

Green Brand Evangelism in the Shadow of Greenwashing: The Mediating Roles of Trust and Happiness

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Abstract

Green marketing has emerged as an indispensable strategic concept that drives marketers to integrate sustainability principles into branding practices, due to which authentic consumer-brand relationships have gained prominence in shaping pro-environmental behaviour. With increasing environmental awareness and regulatory pressure in emerging markets, green brands are seeking psychological pathways to convert engaged consumers into vocal brand advocates. This study investigates the relationships among green brand engagement, green brand trust, green brand happiness and green brand evangelism through the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) framework, while incorporating greenwashing perception as a moderating variable. Data were collected from 450 environmentally aware consumers across Delhi National Capital Region (NCR) using a structured questionnaire and the mall intercept method. We applied Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4 to validate the proposed model, with bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) used to test direct, indirect (mediation) and interaction (moderation) effects. The findings highlight the critical role of green brand engagement in cultivating cognitive trust and affective happiness that motivate consumers to become active green brand evangelists. Green brand trust and green brand happiness partially mediate the engagement-to-evangelism relationship both individually and serially, while greenwashing perception significantly weakens the trust-to-evangelism linkage. Theoretical and practical implications provide insights into how green brands can leverage consumer engagement to encourage authentic advocacy in skepticism-prone metropolitan markets.

Keywords: Green brand engagement, green brand trust, green brand happiness, green brand evangelism, greenwashing perception, stimulus-organism-response

INTRODUCTION

Effective brand management is necessary for any business to succeed in today's environmentally conscious and value-driven market (de Chernatony et al., 2006). Simply promoting a brand to consumers is no longer sufficient; companies must now demonstrate genuine environmental commitment and engage with consumers, stakeholders, and communities to create a meaningful and credible green brand experience (Iglesias et al., 2017; Khandai et al., 2025). This strategy, called green branding, has become a widely used differentiation approach among leading companies, allowing consumers to play an active role by aligning their consumption choices with their pro-environmental values (Chen, 2010). Green branding cultivates a sense of shared purpose and ecological identity among consumers, which leads to the creation of offerings that resonate with their sustainability-oriented needs and wants. Consumers increasingly prefer products that reflect environmental responsibility, transparency, and authenticity. They desire higher levels of trust in the products they choose, and how brands communicate their green credentials. Therefore, scholars have introduced multiple constructs to better understand the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer-green brand relationships (Khandai et al., 2025; Asan et al., 2024).

