

GREENWASHING AWARENESS, PERCEPTION, AND BRAND TRUST RELATIONSHIP: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN TURKEY

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Abstract

With increasing environmental awareness in society, businesses are centering their marketing strategies around sustainability and environmentalism. However, some businesses that are not actually environmentally conscious are camouflaging their unfriendly practices with "greenwashing" strategies to create a positive brand image and gain trust by appearing environmentally friendly. The aim of this study is to examine university students' awareness, trust and perceptions regarding greenwashing practices in Turkey. An online survey was administered to students studying at 208 universities in Turkey. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the internal consistency of the survey was found to be $\alpha = .808$. Construct validity was evaluated with exploratory factor analysis (KMO = .841; $p < .001$), and it was determined that the scale exhibits a three-dimensional structure: greenwashing awareness, perception, and brand trust. The findings show that the participants' knowledge level regarding the concept of greenwashing is at a moderate level; however, their critical attitudes towards sustainability claims are high. The results indicate that perceived greenwashing negatively affects brand trust, while media exposure and awareness levels play a significant role in shaping consumers' questioning behavior and responsible consumption tendencies. This study reveals that young consumers' critical evaluation levels of environmental claims have an impact on brand trust, and offers an empirical contribution to the greenwashing literature in the Turkish context.

Keywords: Greenwashing, Shallow Environmentalism, Sustainability, Deceptive Marketing, Environmental Marketing Consumer Perception, University Students

JEL Classification: M1, M37, D83

YEŞİL AKLAMA FARKINDALIĞI, ALGI VE MARKA GÜVENİ İLİŞKİSİ: TÜRKİYE'DE ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİ ÜZERİNE AMPİRİK BİR ARAŞTIRMA

Öz

Toplumda çevresel duyarlılığın artmasıyla birlikte, işletmeler pazarlama stratejilerini sürdürülebilirlik ve çevrecilik söylemleri etrafında toplamaktadır. Ancak gerçekte çevreye duyarlı olmayan bazı işletmeler, çevre dostu görünerek olumlu marka imajı oluşturmak ve güven kazanmak için çevreci olmayan uygulamalarını "greenwashing" stratejileriyle kamufle etmektedir. Çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'de öğrenim görmekte olan üniversite öğrencilerinin greenwashing uygulamalarına yönelik farkındalık, güven ve algılarını incelemektir. Türkiye'deki 208 üniversitede öğrenim gören öğrencilere çevrimiçi anket uygulanmıştır. Anketin iç tutarlılığına ilişkin Cronbach's Alpha katsayısı $\alpha = .808$ olarak bulunmuştur. Yapı geçerliliği açımlayıcı faktör analizi ile değerlendirilmiş (KMO = .841; $p < .001$) ve ölçeğin üç boyutlu bir yapı sergilediği belirlenmiştir: greenwashing farkındalığı, algısı ve marka güveni. Elde edilen bulgular, katılımcıların greenwashing kavramına ilişkin bilgi düzeylerinin orta seviyede olduğunu; sürdürülebilirlik iddialarına yönelik eleştirel tutumlarının ise yüksek olduğunu göstermektedir. Bulgular, algılanan greenwashing'ın marka güvenini olumsuz etkilediğini, medya etkisi ve farkındalık düzeyinin ise tüketicilerin sorgulama eğilimleri ve sorumlu tüketim davranışları üzerinde belirleyici rol oynadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, genç tüketicilerin çevresel iddialara yönelik eleştirel değerlendirme düzeylerinin marka güveni üzerinde etkili olduğunu ortaya koymakta ve greenwashing literatürüne Türkiye bağlamında ampirik bir katkı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Yeşil Aklama, Yeşil Badana, Sığ Çevrecilik, Sürdürülebilirlik, Yanıltıcı Pazarlama, Çevreci Pazarlama Tüketici Algısı, Üniversite Öğrencileri

JEL Sınıflaması: M1, M37, D83

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1. Introduction

In recent years, environmental awareness has become an increasingly important issue for both consumers and businesses. With this awareness, companies are trying to highlight their environmental responsibilities; however, in some cases, these efforts are based more on a "looking environmentally friendly" strategy than on genuine sustainability. This situation is defined in the literature by the concept of greenwashing (greenwashing, false environmentalism, shallow ecology, etc.). Greenwashing refers to misleading marketing and communication activities that make companies appear environmentally conscious but are not actually sufficiently committed to sustainable practices (Lublóy et al., 2024; Şenyapar, 2024). Today, environmental awareness has become a crucial issue for both consumers and brands. For companies in particular, fulfilling and demonstrating their responsibilities to the environment and society as corporate citizens is extremely important for influencing their target audience.

Greenwashing practices aim to influence consumer perception through vague statements, unverified sustainability claims, and incomplete information about corporate activities (Verma and Bharti, 2023). Such approaches also create inconsistencies between environmental practices and image, thus undermining consumer trust (Dempere et al., 2024; Koch and Denner, 2024). These practices by businesses both prevent environmentally conscious consumers from adopting an environmentally aware lifestyle and weaken efforts to solve environmental problems (Akyüz, 2020; Şen, 2025; Hüseyinli and Akosmanoğlu, 2024).

In this context, understanding how consumers perceive greenwashing and how this perception influences their trust, media-driven awareness, and behavioral responses has become increasingly important. Therefore, this study focuses on examining greenwashing within the dimensions of awareness, trust, media influence, and consumer behavior.

