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# Luxury Versus Fast Fashion: The Impact of Sustainability Communication on Consumer Trust and Greenwashing Perceptions

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Title:** “Luxury Versus Fast Fashion: The Impact of Sustainability Communication on Consumer Trust and Greenwashing Perceptions”

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This study examines how verbal and visual sustainability communication influence consumer trust and perceptions of greenwashing in luxury and fast fashion brands. Using an experimental design, four brand advertisements were tested in an online survey, and results were analyzed through statistical methods.

Findings confirm that luxury brands generally inspire greater consumer trust than fast fashion brands. However, the type of communication—verbal or visual—did not directly impact trust or greenwashing perceptions as expected. Instead, trust itself played a key role: consumers who trusted a brand’s sustainability claims were also less likely to perceive it as engaging in greenwashing. Additionally, whether a brand was positioned as luxury or not did not significantly alter this relationship.

These results highlight trust as a decisive factor in sustainability communication. Luxury brands can rely on their strong reputation, while fast fashion brands should focus on proving their credibility through transparency rather than just changing their communication style (OpenAI, 2024).

### **Keywords**

Sustainability, Consumer Trust, Greenwashing, Luxury, Fast Fashion, Verbal Communication, Visual Communication

## **SUMARIO**

**Título:** “Luxury Versus Fast Fashion: O Impacto da Comunicação de Sustentabilidade na Confiança do Consumidor e nas Percepções de Greenwashing”

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Este estudo analisa a forma como a comunicação verbal e visual sobre sustentabilidade influencia a confiança do consumidor e as percepções de greenwashing em marcas de luxo e de fast fashion. Utilizando um design experimental, quatro anúncios de marcas foram testados num inquérito online e os resultados foram analisados através de métodos estatísticos.

Os resultados confirmam que as marcas de luxo inspiram geralmente maior confiança aos consumidores do que as marcas de fast fashion. No entanto, o tipo de comunicação - verbal ou visual - não teve um impacto direto na confiança ou nas percepções de greenwashing, como esperado. Em vez disso, a própria confiança desempenhou um papel fundamental: os consumidores que confiavam nas afirmações de sustentabilidade de uma marca também tinham menos probabilidades de a perceberem como estando envolvida em greenwashing. Além disso, o facto de uma marca estar ou não posicionada como de luxo não alterou significativamente esta relação.

Estes resultados destacam a confiança como um fator decisivo na comunicação da sustentabilidade. As marcas de luxo podem confiar na sua forte reputação, enquanto as marcas de fast fashion devem concentrar-se em provar a sua credibilidade através da transparência, em vez de mudarem apenas o seu estilo de comunicação (OpenAI, 2024).

### **Palavras-chave**

Sustentabilidade, Confiança do Consumidor, Greenwashing, Luxo, Fast Fashion, Comunicação Verbal, Comunicação Visual

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## **GLOSSARY**

**USA:** United States of America. A country referenced in this study in an example or case.

**CSR:** Corporate Social Responsibility. Refers to a company's initiatives to assess and take responsibility for its effects on the environment and social well-being.

**CO<sub>2</sub>:** Carbon Dioxide. A greenhouse gas commonly associated with climate change, is discussed in the context of the fashion industry's environmental impact.

**RQ:** Research Question(s). Refers to the central questions that guide the investigation in this thesis.

**SPSS:** Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. A software tool used for statistical analysis in this study.

**EFA:** Exploratory Factor Analysis. A statistical technique used to validate the structure of survey constructs.

**ANOVA:** Analysis of Variance. A statistical method employed to compare means between groups in this study.

**TBL:** Triple Bottom Line. A sustainability framework considering economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

**VIF:** Variance Inflation Factor. A diagnostic measure used to assess multicollinearity in regression analyses.

**SD:** Standard Deviation. A measure of variability in the dataset.

**B:** Regression Coefficient. Indicates the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable in regression analysis.

**R<sup>2</sup>:** Coefficient of Determination. Measures the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variable(s).

**p-value:** Probability Value. Indicates the statistical significance of the test results, with values below 0.05 considered significant.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

With approximately 10% of global carbon emissions and being the second-largest consumer of water worldwide (Mayer & Birkocak, 2024), the fashion industry is seeing increasing criticism over its environmental impact and effect. This has led the fashion sector and its firms to incorporate sustainability into their marketing strategies (Caniato et al., 2012). As a result, current and upcoming generations are becoming increasingly aware and sensitive to these issues and are demanding more transparency and ethical behavior from companies (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

The increase in sustainability claims has led to many accusations of greenwashing, especially in the fashion industry, where companies inflate or misrepresent their environmental initiatives (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

Fashion brands often and primarily rely on two forms of sustainability communication: verbal (e.g., written statements, reports) and visual (e.g., images, certifications, and logos). Verbal communication provides detailed information about a brand's environmental initiatives, while visual elements evoke emotional responses and convey an immediate impression (Turunen & Halme, 2021).