In today's emerging-market context, the National Capital Region (NCR) of India presents a particularly compelling research setting, as the region records some of the world's highest air pollution levels and accommodates a demographically diverse, digitally connected, and environmentally aware consumer base. These communities have become central hubs where consumers actively engage with green brands, share sustainability experiences, and influence one another's purchase decisions (Prakash & Pathak, 2017). This interaction goes beyond mere transactional engagement and often leads to a deeper relational outcome known as green brand evangelism. Thus, Delhi NCR provides a distinctive environment for green brands to cultivate engagement and stronger emotional connections, leading to positive behavioural outcomes (Baca et al., 2025). Brands actively engage with consumers to develop sustainable products and services, recognising the importance of involving consumers in the value creation process (Chauhan & Goyal, 2024). Strong engagement indicates a commitment to the brand, fostering deeper cognitive and emotional connections. According to self-perception theory, consumers infer their attitudes and dispositions by observing their own behaviour, which makes engagement a powerful precursor to advocacy (Bem, 1972). The current study utilises the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) theory to elucidate the psychological mechanisms through which green brand engagement affects consumers' behavioural outcomes, particularly green brand evangelism. There is a substantial amount of research on relationships within the S-O-R paradigm, but there is a lack of literature examining the connections between green brand engagement, green brand trust, green brand happiness and green brand evangelism in an integrated framework, especially within emerging-market metropolitan contexts. According to the S-O-R model, external stimuli (S) prompt internal cognitive and emotional responses (O), which then result in behavioural outcomes (R) (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In this framework, green brand engagement serves as the stimulus, providing consumers with cognitive, emotional, and behavioural touchpoints with the brand's sustainability ethos. This fosters cognitive and affective reactions in consumers. The internal cognitive state, known as green brand trust, and the affective state, known as green brand happiness, represent the organism. Lastly, green brand evangelism represents the response, where consumers, driven by their cognitive and emotional bond with the brand, actively participate in advocacy behaviours such as positive word-of-mouth, recommendations and oppositional brand referrals (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). Previous research has deeply explored how green branding strengthens consumer trust and purchase intention. Yet, very little research has explored how green brand engagement transforms into evangelism through the sequential mechanisms of cognitive trust and affective happiness. Additionally, the S-O-R model has been applied to study green consumer behaviour across various industries, but the majority of research focuses on purchase intention and brand loyalty (Khandai et al., 2025; Asan et al., 2024) overlooking the higher-order behavioural outcome of evangelism, which has become particularly relevant in digital marketplaces where peer recommendations carry greater credibility than corporate communications. According to Chauhan and Goyal (2024), previous research has primarily focused on positive relational drivers of green brand outcomes, ignoring the parallel role of consumer skepticism towards greenwashing. Further, greenwashing perception has been broadly studied, but its role as a boundary condition disrupting the trust-evangelism linkage remains underexplored. Filling these research gaps, the current study examines the mediating roles of green brand trust and green brand happiness in converting consumer engagement into active green brand evangelism, while testing greenwashing perception as a negative moderator, specifically within the Delhi NCR consumer market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Green Brand Engagement. The idea of brand engagement was first popularised by Hollebeek et al. (2014), who defined it as a consumer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural investment in brand interactions. The internet and social media offer consumers new avenues for engaging with brands' environmental initiatives, while providing companies with valuable insights into consumer expectations, leading to more authentic green branding strategies (Kumar & Polonsky, 2019). Green brand engagement is now an essential part of sustainable marketing strategies, making use of social media, eco-events and brand-specific platforms to build active green consumer ecosystems (Dwivedi, 2015). Green brand engagement fosters a sense of shared environmental purpose and ecological identity, enhancing pro-environmental behaviour and encouraging participation through deeper interaction, content sharing and value alignment (Hollebeek et al., 2014). As a result, engaged consumers are more prone to establish profound connection with the green brand. Through engagement, consumers share their preferences and ideas, which the brand then utilises to refine its sustainability practices and overall green positioning (Chauhan & Goyal, 2024). This collaborative process promotes involvement and empowerment among consumers, and thus improves the green brand's capacity to deliver authentic environmental value, ensuring the resulting offerings better suit the requirements of environmentally aware consumers.

Green Brand Trust. Green brand trust is a term used to describe the cognitive confidence consumers develop towards a brand based on their belief in the brand's environmental performance, credibility, and benevolence (Chen, 2010). This confidence typically develops over an extended interaction between the consumer and the brand. Unlike general brand trust, green brand trust involves a more specific evaluation of environmental authenticity, and it plays a crucial role in establishing a strong and enduring sustainable consumption relationship (Davari & Strutton, 2014). According to Chen (2010), consumers develop trust toward green brands when they perceive consistency between environmental claims and actual performance. Green brand trust is defined as a willingness to depend on a brand based on the consumer's belief or expectation resulting from the brand's credibility, benevolence, and ability with regard to environmental performance. This cognitive evaluation influences consumer behaviour and is essential for developing strong green consumer-brand relationships (Chauhan & Goyal, 2024). For green trust to flourish, consumers need to encounter consistent and verifiable environmental signals (Guerreiro & Pacheco, 2021). Cultivating green brand trust is beneficial as it fosters cognitive reassurance and emotional security, leading to increased green loyalty, advocacy and resilience against competitor incursions.

Green Brand Happiness. Green brand happiness represents the consumer's greatest emotional fulfilment derived from interactions with a green brand — a moment-based experience of pleasant emotions induced through purchase, consumption or association with the brand's sustainability ethos (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). This emotional state goes beyond simple satisfaction, integrating hedonic pleasure with eudaimonic fulfilment, where consumers experience deeper feelings of joy, pride and meaningfulness from contributing to environmental wellbeing (Khandai et al., 2025). Brand happiness is a particularly potent emotional outcome

in green consumption because consumers derive pleasure not only from product attributes but also from the moral and ecological value embedded in their consumption choices. This shift acknowledges that consumers' emotional rewards from green brands are intertwined with their pro-environmental identity and values (Khandai et al., 2025). Thus, green brand happiness leverages consumers' affective resonance to drive deeper relational outcomes.

