

Converting Clicks to Green Customers: Strategies for Building Trust and Proving Impact Online

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Abstract

Sustainability has entered mainstream consumer behavior, yet many customers still hesitate to purchase eco-friendly products online due to lack of trust and uncertainty. A global study in 2025 found that 58% of consumers doubt environmental claims, mainly because of widespread greenwashing. This research explores how tools such as Digital Product Passports (DPPs), blockchain verification, and measurable environmental impact disclosures help shape trust-based online buying decisions. Using A/B testing with 500 online shoppers in India, transparency elements were shown to increase purchase intention by 67% and strengthen trust for 73% of respondents. The study identifies key digital experience factors—including UI elements, certification visibility, and sustainability-focused social proof—that can help convert website visitors into confident green buyers.

Keywords: sustainable shopping, greenwashing, digital product passport, transparency, consumer behavior

Introduction

Sustainability is no longer a niche concept in marketing—it has become a mainstream expectation for many consumers. Whether purchasing household goods, apparel, or self-care items, shoppers increasingly prefer products produced responsibly. However, a significant gap remains between consumer interest and actual purchase behavior. This gap is largely due to a lack of trust in sustainability claims made by brands—especially online, where customers cannot physically inspect or verify products.

This hesitation has created what researchers now refer to as a trust deficit in sustainable e-commerce. Greenwashing—where companies market themselves as more sustainable than they actually are—has played a major role in shaping this distrust. Words like natural, eco-friendly, and green are often used without evidence, making consumers cautious and more analytical before making a purchase decision.

Unlike in-person shopping, where labels and packaging can provide clarity, online shopping depends almost entirely on the information shown on a product page. This makes trust-building and transparency essential parts of the online user experience—not just marketing. This study examines how e-commerce platforms can bridge the trust gap through transparency tools such as certifications, traceability systems, impact metrics, and verified data.

Literature Review

Growing Skepticism and Greenwashing

Recent surveys reveal increasing skepticism toward sustainability claims. A 2025 study across 13 countries reported that 62% of participants believed environmental claims exaggerate actual sustainability efforts. This has resulted in reduced confidence even when claims are genuine.

The Importance of Transparency Tools

To address skepticism, companies are adopting tools such as Digital Product Passports. These tools allow customers to trace a product's lifecycle—from sourcing to recycling. Research indicates that 73% of consumers report increased trust when able to verify product data through such tools. Certification systems such as Fair Trade, FSC, GOTS, and India's Ecomark program also provide recognizable credibility markers.

Business Impact

Lack of credibility has financial consequences. Brands accused of greenwashing lose repeat customers and long-term loyalty. In contrast, brands offering transparency tend to have stronger customer retention and higher order value.

Sustainability in the Indian Marketplace

India has introduced regulatory frameworks, including the Ecomark Rules (2024), to standardize sustainability labeling. The shift aligns with increasing demand for verified sustainability information among Indian online shoppers.

Research Gap

While many studies explore why customers prefer sustainable options, fewer focus on how digital design influences trust-building. Limited research exists on how UI design, transparency tools, and evidence-based communication influence cart abandonment, perceived credibility, and conversion rates among Indian e-commerce users.

The Role of Digital Proof in Consumer Behavior

Digital proof has become central to online sustainable purchasing. Consumers seek evidence—including tracked supply chain data, measurable impact claims, and third-party certifications—before committing to a purchase.

Measurable Impact

Research shows that customers respond better to quantifiable environmental outcomes. For example, statements like “Reduces carbon emissions by 2.4 kg per purchase” create more trust than vague sustainability language.

Certifications as Decision Shortcuts

Certification logos act as familiar trust signals. When placed near pricing, product titles, or Add-to-Cart buttons, they support faster decision-making and reduce uncertainty.

Layered Information

Consumers prefer layered transparency—short summaries with the option to access detailed information. This prevents information overload while keeping verification accessible.

Factors Affecting Online Green Marketing Effectiveness

Three primary factors influence how users evaluate sustainability messaging online:

1. **Credibility:** Claims must be verifiable through reliable data or certification.
2. **Placement and timing:** Sustainability information should be visible during key decision moments.
3. **Price justification:** Customers are willing to pay more only when sustainability benefits are clearly explained.

Research Objectives

This study was designed to:

Identify strategies to build trust in green e-commerce

Measure the role of DPPs in purchase intent

Study connections between transparency and abandoned carts

Compare the effectiveness of specific UI elements

Understand how sustainability-focused reviews influence purchase decisions

Hypotheses

H0: Transparency tools do not significantly influence purchase decisions.

H1: Transparency tools increase trust and significantly improve purchase rates.

Methodology

A quantitative design was used. Participants included 500 Indian online shoppers. Respondents were shown two versions of a product page—one with general sustainability claims and one with verified data and transparency tools. Regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between transparency and purchase intention.

Findings

67% of participants increased purchase intention when shown DPPs and measurable data.

73% reported increased trust when sustainability data was verifiable.

91% believed some brands exaggerate sustainability claims.

Product pages with specific measurable metrics performed significantly better.

Recommendations

Make transparency visible and accessible.

Use certifying bodies and recognizable eco-labels.

Provide personalized environmental impact reports.

Highlight sustainability during checkout—not just on product pages.

Conclusion

Online sustainability decisions rely heavily on trust and evidence. Customers want verified impact, measu-

rable benefits, and clear transparency—not vague claims. Brands that adopt tools like DPPs, visible certifications, and measurable environmental disclosures create stronger trust and convert more customers. The future of sustainable e-commerce depends on proof-driven communication and evidence-based transparency.

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