The balance and effectiveness of these modes can vary by brand type, such as luxury or high-class fashion versus fast fashion, and play an essential role in consumer perceptions of greenwashing and trust (Eynullaeva & Woodward-Smith, 2012).

Greenwashing misleads customers, lowers trust, and significantly damages a brand's reputation (Parguel et al., 2011). Despite their different market positions, both luxury and fast-fashion companies are involved in these activities.

Luxury companies, associated with superior quality, exclusivity, and craftsmanship, may influence consumer trust in their sustainability initiatives as they focus on timelessness and longevity (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014). Conversely, fast fashion companies, known for their fast production cycles and low prices, are sometimes criticized for their sustainability claims because they are associated with overconsumption and disposable goods (Joy et al., 2012).

As consumers become more knowledgeable about environmental concerns, it is important to understand how brand positioning—luxury or fast fashion—affects customer trust and perceptions of greenwashing (Henninger et al., 2016). This study investigates the impact of sustainability communication (Visual or Verbal) on customer trust and perceptions of greenwashing, focusing on the role of a brand's premium positioning in this dynamic.

In particular, the study examines how verbal and visual elements of sustainability communication interact with brand positioning to influence consumer trust and perceptions of greenwashing.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The world of today is characterized by conflicting shifts and difficult-to-solve issues, such as population expansion, changing consumption habits, overproduction, climate change, and shortages of food and water (Ridoutt & Pfister, 2009).

Consequently, an increasing number of companies are adopting practices that could be perceived as entering a "grey area" and engaging in various forms of greenwashing (Aggarwal & Kadyan, 2014).

Although the fashion industry is placing more and more attention on sustainability, little is known about how differing brand positions—luxury vs fast fashion—affect customer perceptions of greenwashing and consumer trust when sustainability claims are made (Janssen et al., 2013).

Moreover, brands employ both verbal and visual elements to communicate sustainability efforts, yet there needs to be more understanding of how these modes influence consumer perceptions. Verbal communication, such as detailed written claims, and visual communication, such as imagery or certifications, may evoke different responses depending on the brand segment (luxury vs fast fashion) (Eynullaeva & Woodward-Smith, 2012).

Previous studies have examined sustainability practices in isolation in either the luxury or fast fashion segment, but there are hardly any comparative analyses (Janssen et al., 2013).

This lack of complete understanding hinders the ability of companies to establish successful communication strategies, perhaps leading to a conflict with customer expectations. It is, therefore, critical to investigate how sustainability communication influences customer trust

and perceptions of greenwashing in these two distinct market segments: fast fashion and luxury fashion.

The interaction of verbal and visual sustainability statements with brand positioning—luxury versus fast fashion—is examined in this study to understand its impact on consumer trust and perceptions of greenwashing, directly addressing the identified research questions stated below.

The following research questions are used to illustrate this problem statement:

**RQ1:** Does sustainability communication from luxury brands generate higher consumer trust compared to fast fashion brands?

**RQ2:** How do consumers perceive sustainability claims from luxury brands compared to fast fashion brands in terms of trust?

**RQ3:** How does consumer trust in a brand's sustainability claims relate to perceptions of greenwashing?

**RQ4:** Do perceptions of greenwashing differ based on verbal versus visual sustainability communication in luxury and fast fashion brands?

### **1.3 Relevance**

This study addresses an emerging and important topic when considering the increasing importance of sustainability in the various fashion industries. Consumer views have changed dramatically in recent years, with an increased demand for sustainable practices in both the luxury and fast fashion industries (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). This change is driven by increasing environmental awareness and the growing importance of sustainability as a consumer trend (Gökçekuş et al., 2011).

This research looks further into the effect of communication strategies, particularly verbal and visual sustainability claims, in determining customer trust and perceptions of greenwashing.

Consequently, this research is not only essential but also consistent with the current trend toward sustainable fashion and ethical consumption.

Given the complex nature of sustainability communication, the findings of this study can provide valuable insights for brands looking to increase consumer trust in their sustainability claims and reduce perceptions of greenwashing. By analyzing both verbal and visual

communication dimensions, this study addresses an underexplored area and provides fresh insights into how different types of sustainability claims affect consumer perceptions across brand types.

The study offers practical implications for fashion brands by exploring strategies to enhance consumer trust in their sustainability messages. In this way, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that can occur associated with sustainable marketing in the fashion industry.

#### **1.4 Research methods**

This research adopts a mixed methods approach, which includes both primary and secondary research in order to gather important information for a comprehensive analysis of the chosen topic. This combination was chosen in order to obtain the necessary information to answer the research questions successfully.

Secondary research is central to this study as it critically reviews the relevant academic literature on sustainable fashion, consumer trust, sustainability communication and greenwashing in both the fast fashion and luxury fashion industries. This review is crucial for establishing a solid theoretical framework and identifying gaps in the current body of knowledge.