2. The Concept of Greenwashing: Definition, Scope, and Development

As a critical concept, greenwashing refers to the discrepancy between the environmental performance and rhetoric of businesses and brands. Through greenwashing practices, companies conceal their environmentally insensitive and harmful practices while attempting to position themselves as environmentally friendly and sustainable through various marketing strategies. The concept of greenwashing was first used in 1986 by environmental activist Jay Westerveld, who drew attention to practices in the hospitality sector that contradicted their discourse on environmental sensitivity. Westerveld's criticism was based on the fact that hotels

claimed to be protecting the environment by urging guests not to wash towels, but did not follow a systematic policy to reduce resource consumption in the background (Netto et al., 2020). The word "greenwashing" was officially added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 1999, where it is defined as misleading information tactics used by companies to present themselves as environmentally friendly (Yılan, 2020).

Greenwashing can also be defined as a marketing tactic encompassing companies' efforts to portray their products or activities as more environmentally friendly than they actually are (Veral, 2022). One of these tactics is to use visual design elements on product labels that make a company's products or services appear environmentally friendly in order to make them seem eco-friendly (Hüseyinli and Akosmanoğlu, 2024; Gürçam, 2025; Macit and Aydın, 2024).

According to Seele and Gatti, greenwashing is a strategic and deliberate act of spreading misinformation aimed at misleading stakeholders about an organization's environmental actions and practices (Seele and Gatti, 2017; Xia et al., 2023). The reasons behind businesses' efforts to appear environmentally friendly can vary. Companies often tend to conceal their true environmental performance by resorting to this practice to improve their public image, attract environmentally conscious consumers, or meet the expectations of their internal target audience (Jog and Singhal, 2020; Wang et al., 2024; Zhang and Yang, 2022; Sun and Shi, 2022).

Sustainability is an approach to creating long-term value by balancing the economic growth goals of brands and companies with environmental and social responsibilities. In other words, it involves real and holistic practices such as eco-friendly production, ethical supply chains, carbon footprint reduction, and social responsibility projects. Greenwashing, on the other hand, is the attempt by a brand or company to project an "environmentally friendly" or "sustainable" image solely through communication and marketing tools, without actually implementing sufficient sustainable practices.

2.1. Greenwashing Strategies

Greenwashing strategies are various communication and positioning strategies employed by businesses to conceal the truth about their environmental performance. These strategies often aim to create a public perception of an environmentally conscious organization while hiding the true environmental impact of products or services. In implementing greenwashing strategies, organizations or brands heavily utilize exaggerated environmental claims, nature-themed symbols, and colors. Furthermore, non-transparent corporate reports, environmental certifications of uncertain accuracy, or the exaggeration of corporate activities not directly

related to the environment are also considered greenwashing strategies (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020).

Greenwashing practices have been classified in various ways in the literature. These can be categorized as communication-focused greenwashing, implementation-focused greenwashing, symbolic greenwashing (Delmas and Burbano, 2011), and certification or label manipulation. According to this classification:

Communication-Focused Greenwashing: This involves emphasizing the company's exaggerated claims about sustainability only through communication channels (advertising, website, reports). In this practice, the truth about the institution or brand may be revealed through other channels (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015).

Application-Oriented Greenwashing: This is when a company conceals unfriendly practices by highlighting a few sustainable initiatives. An example is BP's emphasis on sustainability with its "Beyond Petroleum" slogan, yet its involvement in oil spills and ecological disasters.

Label or Certificate Manipulation: Label or certificate manipulation refers to the use of environmental certifications and labels containing sustainability claims issued by unknown or unauthorized organizations. For example, a fashion brand might give the impression of being environmentally sustainable by using phrases, colors, or logos such as "organic cotton," "recycled yarn," or "Naturally Certified" on clothing labels.

Another strategy associated with greenwashing is "greenhushing." Greenhushing refers to companies consciously avoiding publicly sharing their genuinely positive sustainability efforts. In other words, it means an organization deliberately understating or completely ignoring its environmental performance out of fear of criticism, misunderstanding, or accusations of greenwashing. However, greenhushing is also problematic because the failure to share positive practices eliminates transparency and prevents the dissemination of good examples. (Gacek, 2020; Yang et al., 2024).

Through greenwashing strategies, organizations attempt to attract environmentally conscious consumers and project a more responsible image in their eyes (Şenyapar, 2024). Essentially a form of corporate disinformation, this practice aims to manipulate public perception by spreading exaggerated or unverified claims about the environmental sustainability of products, services, or overall operations, thereby concealing the companies' actual environmentally damaging behaviors (Liang and Gao, 2025; Dempere et al., 2024; Koch and Denner, 2024).

2.2. Reasons for the Spread of Greenwashing and its Effects on Consumer Trust

Today, the increasing awareness of consumers regarding environmental issues is forcing institutions and brands to pay attention to this matter. While some institutions adopt corrective practices to respond to these consumer demands, companies that do not adopt environmentally friendly practices prefer to engage in efforts to present themselves in a better light to the public (Santos et al., 2023). Especially in sectors such as textiles and fast fashion, where environmental damage is significant, greenwashing practices are also becoming widespread (Persakis et al., 2025). The proliferation of greenwashing practices creates disadvantages for brand reputation; because consumers lose trust when they see a discrepancy between companies' environmental claims and their actual activities (Koch and Denner, 2024; Persakis et al., 2025).

In an era where environmental awareness is becoming increasingly important, it is a fact that companies are under increasing pressure to adopt environmentally sensitive practices (Forliano et al., 2025). However, increasing pressure for sustainability has led some companies to adopt only environmental rhetoric as a marketing strategy without real change (Santos et al., 2023; Tian and Niu, 2024). Such strategic environmental rhetoric is frequently seen, especially in advertising campaigns, and over time it undermines consumer trust and hinders genuine sustainability efforts (Alqahtani, 2025; Santos et al., 2023).

