' perceptions of manipulation, thereby strengthening green purchase intention. This perspective aligns with prior conceptual arguments that trust can buffer negative cognitive evaluations and mitigate skepticism toward persuasive communication.

From a practical standpoint, the conceptual framework underscores the importance of transparency and credibility in green marketing strategies. Marketers should carefully consider the choice of content source and ensure that marketing messages are delivered in a manner that fosters trust while minimizing perceptions of manipulation. This is particularly important when employing influencer or AI-assisted content, where disclosure, ethical guidelines, and authenticity cues may play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions.

Overall, although empirical testing has not yet been conducted, the discussion provides a theoretically grounded explanation of the proposed relationships and offers a foundation for future empirical validation. By integrating trust and perceived manipulation within a single explanatory model, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of consumer responses to digital green marketing communication and opens avenues for subsequent research using quantitative methods such as SEM-PLS..

## 5. Conclusion

This study conceptually examines the influence of marketing content source on green purchase intention by incorporating trust and perceived manipulation as key mediating mechanisms. Drawing on source credibility theory, persuasion knowledge theory, and relationship marketing perspectives, the proposed framework highlights how consumers cognitively and affectively evaluate green marketing messages delivered through different content sources, including human influencers, brand-generated content, and AI-assisted content. The conceptual analysis suggests that marketing content source plays a critical role in shaping consumer trust, which in turn enhances green purchase intention. Simultaneously, perceived manipulation emerges as an important psychological barrier that may weaken the effectiveness of marketing communication, particularly in sustainability-oriented contexts where ethical sensitivity is high. By integrating trust and perceived manipulation within a single explanatory model, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of consumer responses to digital green marketing communication.Although empirical testing has not yet been conducted, the proposed model offers a theoretically grounded explanation of the underlying mechanisms through which marketing content source may influence green purchase intention. The framework also serves as a foundation for future empirical research employing quantitative methods such as Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS).

**Theoretical Implications**

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it extends green marketing research by shifting the focus from product attributes and individual environmental attitudes to communication-related variables, particularly the role of marketing content source. Second, by integrating trust and perceived manipulation, this study bridges relationship marketing theory and persuasion knowledge theory within a unified framework, offering a deeper explanation of consumer psychological processes in digital marketing contexts. Furthermore, the inclusion of AI-assisted content as a marketing content source addresses an emerging research area that remains

underexplored in sustainability and consumer behavior literature. The proposed framework thus enhances theoretical understanding of how technological advancements in marketing communication interact with consumer perceptions and ethical evaluations.

**Managerial Implications**

From a managerial perspective, the findings of this conceptual study emphasize the importance of selecting appropriate content sources when promoting green products. Marketers should prioritize strategies that build trust and reduce perceptions of manipulation, such as transparent disclosure, credible messaging, and ethical communication practices. This is particularly relevant when utilizing influencer or AI-assisted content, where consumers may be more sensitive to persuasive intent. Companies are encouraged to design green marketing campaigns that emphasize authenticity and informational value rather than aggressive persuasion. By fostering trust and minimizing perceived manipulation, marketers can enhance the effectiveness of sustainability-oriented communication and strengthen consumers' green purchase intentions.

**Limitations and Future Research**

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the proposed relationships have not yet been empirically tested, and future research should validate the conceptual framework using quantitative data and robust analytical techniques such as SEM-PLS. Second, future studies may explore additional moderating variables, such as environmental concern, consumer skepticism, or cultural context, to enrich the explanatory power of the model. Further research could also compare consumer responses across different platforms or product categories to examine the generalizability of the framework. Despite these limitations, the present study provides a valuable conceptual foundation for advancing research on digital green marketing communication.

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