On the other hand, a quantitative approach was chosen for the primary research, which includes an online survey of consumers of fast fashion and luxury fashion brands. This survey aims to successfully collect data on the key variables of this study: Consumer trust, perception of sustainability claims and susceptibility to greenwashing based on brand positioning. By combining these two methods, this study aims to explore these topics in depth and ensure a perfect understanding of the issues.

#### **1.5 Dissertation outline**

The literature review presented in the following chapter describes and explains the hypotheses that serve as the basis for this research and are used to address the previously identified research questions. The literature review aims to illuminate, critique and characterize the existing research and examine the relevance of the variables selected for the study of sustainable fashion, sustainability communication and greenwashing in both fast fashion and luxury fashion. This

is followed by the third chapter, which examines the methodology used to answer the four research questions developed for this study. To effectively answer the research questions, this chapter explains the steps and constructs used to collect and analyze the data. The fourth chapter presents the results and findings derived from the methodology, which are crucial for addressing the research questions and achieving the main objectives of this study. The dissertation is concluded by the fifth chapter, which identifies the study's limitations and suggests possible directions for future research in this area.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework for the research questions developed in this thesis. It critically explores key theories and concepts from existing literature, focusing on verbal and visual sustainability communication in both the fast fashion and luxury industries and their impact on consumer trust and perceptions of greenwashing.

### **2.1 Sustainability in the fashion industry**

The topic of sustainability in the fashion industry has gained attention in recent years due to increasing environmental and social concerns regarding the production and consumption of textiles (Kozlowski et al., 2015). According to Kozlowski, Searcy and Bardecki (2015), sustainability in the fashion industry includes measures such as using environmentally friendly materials, applying ethical labor practices, reducing waste, and adopting circular economy models.

As a result, companies are gradually adopting these sustainable practices to reduce their environmental impact, improve social well-being and potentially increase financial success (Henninger, Alevizou, & Oates, 2016). Luxury fashion companies such as Louis Vuitton and Gucci often emphasize longevity and longer product lifecycles, consistent with sustainability concepts (Joy et al., 2012).

Fast fashion companies, such as ZARA and H&M, focus on rapid production, leading to excessive consumption and waste, creating a paradox between affordability and sustainability (Joy et al., 2012).

However, whether these sustainability practices genuinely reduce environmental impact or primarily serve as marketing tactics remains debatable. The Triple Bottom Line model (Elkington, 2004), which evaluates sustainability using economic, social, and environmental criteria, might be used for both luxury and fast fashion to determine if their efforts are really helpful or simply cosmetic.

### **2.2 Consumer Trust**

Consumer trust, as defined in the commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), refers to people's confidence in the reliability and honesty of a brand, which leads to positive expectations regarding the brand's future activities. The theory posits that trust and commitment are central to building and maintaining successful relationships between brands and consumers. Furthermore, consumer trust is a critical component in a brand's

relationship with its current, past and potential future customers. It significantly impacts customer behavior, loyalty and trust (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Consumers gain trust when they believe that a company regularly keeps its promises and acts honestly and openly (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

While the Commitment-Trust Theory provides useful insights into brand trust, its application to fashion may be restricted. Given the increasing transparency of sustainability commitments, consumers may demand further confidence before extending long-term loyalty. This suggests that other frameworks, such as the Trust-Commitment Model, could help clarify the relationship between trust and brand loyalty in sustainability contexts. Consumer trust is also sometimes characterized as a consumer's willingness to rely on a brand because they have positive expectations of its behavior (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). This term is often defined in three dimensions of the trust model: Competence, Integrity and Compassion.

Trust in fashion brands is closely linked to brand loyalty. If customers believe that a fashion brand is trustworthy, they are more likely to remain loyal to it and recommend it to others. As customers become increasingly aware of ethical issues and become more discerning in their purchasing decisions, companies face both obstacles and opportunities in building trust. By addressing the attributes of competence, integrity and compassion, companies can not only attract new customers but also maintain long-term loyalty and favorable brand associations (Choi et al., 2007).

Trust plays a critical role in reducing negative consumer perceptions. Accordingly, H3 *posits that higher consumer trust in a brand's sustainability claims will reduce perceptions of greenwashing.*

### **2.3 Greenwashing**

The academic paper “An Integrated Framework to Assess Greenwashing” by Nemes et al. (2022) defines greenwashing as “the deceptive practice of exaggerating or falsifying environmental claims to create a positive image without actual sustainable actions” (Nemes et al., 2022). As the demand for sustainable products increases, this approach has caused great concern among both customers and authorities. The presence of greenwashing often leads to skepticism among customers and other commercial consequences (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). Greenwashing undermines customer trust, ranging from fraudulent claims to corporate dishonesty (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). The 'seven sins of greenwashing' highlight how vague

or irrelevant claims mislead consumers. The Seven Sins of Greenwashing model (Green Business Benchmark<sup>o</sup>, 2021) categorizes greenwashing strategies and offers a framework for evaluating such efforts in fashion. Fast fashion businesses, for example, commonly fall into categories such as 'Vagueness' and 'Irrelevance,' in which claims of eco-friendliness are either overly broad or detached from fundamental business activities, calling into doubt the genuineness of their sustainability promises.