Greenwashing is widely used in many sectors, including fashion and food, as well as automotive, industrial manufacturing, and cosmetics (Kouam, 2024). It is noted that greenwashing practices are particularly concentrated in the fashion and food sectors, but are also widely observed in different sectors such as automotive, industrial manufacturing, and cosmetics (Kouam, 2024). The increasing demand for green products and sustainability-based markets has led some organizations to focus solely on environmental rhetoric instead of creating and implementing truly sustainable business models. For environmentally conscious and sustainability-conscious consumers, this undermines trust in corporate social responsibility (Verma and Bharti, 2023). Greenwashing, which is increasingly becoming a structural problem, increases feelings of uncertainty among consumers towards businesses, eroding trust and making it difficult for businesses with genuinely sustainable policies to gain a competitive advantage in their markets (Somany, 2023). The erosion of consumer trust in organizations due to greenwashing practices can be an obstacle to the achievement of the goals of genuine sustainability initiatives (Deshmukh and Tare, 2023; Şenyapar, 2024; Estrada, 2024; Verma and Bharti, 2023).

3. Method

This research aims to examine the awareness levels of university students across Turkey regarding the concept of greenwashing and the relationship between this awareness and their knowledge, attitudes, and consumer behavior. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Beykoz University Ethics Committee with decision number E-45152895-299-2500022454 dated 29.04.2025. The survey used in the research was conducted in two stages; the first stage involved a pilot study with 116 participants. The findings from the pilot study were presented as an abstract entitled "Greenwashing: A Study on University Students' Awareness" at the Borderless 3 Ecology Now Symposium in May 2025.

In this study, four main hypotheses are tested within the dimensions of awareness, trust, media influence, and consumer behavior. These dimensions were operationalized through the survey items designed to measure students' awareness, trust perceptions, media exposure, and consumer behavior related to greenwashing. The hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H1: Awareness of greenwashing increases consumers' tendency to question companies' sustainability claims.

H2: Perceived greenwashing negatively affects consumers' trust in brands.

H3: Exposure to media and social media positively influences consumers' awareness and skepticism toward greenwashing.

H4: Consumers who are aware of greenwashing are more likely to engage in responsible behaviors, such as researching products, boycotting brands, or supporting regulatory measures.

The target population of the study consists of students enrolled in higher education institutions in Türkiye. According to official data provided by the Council of Higher Education, there are 208 universities in Turkey; 6,715,761 people are studying at the undergraduate and associate degree levels in these universities. Accordingly, using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the minimum required sample size for the survey was calculated as 385. The survey was distributed to 208 universities nationwide, and responses were collected between January 8 and February 28, 2026. The survey yielded 767 usable responses, exceeding the calculated threshold and strengthening the robustness of the statistical analyses. This 22-question survey, developed to examine students' awareness, perceptions, and attitudes regarding greenwashing, was conducted online. The internal consistency of the survey was assessed using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, yielding an $\alpha = 0.808$ coefficient, reflecting an acceptable level of reliability.

The suitability of the scale for factor analysis was evaluated using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Sphericity Test. The KMO value was found to be 0.841, indicating that the sample size was sufficient for factor analysis. The Bartlett test result is statistically significant ($\chi^2(153)=3588.56$; $p<0.001$). These findings indicate that there are significant correlations between the items.

4. Findings

A demographic analysis of the 767 university students participating in the study revealed the following results:

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Age	18-21	54.7
	22-25	24.9
	26+	20.4
Education Level	Undergraduate	63.9
	Others	36.1
Gender	Female	62.3
	Male	37.7
University Type	State	72.4
	Private	27.6

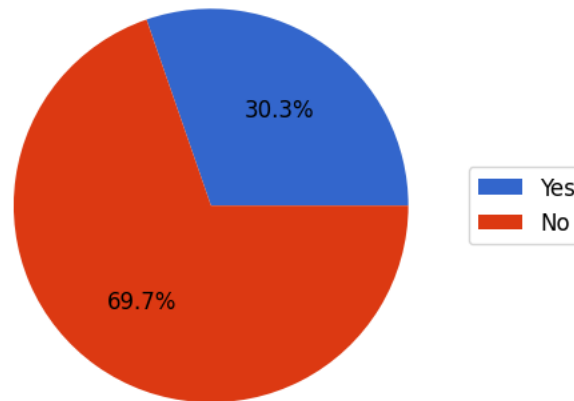
As presented in Table 1, the students were aged 18-21 (54.4%) and were studying at the undergraduate level (63.9%). The proportion of female participants (62.3%) was higher than that of male participants. The survey form was sent to 208 state and private universities in Turkey, and participation was received from 142 universities. Of these 142 universities, 72.4% were state universities and 27.6% were private universities. When universities are grouped according to the YÖK (Council of Higher Education) geographical region classification, the regional distribution of participants is as follows:

Table 2. Regional distribution of participants

Region	Percentage (%)
Marmara	34.8
Mediterranean	18.6
Central Anatolia	14.9
Aegean	10.7
Black Sea	8.5
Eastern Anatolia	6.1
Southeastern Anatolia	6.4

As presented in Table 2, analyses regarding the university distribution show that the sample is geographically spread throughout Turkey, but is concentrated in certain universities, especially in the Marmara Region. The predominance of state universities suggests that the findings more strongly reflect the perceptions of public university students.

Graph 1. Have you ever taken a course on sustainability?