Green Brand Evangelism. Green brand evangelism represents the highest-order behavioural outcome in consumer–green brand relationships and refers to the voluntary, passionate and unsolicited promotion of a green brand to others (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) introduced the construct as a tripartite phenomenon comprising intent to repurchase, positive brand referrals and oppositional brand referrals — actively discouraging others from using competing alternatives. This perspective suggests that competitive advantage for green brands is derived from authentic consumer advocacy that carries credibility beyond traditional marketing communications (Asan et al., 2024). Thus, green brand evangelism leverages consumers' value-driven advocacy to extend the brand's environmental influence. Khandai et al. (2025) observed that consumers regard green brand evangelism as a form of identity expression, where vocal advocacy reinforces their pro-environmental self-concept. The involvement of consumers in green brand advocacy enhances the perceived authenticity and credibility of the brand.

Greenwashing Perception. Greenwashing perception refers to the consumer's belief that a brand misleads stakeholders about its environmental performance through false, vague, or exaggerated claims (Chen & Chang, 2013; Delmas & Burbano, 2011). This skeptical evaluation manifests through five behavioural cues: vague language, misleading visuals, false labels, irrelevant claims and the deliberate omission of unfavourable environmental information. Rising consumer scepticism — especially in metropolitan India where digital literacy and access to third-party sustainability information are higher — has elevated greenwashing perception as a critical variable that disrupts the trust-based mechanisms underpinning green branding (Chauhan & Goyal, 2024). Drawing on signalling theory (Spence, 1973), when consumers perceive inconsistency between a brand's environmental claims and actual practices, the credibility of brand signals deteriorates, eroding the relational pathways that drive advocacy. Greenwashing perception thus serves as a boundary condition that conditions the strength of the green brand engagement-to-evangelism pathway.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Green Brand Engagement and Green Brand Evangelism. Engagement is widely recognised as a precursor to higher-order brand outcomes (Hollebeek et al., 2014). When consumers actively engage with a green brand — through information search, social media interaction or experiential involvement — they accumulate evidence about the brand's environmental authenticity and gradually develop the conviction that motivates public advocacy. Dwivedi (2015) demonstrated that engagement intensity directly correlates with brand-supportive behaviours, while Khandai et al. (2025) confirmed this relationship specifically for sustainable brands. The deeper a consumer's involvement with a brand's sustainability story, the greater their willingness to recommend, defend and advocate for the brand. In emerging markets such as India, where environmental awareness is rapidly intensifying, green brand engagement has emerged as a critical antecedent of evangelistic behaviour. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H1: Green brand engagement has a significant positive impact on green brand evangelism.

Green Brand Engagement and Green Brand Trust. Engagement is also a precursor to trust formation in consumer–brand relationships (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). When consumers actively engage with a green brand's sustainability initiatives, they accumulate evidence about the brand's environmental credibility and develop cognitive confidence in its claims. Kumar and Polonsky (2019) found that engagement provides consumers with multiple touchpoints to verify brand authenticity, thereby strengthening trust. Chauhan and Goyal (2024) further demonstrated that engagement-driven information processing reduces consumer scepticism and elevates green brand trust. The richer a consumer's engagement with a brand's sustainability narrative, the greater their confidence in the brand's environmental commitment becomes. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H2: Green brand engagement has a significant positive impact on green brand trust.

Green Brand Engagement and Green Brand Happiness. Active engagement with a green brand also generates positive emotional outcomes (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). When consumers participate in a green brand's sustainability activities and identify with its environmental purpose, they experience a sense of meaningful fulfilment that transcends ordinary consumption pleasure. Khandai et al. (2025) empirically demonstrated that consumer engagement with sustainable brands generates affective responses characterised by joy, pride and moral fulfilment. This emotional outcome is particularly pronounced in green consumption because consumers derive pleasure both from product enjoyment and from contributing to a higher environmental purpose (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H3: Green brand engagement has a significant positive impact on green brand happiness.

Green Brand Trust and Green Brand Evangelism. Trust is a powerful precursor to advocacy behaviour (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). When consumers cognitively trust that a green brand is genuinely committed to environmental welfare, they become willing to publicly endorse the brand and stake their reputation on its credibility. Asan et al. (2024) demonstrated that green brand trust significantly drives evangelistic behaviour, as consumers who trust a brand's environmental claims are more likely to recommend it and defend it against criticism. In digital marketplaces where reputational risk is salient, trust functions as the foundation upon which public advocacy is built. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H4: Green brand trust has a significant positive impact on green brand evangelism.