Delmas and Burbano (2011) go into more detail on the causes of greenwashing, citing inadequate legal frameworks and organizational constraints as the main causes. They believe that in the absence of strict laws, companies often give in to the urge to appear sustainable in order to meet customer expectations, even if their behavior contradicts these claims (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). This research provides a good framework for understanding why companies engage in greenwashing. However, it also shows that stronger laws and enforcement measures are needed to combat these misleading tactics.

## **2.4 Sustainable Marketing Communication**

Sustainable marketing communication is crucial in the fashion sector, as companies increasingly emphasize environmental and social responsibility to engage consumers. This communication can be divided into non-verbal and verbal tactics, each playing a vital role in shaping consumer perceptions of trust and greenwashing. These strategies also influence how consumers identify potential greenwashing practices.

### **2.4.1 Non-verbal communication**

Non-verbal communication in sustainable fashion marketing includes visual elements such as eco-friendly materials, sustainable packaging, and certification labels that signify ethical practices without the need for explicit statements (Hall et al., 2019).

In luxury fashion, non-verbal cues such as high-quality materials and timeless designs highlight durability and exclusivity, fostering perceptions of trust in sustainability claims (Fionda & Moore, 2009). For instance, luxury brands may emphasize longevity and exclusivity through organic materials and transparent production, while fast fashion brands use eco-labels and recycling symbols to signal sustainability commitments.

Additionally, elements in physical retail spaces—such as the use of recycled wood or energy-efficient lighting—reinforce a brand’s environmentally conscious image (Knapp & Hall, 2018). However, the reliance on non-verbal communication alone can sometimes lead to skepticism if not supported by clear verbal messages, as it may be perceived as superficial or greenwashing.

#### **2.4.2 Verbal Communication**

Luxury brands focus on exclusivity, tradition, and the enduring quality of their sustainable practices to build trust in their claims (Buck & VanLear, 2002). For instance, verbal statements such as “100% certified organic cotton” or “achieving carbon-neutral production” provide specific details about a brand’s sustainability efforts, making their claims more credible than what can be conveyed through non-verbal cues alone.

Verbal communication also plays a crucial role in mitigating accusations of greenwashing. By explicitly detailing sustainability credentials and transparent practices, brands can enhance trust among consumers who increasingly demand accountability (de Saussure & Rocci, 2016). However, excessive reliance on verbal claims without substantive actions may erode trust and amplify perceptions of greenwashing. Therefore, H1 suggests that:

*Consumers perceive sustainability claims from luxury brands as more trustworthy than those from fast fashion brands, particularly when communicated verbally rather than visually.*

#### **2.5 Luxury Fashion and its Characteristics**

Luxury fashion brands are characterized by exclusivity, excellent quality, craftsmanship, and deep-rooted heritage, creating a brand identity that justifies their high prices (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). This industry's growth is driven by customers' desire for these distinguishing characteristics.

While luxury clothing emphasizes exclusivity and quality, it does not always imply ethical activities. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), attitudes toward luxury are shaped by status, whereas fast fashion prioritizes accessibility and price, reflecting the differing purchasing incentives between these two sectors.

In contrast to fast fashion, which focuses on affordability and rapid trend changes, luxury fashion companies emphasize heritage, distinctive designs, and high-quality materials to convey rarity and desirability (Heine & Trommsdorff, 2010). These brands transcend utility by emphasizing prestige and personal identity, using marketing tactics that leverage emotional connections and carefully regulate perceived value through limited distribution and accessibility (Bilro et al., 2022; Heine & Trommsdorff, 2010).

Sustainability and ethical consumption have driven luxury brands to adopt practices like eco-friendly materials and transparent supply chains (Aleem, Loureiro, & Bilro, 2024). However, exclusivity and high prices continue to distinguish luxury fashion, making these brands symbols of prestige accessible to a limited audience (Fionda & Moore, 2009).

### **2.5.1 Sustainability Communication in Luxury Fashion**

Luxury fashion companies are increasingly relying on sustainability marketing as a key part of their brand strategy to attract environmentally conscious customers. In contrast to fast fashion, luxury companies often emphasize sustainability through narratives, transparency reports and collaboration with groups that advocate for ethical practices. These initiatives aim to highlight the brand's commitment to the environment while reinforcing its image of rarity, quality and craftsmanship (Di Leo et al., 2023).

Gucci and Burberry are pioneers of sustainability communication in premium fashion and use transparent approaches to appeal to environmentally conscious customers. Gucci has been carbon neutral since 2018, and its collaboration with The Lion's Share Fund underlines its leadership (Gucci, 2023).

Burberry is committed to circular economy initiatives, excludes exotic leathers and is aiming for 100% organic cotton by 2025.