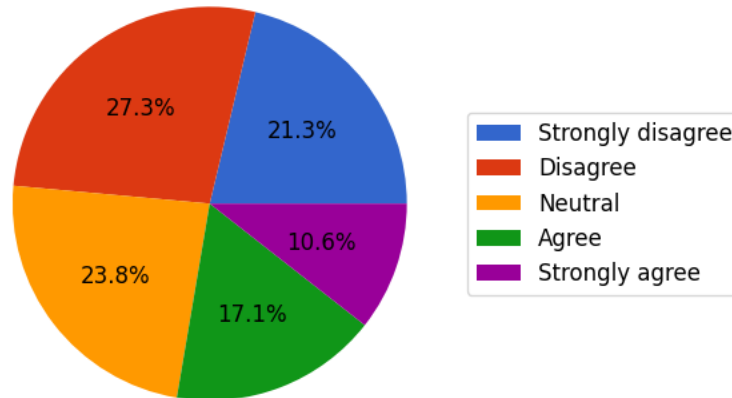


When the items related to greenwashing were evaluated, the following results were obtained. As illustrated in Graph 1, 69.7% of participants have not taken any course on sustainability, while only 30.3% have received such education. This is clearly reflected in the chart, where the “no” segment occupies a significantly larger portion.

This finding indicates that participants lack a structured knowledge base regarding sustainability and greenwashing. As a result, individuals may rely more on intuitive judgments

or media-based information when evaluating environmental claims. This suggests a relatively low level of awareness and provides an important foundation for H1 (awareness-questioning behavior).

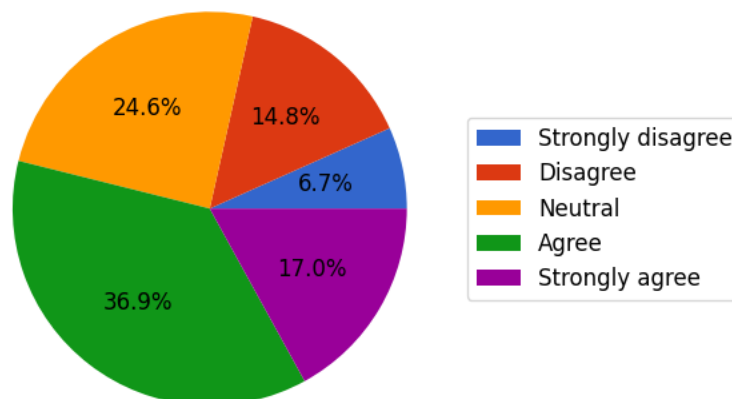
Graph 2. I have heard the term greenwashing (misleading sustainability claims) before



As shown in Graph 2, 48.6% of participants (Strongly disagree (21.3%) + Disagree (27.3%)) reported that they had not heard the term greenwashing before. This is visually reflected in the chart, where disagreement responses occupy a considerable portion.

This finding indicates a low level of conceptual awareness regarding greenwashing. Such a lack of awareness may prevent consumers from accurately identifying misleading sustainability claims. This result is directly related to H1 (awareness, questioning behavior) and H2 (perceived greenwashing-trust), suggesting that awareness plays a key role in both critical evaluation and trust formation.

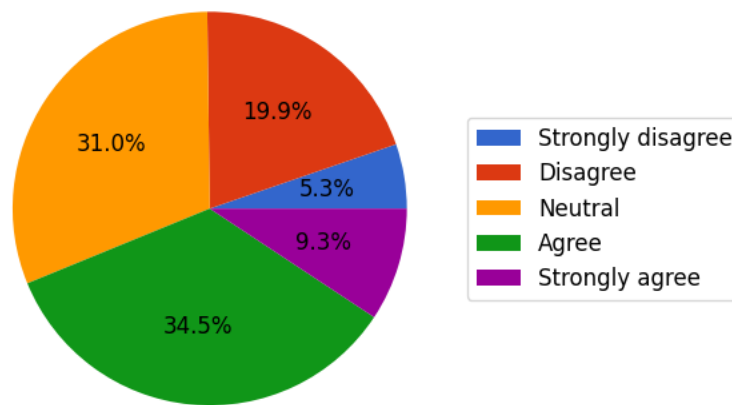
Graph 3. I tend to question companies' sustainability claims



As illustrated in Graph 3, 53.9% of participants tend to question companies' sustainability claims. This is clearly visible in the chart, where the combined "agree" and "strongly agree" segments occupy more than half of the pie.

This finding indicates the presence of a certain level of critical thinking and questioning behavior among consumers. It suggests that individuals are not passive recipients of sustainability claims. The result supports H1, and it can also be indirectly associated with H3 (media influence), as questioning behavior may be shaped by access to information.

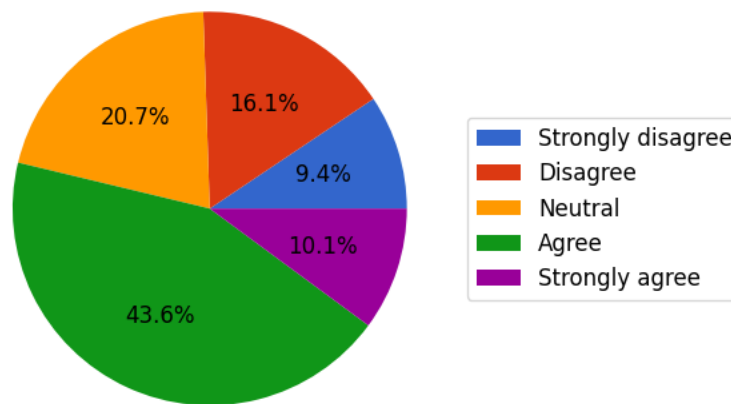
Graph 4. I research whether the product I intend to purchase is truly environmentally friendly



As shown in Graph 4, 43.8% of participants reported that they investigate whether the product they intend to purchase is truly environmentally friendly. The visible proportion of agreement responses in the chart indicates that this behavior is relatively common.

This finding demonstrates that consumers are not only aware but also behaviorally active, engaging in verification practices against potential greenwashing. This strongly supports H4 (awareness-responsible consumer behavior) and suggests that consumer actions are closely linked to their level of awareness.