Green Brand Happiness and Green Brand Evangelism. Happy consumers exhibit a heightened propensity to share their positive experiences with others (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). Khandai et al. (2025) empirically established that brand happiness is a powerful antecedent of brand evangelism, particularly in sustainable consumption contexts where consumers feel a sense of moral fulfilment alongside hedonic enjoyment. Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) further explains this relationship: when consumers experience consistent happiness from a green brand, they begin to identify themselves as advocates and behave accordingly — recommending the brand, defending it and discouraging competitors. This emotional contagion effect is especially pronounced among Gen Z and millennial consumers who use social media as a platform for value expression. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H5: Green brand happiness has a significant positive impact on green brand evangelism.

Green Brand Trust and Green Brand Happiness. Trust is a precursor to deep emotional fulfilment in consumer–brand relationships (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). When consumers cognitively trust that a green brand is genuinely committed to environmental welfare, the cognitive reassurance reduces dissonance and amplifies the emotional reward of consumption. In the sustainable consumption context, trust transforms ordinary purchase satisfaction into a meaningful emotional state characterised by pride and joy in contributing to environmental wellbeing (Khandai et al., 2025). Consumers who doubt a brand's authenticity cannot experience deep affective fulfilment from its consumption; therefore, trust serves as the cognitive foundation upon which green brand happiness is constructed. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H6: Green brand trust has a significant positive impact on green brand happiness.

Mediating Role of Green Brand Trust and Green Brand Happiness. Drawing on the S-O-R framework, the relationship between green brand engagement and green brand evangelism is unlikely to operate solely through a direct effect; instead, it is expected to flow through internal cognitive and affective states. Trust serves as the cognitive mediator that translates engagement into advocacy, while happiness functions as the affective mediator that converts engagement into evangelism through emotional fulfilment (Khandai et al., 2025). Engagement provides the stimulus, trust and happiness constitute the organismic states, and evangelism represents the behavioural response. Furthermore, the integration of both mediators in sequence yields a serial mediation pathway in which engagement progressively converts into evangelism through trust first, which then activates happiness, ultimately driving advocacy behaviour. This cognitive–affective–conative chain reflects the full psychological journey from engagement to evangelism. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H7: Green brand trust mediates the relationship between green brand engagement and green brand evangelism.

H8: Green brand happiness mediates the relationship between green brand engagement and green brand evangelism.

H9: Green brand trust and green brand happiness serially mediate the relationship between green brand engagement and green brand evangelism.

Moderating Role of Greenwashing Perception

Greenwashing perception introduces a critical disruptive force into the proposed relational chain. Drawing on signalling theory (Spence, 1973), when consumers perceive a brand's environmental claims as misleading, the credibility of brand signals deteriorates, weakening the conversion of cognitive trust into public advocacy. Chen and Chang (2013) demonstrated that greenwashing significantly diminishes consumer confidence in green offerings, while Chauhan and Goyal (2024) found that perceived greenwashing erodes the relational benefits of green marketing efforts. Even consumers who cognitively trust a brand may withhold public advocacy if persistent doubts about authenticity make them fear reputational risk on social media platforms. Therefore, even when green brand trust is established, the conversion of trust into evangelism is expected to weaken when greenwashing perception is high. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H10: Greenwashing perception negatively moderates the relationship between green brand trust and green brand evangelism, such that the relationship is weaker when greenwashing perception is high.

Conceptual Research Model.Based on the foregoing theoretical arguments, this study proposes an integrated conceptual model that links green brand engagement, green brand trust, green brand happiness and green brand evangelism within a unified framework, while incorporating greenwashing perception as a negative moderator on the trust-to-evangelism linkage. The proposed model is presented in Figure 1.