Although premium brands such as Gucci and Burberry demonstrate their expertise in environmental communication, there are also challenges. The significant resource consumption often associated with the production of luxury goods causes mistrust among some customers, who see sustainability initiatives as contradictory to the luxury concept of exclusivity and indulgence (Janssen et al., 2017).

### **2.5.2 Consumer Trust in Luxury Fashion**

Customers' trust in the luxury fashion sector is mostly established through a synthesis of superior product quality and clear sustainability initiatives. Trust in luxury brands is influenced by emotional, social, and utilitarian values. Consumers associate luxury goods with exceptional quality and durability, which leads to increased trust when these companies demonstrate environmental responsibility (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Loureiro et al., 2020).

As mentioned in the context of sustainable communication, Gucci's Equilibrium platform not only communicates the brand's environmental initiatives but also goes a long way to promoting customer trust. Gucci is building customer trust through explicit goals such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40%, achieving full material traceability by 2025, and maintaining a carbon-neutral operation since 2018. These activities show that constant and open disclosure of authentic sustainability efforts is essential to building lasting trust in premium fashion companies (Gucci, 2023). Building on this, Hypothesis 2 posits that

*Sustainability communication from luxury brands generates higher consumer trust compared to fast fashion brands.*

### **2.5.3 Perceptions of Greenwashing in Luxury Fashion**

Greenwashing in the luxury fashion industry has become a significant issue as companies advertise sustainability credentials that often contradict their practices. Brands like Louis Vuitton and Chanel have faced criticism for inconsistencies between their environmental claims and actual resource usage. These discrepancies undermine customer trust and highlight the need for luxury companies to authenticate their environmental measures to meet the growing consumer demand for transparency (Adamkiewicz et al., 2022).

## **2.6 Fast Fashion and its Characteristics**

The fashion industry has experienced significant growth in recent years, leading to the prominence of “fast fashion” as a dominant business model. Fast fashion refers to affordable, mass-produced clothing that often mimics high-end designs, offering consumers runway trends at accessible prices (Joy et al., 2012). This rapid-response model enables brands to quickly integrate the latest styles into their collections, fulfilling the demand for constant innovation and affordability (Bick et al., 2018).

Fast fashion's reliance on cost efficiency has resulted in the globalization of supply chains, often prioritizing low-cost production over ethical considerations. Manufacturing operations frequently occur in low- and middle-income countries where labor costs are minimal and regulations on working conditions and environmental protections are less stringent (Bick et al., 2018). As a result, the sector is often criticized for its environmental impact, from excessive water use and carbon emissions to significant contributions to global textile waste. For instance, the United States alone generates approximately 3.8 billion pounds of textile waste annually due to fast fashion disposability (Bick et al., 2018).

Although some progress has been made in addressing sustainability concerns, the core practices of fast fashion remain resource-intensive, raising questions about its compatibility with genuine environmental commitments.

### **2.6.1 Sustainability Communication in Fast Fashion**

As sustainability concerns grow among consumers, fast fashion companies increasingly engage in sustainability communication to appeal to environmentally conscious shoppers. Brands such as H&M's "Conscious" collection and Zara's "Join Life" line emphasize the use of organic materials and recycling efforts in their marketing strategies. However, the industry's reliance on short production cycles and high-volume outputs often contradicts these sustainability claims (Kim & Oh, 2020).

Fast fashion brands employ both verbal and non-verbal strategies to project a sustainable image. Verbal strategies include promotional language in advertisements and detailed descriptions of sustainable practices, aimed at building an eco-friendly brand image. Non-verbal elements, such as product labeling and visual cues in store design, further contribute to the perception of sustainability. However, these efforts risk appearing superficial if not supported by substantive operational changes. Kusá and Urmínová (2020) note that consumers often interpret such claims as greenwashing when inconsistencies between marketing rhetoric and actual practices emerge. To mitigate consumer skepticism, fast fashion brands must align sustainability messaging with tangible improvements in operations. This alignment is essential for fostering trust and appealing to environmentally conscious consumers.

### **2.6.2 Consumer Trust in Fast Fashion**

Consumer trust in fast fashion brands is shaped by a balance of affordability, trend accessibility, and perceived ethical practices. Brands such as H&M and Zara attract customers with low prices and on-trend designs but increasing awareness of social and environmental issues has driven demand for greater transparency and accountability (Ghazali et al., 2017).

Consumer trust in fast fashion is often undermined by concerns over unethical labor practices and environmental harm. Studies show that consumers are more likely to trust brands that actively demonstrate social responsibility. For instance, Neumann et al. (2021) found that transparent communication about sustainability and ethical practices fosters consumer trust, encouraging loyalty and repeat purchases. However, the fast fashion business model—focused on rapid production and low costs—frequently clashes with these expectations, leading to growing consumer mistrust (Neumann et al., 2021; Neha et al., 2024).

### **2.6.3 Perceptions of Greenwashing in Fast Fashion**

Greenwashing, defined as the exaggeration or fabrication of sustainability claims, is a persistent issue in the fast fashion industry. As consumers become more environmentally conscious, they are increasingly critical of deceptive claims, which can erode trust in brands (Sinisalo, 2020).