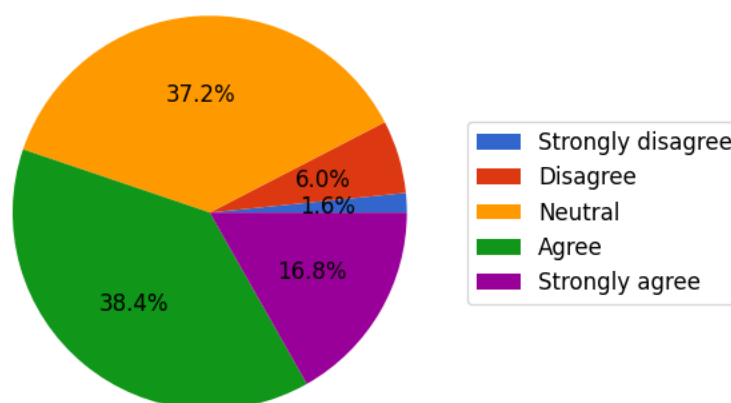
Graph 5. The use of terms such as ‘eco’, ‘green’, and ‘environmentally friendly’ in a brand’s advertisements increases my trust



As shown in Graph 5, 53.7% of participants reported that the use of terms such as “eco,” “green,” and “environmentally friendly” increases their trust. This is clearly reflected in the chart, where agreement responses dominate.

This finding indicates that consumers are influenced by sustainability-related language in marketing communication. However, it also suggests that consumer trust may be vulnerable to manipulation through marketing claims. This result is directly related to H2 (perceived greenwashing-trust), as misleading use of such terms may ultimately erode trust.

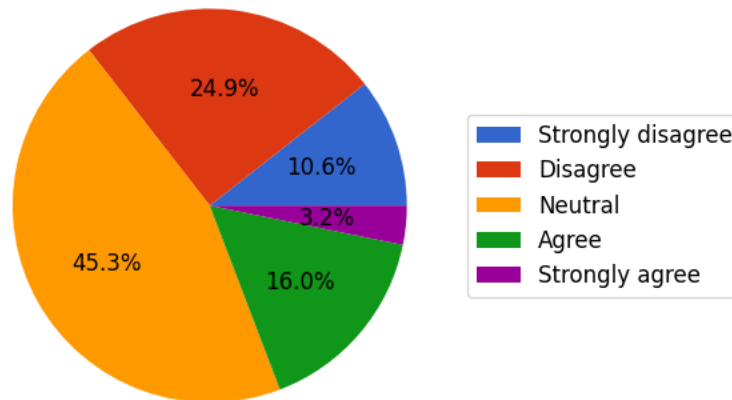
Graph 6. Companies’ sustainability claims are often misleading



As illustrated in Graph 6, 55.2% of participants believe that companies’ sustainability claims are misleading. This is clearly visible in the chart, where agreement responses dominate.

This finding reveals an increasing level of skepticism and distrust toward corporate sustainability communication. The result strongly supports H2, indicating that perceived greenwashing negatively affects trust in brands.

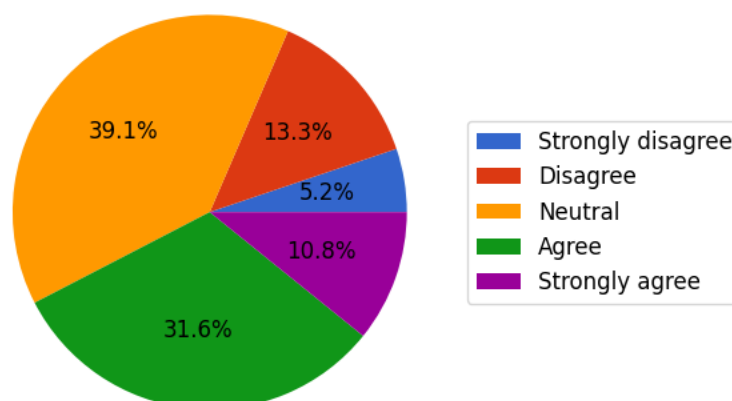
Graph 7. I can identify brands that engage in greenwashing



As shown in Graph 7, a considerable proportion of participants (45.3%) are uncertain about their ability to identify brands engaging in greenwashing. This is clearly reflected in the prominent “neutral” segment.

This finding suggests that even if consumers have some level of awareness, they may struggle to translate this awareness into practical identification skills. This is particularly relevant to H1, indicating that awareness does not always translate into effective evaluation and detection.

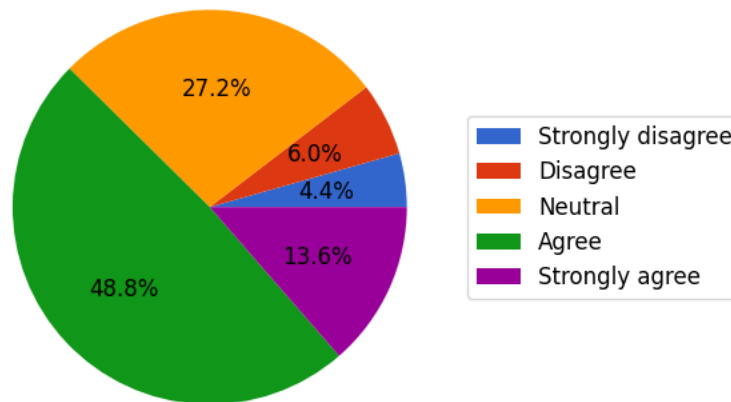
Graph 8. If I learn that a brand engages in greenwashing, I boycott that brand



As illustrated in Graph 8, 42.4% of participants stated that they would boycott brands engaging in greenwashing, while 39.1% remain undecided. These two segments together occupy a substantial portion of the chart.