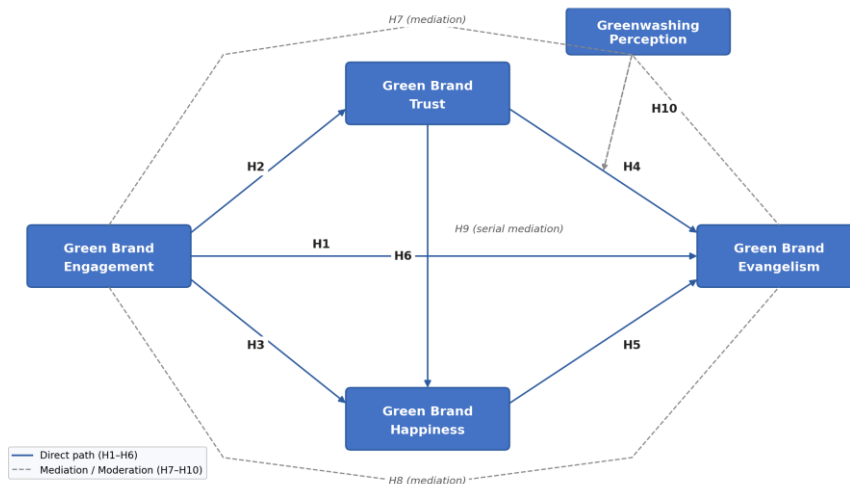


Figure 1. Hypothesised research model.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study examines the connections among green brand engagement, green brand trust, green brand happiness and green brand evangelism, with greenwashing perception as a moderator. A quantitative approach was used to verify the conceptual model (Figure 1). Data were gathered using the mall intercept method (Bush & Hair, 1985). This method was chosen for accessibility, face-to-face interaction, budget constraints and quality responses (Khandai et al., 2023). Respondents were approached in less crowded areas of malls and organic stores across Delhi, Gurugram, Noida, Faridabad and Ghaziabad, ensuring proportional representation across the five sub-regions of the National Capital Region. Participants were selected based on their familiarity with green brands, prior purchase of at least one green-branded product within the preceding six months, and minimum age of 18 years to enhance data reliability. Data were collected using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A questionnaire was drafted using validated scales adapted from previous studies with minor revisions to fit our research objective. The Green Brand Engagement scale was adapted from Hollebeek et al. (2014) to measure consumer perceptions of cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement with the green brand. The Green Brand Trust scale, derived from Chen (2010), captures consumers' confidence in the brand's environmental claims, performance and commitment. The Green Brand Happiness scale was adapted from Bruhn and Schnebelen (2017) and Schnebelen and Bruhn (2018) to assess consumers' affective fulfilment derived from green brand interactions. The Green Brand Evangelism scale was adapted from Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) and Khandai et al. (2025) to assess consumers' active advocacy behaviour, including positive word-of-mouth, recommendations and oppositional brand referrals. The Greenwashing Perception scale was adapted from Chen and Chang (2013) to measure consumers' skepticism towards the brand's environmental claims (Table 1). There were a total of 488 respondents; however, the final sample was composed of 450 usable responses as 38 participants either failed the screening criteria or provided incomplete responses. The demographic profile of the final sample is presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Measurement Items.

Construct	Measurement Statement
Green brand engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014)	1. I think a lot about this green brand when I shop for eco-friendly products. 2. I feel passionate about this brand's sustainability initiatives. 3. Using this brand makes me feel good about contributing to the environment. 4. I actively spend time learning about this brand's environmental practices. 5. I feel emotionally connected to this brand's green products.
Green brand trust (Chen, 2010)	1. I feel that this brand's environmental claims are generally reliable. 2. I feel that this brand's environmental performance is dependable. 3. I feel that this brand's environmental commitments are trustworthy. 4. This brand keeps its promises regarding environmental protection. 5. This brand's environmental concern meets my expectations.
Green brand happiness (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017; Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018)	1. Using this brand makes me feel happy. 2. I feel joyful when I purchase this brand's green products. 3. This brand gives me a sense of fulfilment because of its sustainability efforts. 4. I experience pleasure when consuming this brand's eco-friendly products. 5. Owning this brand's products gives me emotional satisfaction.
Green brand evangelism (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Khandai et al., 2025)	1. I actively recommend this brand's green products to friends and family. 2. I try to convince others to purchase this brand. 3. I speak positively about this brand's environmental efforts on social media. 4. I would defend this brand if someone criticised its sustainability claims. 5. I would discourage others from buying brands that are less eco-friendly than this one.
Greenwashing perception (Chen & Chang, 2013)	1. This brand misleads consumers with words in its environmental claims. 2. This brand uses misleading visuals or graphics to promote its green features. 3. This brand makes vague or unclear claims about being environmentally friendly. 4. This brand overstates the actual environmental benefits of its products. 5. This brand omits important information, making its green claims appear better than they are.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics.