Younger consumers are particularly sensitive to greenwashing tactics. Research by Lu et al. (2022) shows that when greenwashing is detected, consumers are less likely to trust a brand or engage in eco-friendly purchasing behavior. This sensitivity is especially relevant in the fast fashion sector, where sustainability claims often conflict with the fundamentally unsustainable nature of its business model. Building on these insights, two hypotheses are proposed: H4a: *Perceptions of greenwashing differ based on verbal versus visual sustainability communication in luxury and fast fashion brands.*

H4b: *Verbal communication is more effective in reducing perceptions of greenwashing than visual communication.*

## **2.7 Comparative Analysis Luxury vs Fast Fashion**

The sustainability approaches of luxury and fast fashion brands reveal significant differences that shape consumer perceptions and trust.

### **2.7.1 Differences in Sustainability Communication Between Fast Fashion and Luxury Fashion**

Consumer trust in fast fashion vs. luxury fashion is influenced by diverse reasons originating in their respective business strategies. Fast fashion firms like H&M and Zara are often criticized for their rapid production rates and low prices, which may contradict their promises about sustainability. According to Garcia-Torres et al. (2017), fast fashion's frequent charges of greenwashing—in which firms misrepresent their environmental efforts—undermine customer confidence, particularly among those concerned about the environment. The throwaway nature of fast fashion items also raises customer concerns about their adherence to ethical principles.

Luxury fashion companies, such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton, have greater levels of trust. This is mostly due to their commitment to long-term sustainability, craftsmanship, and openness in their sourcing and manufacturing procedures. Luxury companies, according to Di Leo et al. (2023), often include sustainability in their brand identity, with explicit, quantifiable pledges that build greater customer trust.

The mismatch in customer trust derives from the fundamental differences in each sector's approach to sustainability. Fast fashion, with its emphasis on speed and cost-efficiency, fails to reconcile environmental claims with key business operations, resulting in increased distrust. Luxury clothes, on the other hand, emphasize quality and durability, which better match customer expectations for real sustainability, resulting in a more trustworthy connection between brand and consumer (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).

### **2.7.2 Differences in Consumer Trust Between Fast Fashion and Luxury Fashion**

Consumer trust in fast fashion and luxury fashion stems from their contrasting business strategies. Fast fashion brands like H&M and Zara face criticism for rapid production rates and low prices, which often contradict their sustainability promises. Frequent accusations of greenwashing, where environmental efforts are misrepresented, erode consumer confidence,

particularly among environmentally conscious customers (Garcia-Torres et al., 2017). The disposable nature of fast fashion further undermines trust regarding ethical practices.

Luxury brands such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton inspire greater trust due to their focus on long-term sustainability, craftsmanship, and transparency in sourcing and manufacturing. By integrating sustainability into their brand identity and providing measurable commitments, luxury companies build stronger consumer trust (Di Leo et al., 2023). For example, Gucci's Equilibrium platform enhances trust through initiatives like achieving 100% traceability and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Gucci, 2023).

This disparity in trust reflects each sector's approach to sustainability. Fast fashion prioritizes speed and cost-efficiency, leading to distrust when environmental claims clash with business operations. Luxury fashion, emphasizing quality and durability, aligns more closely with consumer expectations for genuine sustainability, fostering stronger brand trust (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).

### **2.7.3 Greenwashing Perceptions in Luxury Fashion and Fast Fashion**

Greenwashing is a major issue in both fast and luxury fashion, since firms often make sustainability promises that may not reflect their real practices. The impression of greenwashing differs across the two sectors owing to the nature of their business structures and the trust connected with them.

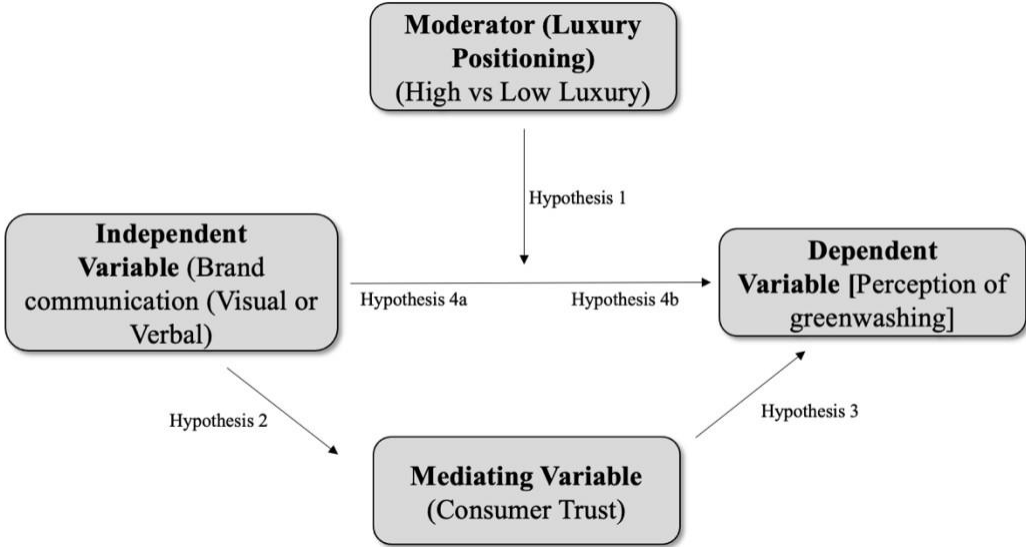
Fast fashion companies such as H&M and Zara have long been accused of greenwashing since their business strategies are essentially built on quick manufacturing and high consumption, which often contradicts their environmental promises. Consumers, particularly young people, are becoming more conscious of these discrepancies. While H&M advertises recycling initiatives and eco-friendly collections, the total environmental effect of its fast-paced manufacturing cycle and short-lived items raises concerns about the credibility of its sustainability claims (Garcia-Torres et al., 2017). This notion of greenwashing is exacerbated by the businesses' ambiguous and sometimes unverifiable promises, which lead to a loss of customer confidence (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015).