This finding indicates that consumers exhibit a potential behavioral response to greenwashing, although this response is not always consistent. This result is directly related to H4 (awareness-behavior), suggesting that consumer actions depend on their level of awareness and perception.

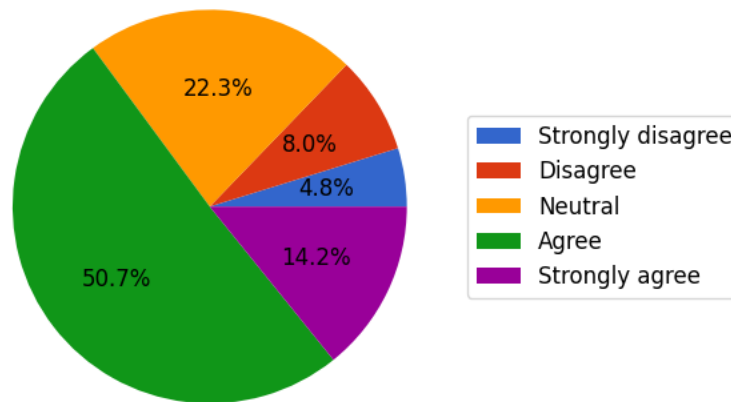
Graph 9. I trust brands that have sustainability certifications more



As shown in Graph 9, 62.4% of participants trust brands with sustainability certifications more. This is clearly reflected in the chart, where the agreement segment is dominant.

This finding further suggests that consumers rely on third-party verification mechanisms when forming trust. This result is consistent with H2, suggesting that trust increases when claims are supported by credible external validation.

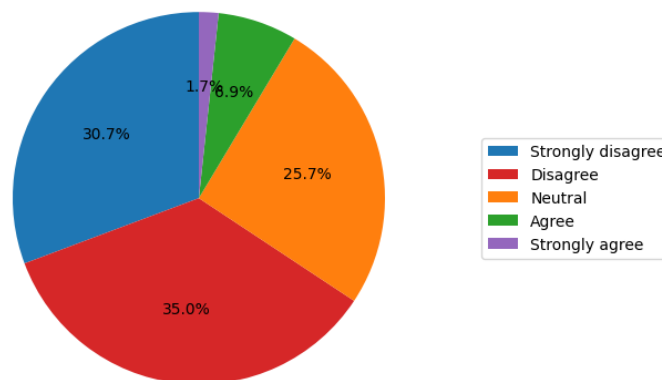
Graph 10. Social media influences my tendency to question companies' environmental claims



As illustrated in Graph 10, a clear majority of participants (64.9%) report that social media influences their tendency to question companies' environmental claims. This is clearly visible in the chart, where agreement responses are prominent.

This finding highlights the role of social media as a significant source of information and awareness for consumers. The result directly supports H3 (media influence-awareness and questioning behavior).

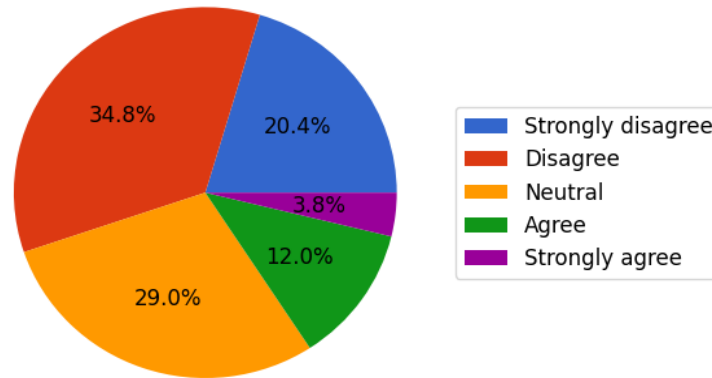
Graph 11. I trust sustainable products that are promoted by influencers



As illustrated in Graph 11, 65.7% of participants report that they do not trust sustainable products promoted by influencers. This is evident in the chart, where disagreement responses account for the majority of the distribution.

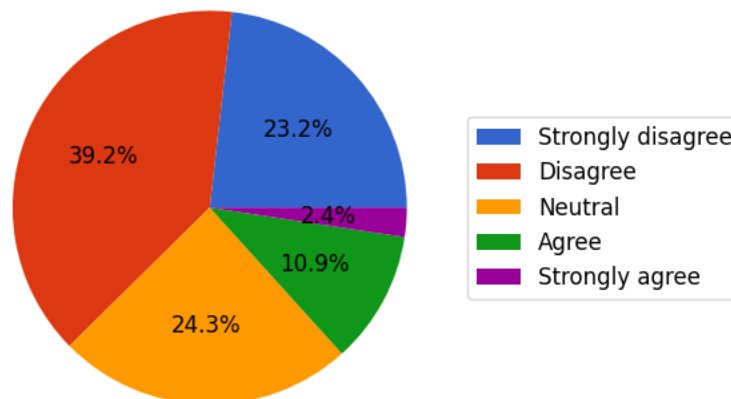
This finding suggests that consumers may be skeptical toward influencer-promoted sustainability claims, possibly due to concerns about greenwashing. It indicates that trust in such endorsements is limited and fragile. This strongly supports H2.

Graph 12. I believe that I have sufficient knowledge about greenwashing



As shown in Graph 12, 55.2% of participants believe that they do not have sufficient knowledge about greenwashing. This is clearly reflected in the dominance of disagreement responses. This finding confirms that overall awareness remains limited. This directly relates to H1.