Descriptive Statistics	Frequency	Per cent
Gender		
Male	234	52.0
Female	212	47.1
Prefer not to say	4	0.9
Age group		
18-25	135	30.0
26-35	158	35.1
36-45	90	20.0
46-55	45	10.0
Above 55	22	4.9
Education		
Graduate	153	34.0
Post-graduate	207	46.0
Doctorate	36	8.0
Other	54	12.0
City		
Delhi	158	35.1
Gurugram	99	22.0
Noida	90	20.0
Ghaziabad	54	12.0
Faridabad	49	10.9

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This study employed validated tools and procedures to ensure robustness. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 27 using principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax Rotation to identify the underlying factor structure. Five factors comprising 25 items were extracted. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure each variable's internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951). The obtained values are more than the acceptable limit of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) is used for examining data's appropriateness, which is 0.892. Hence, it meets the cut-off criteria of 0.60 (Kaiser & Rice, 1974). The value of 0.000 for Bartlett's test of sphericity is less than 0.05, thus indicating that the given factors are uncorrelated. Method bias was checked using Harman's single-factor test. The variance explained is below the accepted limit of 50 per cent suggested by Harman (1967), indicating that the data were free from any bias. The conceptual model was assessed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4, following the two-stage analytical procedure recommended by Hair et al. (2022). PLS-SEM was preferred over covariance-based SEM as the study has a predictive and exploratory orientation, includes multiple mediators and a moderator, and tests a relatively complex structural model with non-normal data. In the first stage, the measurement model was assessed for indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) values surpassed the required thresholds of 0.70 and 0.50 respectively, confirming convergent validity. All diagonal values (square root of AVE) exceeded non-diagonal values (correlation between constructs), confirming the discriminant validity (Table 3). The heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) values were also below 0.85, providing additional evidence of discriminant validity. In the second stage, the structural model was assessed using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples to estimate path coefficients, indirect effects and interaction effects, with bias-corrected confidence intervals used to test statistical significance. The model fit indices met the required thresholds, with all values exceeding the acceptable limits (Table 4). The direct paths (H1–H6) were tested through the structural model, the mediation hypotheses (H7–H9) were assessed through the specific indirect-effects routine in SmartPLS 4 following the Zhao et al. (2010) decision tree to classify mediation type, and the moderation hypothesis (H10) was tested through the two-stage approach using the latent interaction term $GBT \times GWP$.

Table 3. Validity and Reliability.

Constructs	Mean	SD	α	CR	AVE	GBE	GBT	GBH
GBE	5.42	0.812	0.864	0.901	0.645	0.803		
GBT	5.18	0.794	0.892	0.921	0.698	0.624	0.836	
GBH	5.36	0.748	0.875	0.910	0.668	0.581	0.652	0.817
GBEv	4.98	0.821	0.851	0.894	0.628	0.512	0.589	0.638
GWP	3.42	0.962	0.876	0.910	0.668	−0.218	−0.412	−0.286

Notes: AVE: Average variance extracted; CR: Composite reliability; GBE: Green brand engagement; GBT: Green brand trust; GBH: Green brand happiness; GBEv: Green brand evangelism; GWP: Greenwashing perception; SD: Standard deviation. Diagonal values represent the square root of AVE.

Table 4. Model Fit Indices.

Model Fit	Cut-off	Model Statistics
SRMR	≤ 0.08	0.062
NFI	≥ 0.90	0.918
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.932
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.944
R^2 (GBT)	—	0.389
R^2 (GBH)	—	0.512
R^2 (GBEv)	—	0.586
Q^2 (GBEv)	> 0	0.342

Notes: CFI: Comparative fit index; NFI: Normed fit index; SRMR: Standardised root mean square residual; TLI: Tucker–Lewis index.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses H1–H6 were evaluated using PLS-SEM path analysis with bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) in SmartPLS 4, while mediation hypotheses H7–H9 were tested through the specific indirect-effects routine, and the moderation hypothesis H10 was tested through interaction-term analysis using the two-stage approach. The results showed that all hypotheses were significant (Table 5). Green brand engagement significantly and positively affects green brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < .001$), green brand trust ($\beta = 0.624$, $p < .001$) and green brand happiness ($\beta = 0.342$, $p < .001$). Green brand trust has a favourable and significant impact on green brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.231$, $p < .001$) and green brand happiness ($\beta = 0.448$, $p < .001$). Green brand happiness has a favourable and significant impact on green brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.318$, $p < .001$).