Luxury businesses, such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton, are not immune to greenwashing claims, but they encounter less customer suspicion. Luxury fashion often stresses long-lasting, high-

quality items and the utilization of skilled workmanship, which is seen as intrinsically more sustainable than fast fashion's throwaway mentality. Critics claim that even upscale firms may overstate their environmental initiatives. Gucci's Equilibrium platform, for example, sets lofty targets like being carbon neutral, but some customers wonder whether these activities sufficiently reduce the environmental impact of the brand's worldwide operations (Di Leo et al., 2023).

The main distinction is how each area is seen. Fast fashion's greenwashing is often considered more deliberate and dishonest, given the industry's primary business strategy contradicts sustainability promises. Luxury fashion, although still under examination, is viewed as more trustworthy owing to its emphasis on durability, long-term investment in sustainability, and openness in reporting (Kim et al., 2020).

**2.8 Conceptual Framework**



**Figure 6:** Conceptual Model

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This methodology outlines the research design, data collection, and analysis employed to investigate the impact of verbal and visual sustainability communication on consumer perceptions of greenwashing and trust in luxury and fast fashion brands. A structured approach ensures clarity, reliability, and alignment with the study's objectives.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study uses a quantitative, survey-based experimental design to investigate the impact of verbal and visual sustainability communication on consumers' perceptions of greenwashing and trust in luxury and fast fashion brands. Guided by a deductive research strategy, hypotheses, and research questions were derived from an extensive literature review and empirically tested through structured data collection and statistical analysis.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four stimuli conditions—luxury/fast-fashion with verbal/visual communication—enabling the analysis of both the main effects of brand type and interaction effects of communication style. The survey was designed in simple English to ensure it was easily understood by all respondents, with their answers recorded on a 7-point Likert scale for precise statistical outcomes.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS, applying techniques such as descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, correlation, and regression to test the hypotheses and examine relationships between key variables. This rigorous approach ensures the findings are both valid and reliable while effectively addressing the study's research objectives.

### **3.3 Primary Data**

The primary data for this study was gathered through an online survey aimed at exploring consumer perceptions of sustainability communication (Visual and Verbal) within the contexts of luxury and fast fashion brands. Using a structured, between-subjects experimental design, participants were exposed to one of four created stimuli—verbal or visual messages from either luxury or fast fashion brands.

This chosen approach allowed for a clear comparison of verbal and visual communication strategies across the luxury and fast-fashion contexts. Additionally, this methodology was

selected for its efficiency in reaching a broad audience and its ability to gather diverse perspectives on topics such as greenwashing and trust. These responses served as the foundation for addressing the study's research questions and hypotheses.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

#### **3.4.1 Pre-Test**

To ensure the clarity and effectiveness of the stimuli representing different levels of sustainability commitment in luxury and fast fashion brands, a pretest was conducted prior to the main survey. The pretest was designed to ensure that the stimuli appropriately sent high and low sustainability commitments, as well as possible greenwashing impressions, and that participants interpreted each brand's message correctly. A convenience sample of 30 respondents took part, matching the minimum suggested size for pretests (Hashim et al., 2022). Participants reviewed each brand's image and messaging to ensure clarity and realism.

#### **3.4.2 Main Survey**

The main survey served as the primary tool for collecting data, providing quantitative insights into consumer perceptions of sustainability communication, consumer trust, and greenwashing within the fashion industry. An online survey format was chosen for its efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and ability to reach a broad and diverse sample while minimizing interviewer bias. The survey was conducted in simple English to ensure clarity for an international audience, accommodating participants from varied backgrounds. This format also gave respondents sufficient time to reflect on their answers, enhancing the quality of responses (Wright, 2005; Evans & Mathur, 2005).