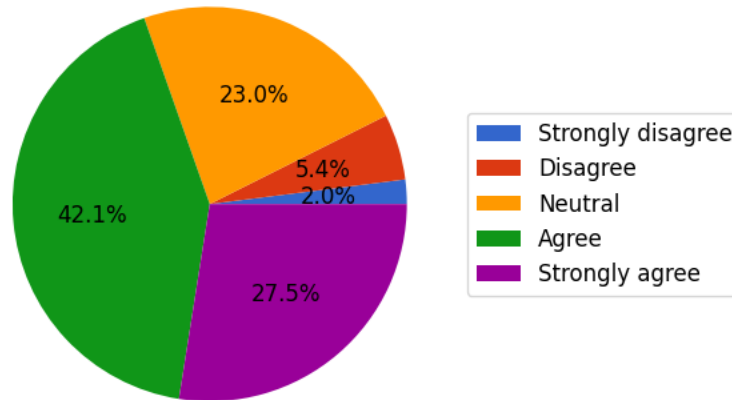
Graph 13. I review companies' sustainability reports



As shown in Graph 13, 62.4% of participants do not review companies' sustainability reports. This is clearly reflected in the dominance of disagreement responses in the chart.

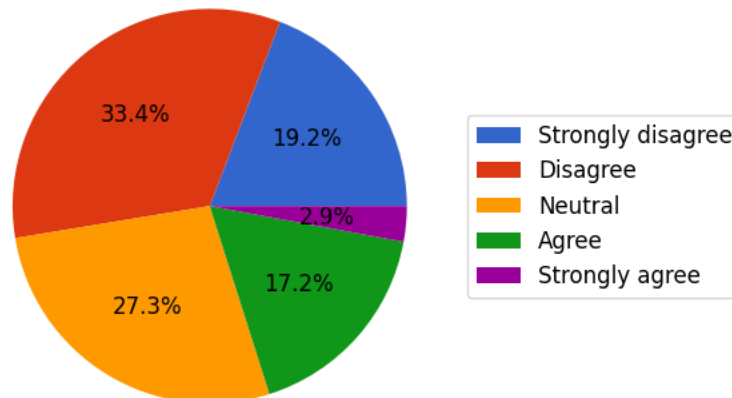
This finding suggests that consumers tend to rely on more accessible information rather than formal and detailed sources. This result relates to H4, indicating that awareness does not always translate into in-depth research behavior.

Graph 14. I believe that stricter regulations should be introduced to combat greenwashing



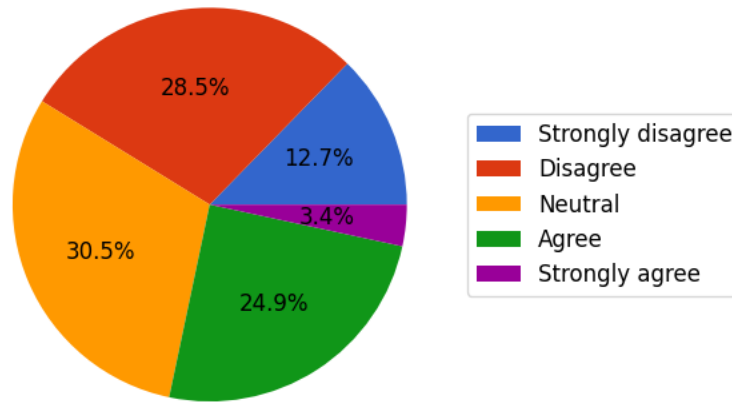
As shown in Graph 14, 69.6% of participants believe that stricter regulations should be introduced to combat greenwashing. This finding suggests that consumers demand not only individual but also system-level solutions. This result relates to H4, indicating that awareness leads to broader behavioral and policy-oriented responses.

Graph 15. I frequently encounter content about greenwashing in the media or on social media.



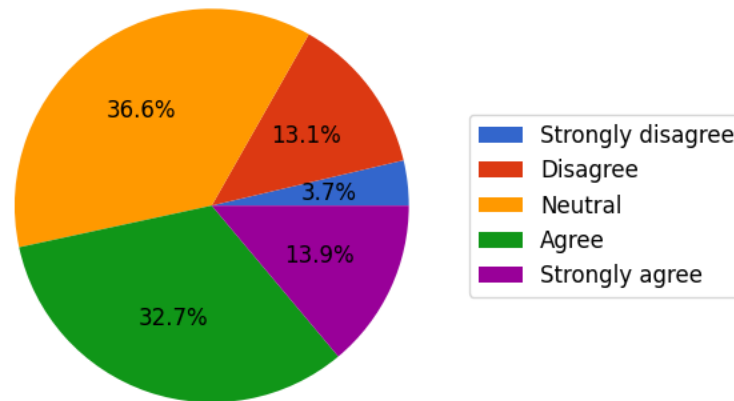
As illustrated in Graph 15, 52.6% of participants reported that they do not frequently encounter greenwashing-related content. This is reflected in the dominance of low-exposure responses. This result indicates that media influence is not uniform across all consumers. This is relevant to H3, as media exposure plays a key role in shaping awareness.

Graph 16. I research third-party sources (e.g., independent environmental organizations, certifications) to verify a brand's sustainability claims



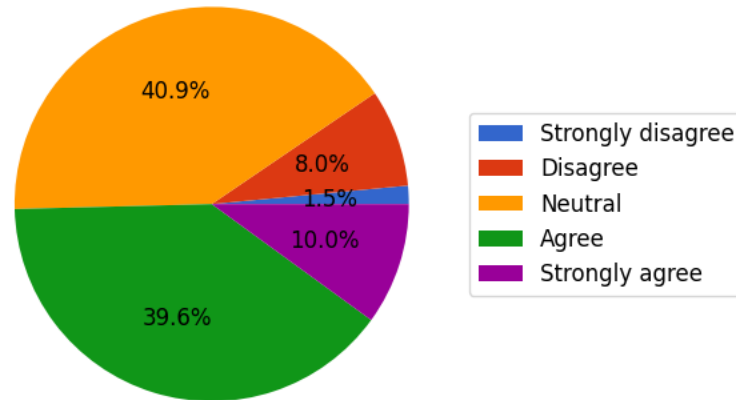
As illustrated in Graph 16, 41.2% of participants report that they do not research third-party sources. This finding indicates that active verification through independent sources remains limited among consumers. While some individuals engage in such behavior, it is not yet widespread. This supports H4.