Table 5. Result of Hypotheses Testing.

No.	Relationships	Path Estimate	p-value	LLCI	ULCI	Outcome
H1	GBE $\rightarrow$ GBEv	0.184	.000	0.108	0.260	Supported
H2	GBE $\rightarrow$ GBT	0.624	.000	0.553	0.695	Supported
H3	GBE $\rightarrow$ GBH	0.342	.000	0.265	0.419	Supported
H4	GBT $\rightarrow$ GBEv	0.231	.000	0.148	0.314	Supported
H5	GBH $\rightarrow$ GBEv	0.318	.000	0.236	0.400	Supported
H6	GBT $\rightarrow$ GBH	0.448	.000	0.371	0.525	Supported

Notes: GBE: Green brand engagement; GBT: Green brand trust; GBH: Green brand happiness; GBEv: Green brand evangelism; LLCI: Lower-level confidence interval; ULCI: Upper-level confidence interval.

Table 6 summarises the results of the indirect impact of green brand engagement on green brand evangelism via green brand trust (H7), green brand happiness (H8) and the serial mediation pathway through both trust and happiness (H9). All three indirect effects are significant because the bias-corrected confidence intervals do not contain zero, and the direct effect of green brand engagement on green brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < .001$) also remains significant after the inclusion of the mediators. Following the mediation typology proposed by Zhao et al. (2010) and adapted by Hair et al. (2022) for PLS-SEM, the simultaneous significance of both the direct and indirect effects, combined with their same (positive) direction, classifies the relationship as complementary partial mediation. In other words, green brand trust and green brand happiness do not fully explain the engagement-to-evangelism linkage; rather, they partially transmit the effect of engagement on evangelism while a meaningful direct effect persists. This pattern holds for all three mediation pathways: GBT alone (H7, partial mediation), GBH alone (H8, partial mediation) and the serial GBT $\rightarrow$ GBH chain (H9, partial serial mediation). The variance accounted for (VAF) was 65.0 per cent (combined indirect effect of 0.342 over total effect of 0.526), confirming that the majority of the effect of green brand engagement on green brand evangelism flows through the cognitive–affective mediating chain, while approximately 35 per cent operates through the direct pathway.

Table 6. Indirect Effects.

No.	Relationship	Effect	p-value	LLCI	ULCI
H7	GBE $\rightarrow$ GBT $\rightarrow$ GBEv	0.144	.000	0.089	0.199
H8	GBE $\rightarrow$ GBH $\rightarrow$ GBEv	0.109	.000	0.071	0.148
H9	GBE $\rightarrow$ GBT $\rightarrow$ GBH $\rightarrow$ GBEv	0.089	.000	0.058	0.121
	Direct effect: GBE $\rightarrow$ GBEv	0.184	.000	0.108	0.260
	Total effect: GBE $\rightarrow$ GBEv	0.526	.000	0.453	0.598

Notes: GBE: Green brand engagement; GBT: Green brand trust; GBH: Green brand happiness; GBEv: Green brand evangelism; LLCI: Lower-level confidence interval; ULCI: Upper-level confidence interval.

The moderating effect of greenwashing perception on the green brand trust to green brand evangelism relationship (H10) was tested through the two-stage approach in SmartPLS 4, where the latent interaction term $GBT \times GWP$ was generated and entered into the structural model along with the main effects (Hair et al., 2022). As shown in Table 7, the interaction term is significant and negative ($\beta = -0.176$, $p < .001$), confirming that greenwashing perception weakens the trust-to-evangelism linkage. Simple slope analysis indicates that the positive relationship between green brand trust and green brand evangelism is substantially stronger when greenwashing perception is low at one standard deviation below the mean ($\beta = 0.402$) than when it is high at one standard deviation above the mean ($\beta = 0.058$). Hence, H10 is supported.

Table 7. Moderation Analysis.

No.	Interaction Path	β	p-value	LLCI	ULCI	Outcome
H10	GBT $\times$ GWP $\rightarrow$ GBEv	−0.176	.000	−0.246	−0.106	Supported

Notes: GBT: Green brand trust; GBEv: Green brand evangelism; GWP: Greenwashing perception; LLCI: Lower-level confidence interval; ULCI: Upper-level confidence interval.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of green brand engagement in driving green brand evangelism through the cognitive mechanism of trust and the affective mechanism of happiness, particularly in the skepticism-prone metropolitan market of Delhi NCR. Engagement is shaped by experiences from communication channels, eco-events and digital interactions with the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Engaging with a green brand fosters cognitive trust and emotional fulfilment, which motivate consumers to actively participate in advocacy behaviours such as positive word-of-mouth, recommendations and oppositional brand referrals. This supports recent studies emphasising that cognitive and affective bonds with green brands significantly influence consumer evangelism behaviours (Khandai et al., 2025; Asan et al., 2024). Furthermore, the application of the S-O-R framework provides valuable insights into how green brand engagement can be effectively leveraged to drive evangelism, especially within the Indian consumer market, where environmental awareness and digital connectivity have created a fertile ground for advocacy. Thus, this study contributes to the existing literature by confirming that green brand trust and green brand happiness serve as powerful sequential mediators between green brand engagement and green brand evangelism, aligning with previous findings on the transformative impact of cognitive and affective branding. Critically, the findings reveal that greenwashing perception significantly weakens the green brand trust to green brand evangelism linkage, supporting signalling theory's prediction that consumer skepticism erodes the credibility of brand signals (Spence, 1973; Chen & Chang, 2013). Even consumers who cognitively trust a brand may withhold public advocacy when persistent doubts about authenticity make them fear reputational risk on social media platforms. This dual-mechanism finding extends the green branding literature by demonstrating that positive relational drivers and negative perceptual barriers operate simultaneously in shaping green consumer behaviour.

IMPLICATIONS

This research uses the S-O-R framework to examine the relationships among green brand engagement, green brand trust, green brand happiness and green brand evangelism, while incorporating greenwashing perception as a boundary condition. Applying this framework in a new context provides insights into how cognitive and affective connections in green branding foster active consumer advocacy. This enhances our comprehension of consumer–green brand relationships and pro-environmental advocacy behaviour. By showing that green brand trust and green brand happiness serially mediate the relationship between green brand engagement and green brand evangelism, this research emphasises the crucial role of integrated cognitive–affective mechanisms in turning passive engagement into active brand advocacy. The research also adds to the green branding domain by extending its application within the Delhi NCR metropolitan context. This contributes to the broader theoretical discourse on emerging-market consumer behaviour and the role of skepticism in green brand outcomes.

The results also have significant implications for marketers. To cultivate stronger evangelism among engaged consumers, a green brand must communicate honestly, reliably and credibly. Since green brand trust and green brand happiness play crucial mediating roles, building both cognitive credibility and affective connection with consumers is essential. Brands should focus on achieving this through transparent environmental disclosures, third-party eco-certifications, sustainability storytelling and consistent engagement that aligns with consumer values. Furthermore, given the negative moderating role of greenwashing perception, green brands must proactively address consumer skepticism through verified impact reports, scientific evidence and transparent supply-chain disclosures, rather than relying on vague green claims. Therefore, authentic green branding can be a powerful tool for converting engaged consumers into vocal evangelists in metropolitan markets such as Delhi NCR.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

It is essential to acknowledge that no study is perfect, and this one also has some limitations. The present study focuses on Delhi NCR; future studies should encompass consumers from various Indian cities and other emerging markets to enhance generalisability. While the present study examines the mediating roles of green brand trust and green brand happiness within the S-O-R framework, future research could expand the model by incorporating additional constructs as moderators or mediators. Exploring variables such as environmental knowledge, eco-anxiety or generation cohort as moderators could provide deeper insights into how cognitive and affective connections influence evangelism behaviours. Additionally, integrating factors like green brand authenticity, sustainability self-efficacy or green brand experience as mediators could enhance the understanding of the green branding process. The cross-sectional nature of this study limits causal inference; future research could adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to confirm the temporal sequencing of the proposed pathway. Such extensions would further enrich the model and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of green consumer–brand interactions in the metropolitan emerging-market context.

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