Graph 17. Greenwashing strategies can completely erode my trust in a brand



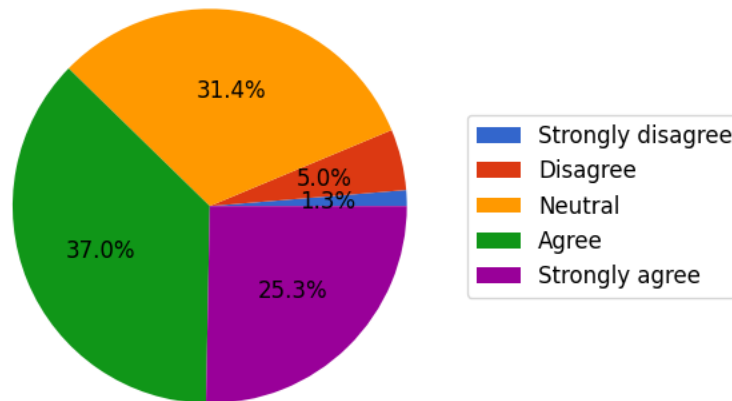
As illustrated in Graph 17, 46.6% of participants believe that they may completely lose trust in a brand due to greenwashing. This is reflected in the chart by a significant agreement segment. This finding highlights the strong impact of greenwashing on trust. This supports H2.

Graph 18. It is difficult to determine whether brands that engage in sustainability marketing are actually engaging in greenwashing



As shown in Graph 18, a large proportion of participants (49.6%) report that it is difficult to identify greenwashing. Additionally, a substantial neutral segment (40.9%) indicates a high level of uncertainty among respondents. This finding suggests that limited knowledge may constrain consumers' ability to accurately identify greenwashing practices. This relates to H1.

Graph 19. I believe that greenwashing negatively affects not only the environment but also consumers



As shown in Graph 19, 62.3% of participants believe that greenwashing negatively affects not only the environment but also consumers. This is clearly reflected in the dominant agreement segment. This finding indicates that greenwashing is perceived as a broad and serious issue. This relates to H4, as such perceptions influence consumer attitudes and behaviors.

5. Results and Recommendations

The findings of the study titled "Greenwashing Awareness, Perception, and Brand Trust Relationship: An Empirical Study on University Students in Turkey" reveal that students lack a clear understanding of the concept of greenwashing. While most students have heard of greenwashing before, they don't have a clear idea of what it refers to. Similarly, they struggle to assess whether brands are truly environmentally friendly or whether they engage in greenwashing.

According to the survey results, while students appear to be more critical of companies' sustainability claims, they are unsure of the veracity of these claims. It's clear that students are confused on this issue. Although students don't readily accept environmental claims, their systematic behavior—such as researching whether products are environmentally friendly, reviewing sustainability reports, or verifying them from independent sources—is limited. A cautious picture emerges regarding trust in marketing communication. Environmental rhetoric and labeling expressions are not considered convincing by students. The findings of the study indicate that students believe greenwashing practices may mislead consumers and damage brand reputation, and that they demonstrate a tendency to boycott companies engaging in such practices.

The survey findings reveal that a considerable proportion of students experience uncertainty regarding greenwashing practices. This ambiguity may create favorable conditions for companies engaging in greenwashing, as consumer confusion can hinder individuals from critically evaluating sustainability claims and making informed decisions. In such contexts, limited environmentally oriented practices may be strategically emphasized to construct a perception of sustainability, potentially contributing to positive brand image and increased profitability.

In this context, the first and most important thing to do is to increase awareness of sustainability and greenwashing. Introducing courses on these areas in universities and strengthening the content of existing courses can ensure that the concept and its application methods are understood and grasped, and that their traces are easily identified in the actions of brands. Training and various studies aimed at improving media and social media literacy, digital content evaluation, and content control/verification skills will help students analyze environmental claims more consciously. For this growing awareness among young consumers to translate into

lasting behavioral change, a more holistic approach supported not only by education but also by corporate practices and legal regulations will be necessary.

The findings of this study indicate that university students exhibit a moderate level of skepticism toward sustainability claims, which is consistent with previous research highlighting increasing consumer awareness of greenwashing practices. However, despite this skepticism, the results also reveal a lack of sufficient knowledge and difficulty in identifying greenwashing. This contradiction suggests that while consumers are becoming more critical, they do not yet possess the necessary tools to effectively evaluate environmental claims.

This finding aligns with existing literature emphasizing that awareness alone is not sufficient to drive informed consumer behavior. Additionally, the limited engagement in verification practices, such as reviewing sustainability reports or consulting third-party sources, supports prior studies indicating that consumers tend to rely on easily accessible information rather than detailed analysis.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that social media plays a significant role in shaping consumers' perceptions of sustainability. Overall, the results suggest that increasing awareness alone is insufficient and should be supported through education and structural mechanisms in order to foster more informed and consistent consumer behavior. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that while university students exhibit a certain level of awareness and skepticism toward sustainability claims, their knowledge and ability to identify greenwashing remain limited, highlighting the need for education and stronger regulatory frameworks.

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