The survey featured a structured questionnaire divided into sections, starting with an introduction that outlined the study's purpose and explained key concepts like greenwashing. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four stimuli—two luxury brand scenarios (verbal and visual sustainability communication) and two fast fashion brand scenarios (verbal and visual sustainability communication). Each stimulus presented a specific sustainability communication strategy from a brand. Respondents then evaluated their perceptions of the brand's communication, positioning, consumer trust, and attitudes toward greenwashing after reviewing their assigned stimulus.

A 7-point Likert scale was used throughout the survey to capture nuanced responses, facilitating detailed statistical analysis and meaningful comparisons between verbal and visual communication strategies across luxury and fast fashion categories. This scaling approach also supported hypothesis testing regarding the impact of sustainability communication on consumer perceptions.

The survey was distributed online through social media platforms and email channels between November 20th and December 2nd, 2024.

To further expand reach, the study also utilized platforms like SurveyCircle and SurveySwap, which connect researchers with diverse participants for survey exchanges. The data collected from the survey was analyzed to address the research questions and hypotheses, focusing on the effects of verbal and visual sustainability communication on consumer trust and perceptions of greenwashing within the luxury and fast fashion sectors.

### **3.5 Stimuli Development**

This master's thesis uses four carefully developed stimuli to investigate consumer perceptions in terms of sustainability communication, consumer trust, and greenwashing in the realms of luxury and fast fashion. The two fictional brands, Velaro for the luxury fashion brand and EcoQuick for the fast-fashion one, were created to avoid biases and focus only on the characteristics of interest. Each brand has been combined with two different styles of communication: visual and verbal on sustainability. This design will permit the orderly investigation of how communication type and brand positioning influence consumer perceptions.

These were designed with insights from the literature review on real-world marketing practices, with due consideration to represent the variables of interest (brand type and communication style) exactly. The combination of brand type—luxury versus fast fashion—and the style of communication—visual versus verbal—in the stimuli offers a robust platform to study the consumer response across dimensions in sustainability communication.

**Table 1:** Overview of Stimuli Design by Brand Type and Communication Style

<b>Stimulus</b>	<b>Brand Type</b>	<b>Communication Style</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Velaro - Visual</b>	Luxury Fashion	Visual	Showcases sustainability efforts through compelling imagery, such as organic materials, transparent production practices, and carbon-neutral goals. Emphasis on visuals.
<b>Velaro - Verbal</b>	Luxury Fashion	Verbal	Uses text-based claims to highlight sustainable practices, focusing on sustainability claims without visuals.
<b>EcoQuick - Visual</b>	Fast Fashion	Visual	Employs vibrant and dynamic visuals, including recycling imagery and natural fibers, to project a strong commitment to sustainability.
<b>EcoQuick - Verbal</b>	Fast Fashion	Verbal	Relies on written claims to describe eco-labelling and sustainable fiber usage, aiming to assess perceptions of greenwashing.

The images used in the stimuli were created using the DALL-E AI image generation tool, ensuring consistency and eliminating biases related to pre-existing brands. The combination of brand type—luxury versus fast fashion—and the style of communication—visual versus verbal—in the stimuli offers a robust platform to study the consumer response across dimensions in sustainability communication. The study examines trust in sustainability communication while addressing concerns about greenwashing in both market segments.

### 3.6 Measurement & Indicators

The key constructs of trust and greenwashing perception were measured using multi-item scales adapted from validated instruments in the existing literature. Each item was adapted to fit the context of sustainability communication in the fashion industry. The use of multi-item scales ensures reliable and valid measurement of abstract constructs while minimizing measurement error. The specific questions corresponding to each item can be found in Appendix 1.

#### Trust:

Items that measured consumer trust were adapted from Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), assessing confidence in the brand's reliability, integrity, and ethical practices.

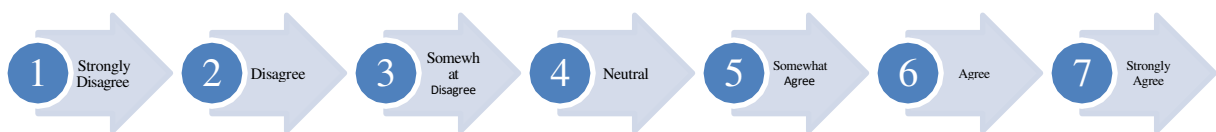
#### Greenwashing Perception:

Perceived greenwashing reflected skepticism about the transparency and validity of the brand's sustainability claims, drawing on dimensions outlined by Delmas and Burbano (2011) and de Freitas Netto et al. (2020).

#### 3.6.1 Measurement Scales

The study used a 7-point Likert scale across all survey items to ensure consistency and comparability.

**Figure 1:** 7-Point Likert Scale for Survey Responses



#### 3.6.2 Stimuli-Specific Indicators

Each stimulus—Velaro-Visual, Velaro-Verbal, EcoQuick-Visual, and EcoQuick-Verbal—was paired with a tailored set of questions designed to evaluate the constructs within the specific chosen communication context. This method ensured that all stimuli were assessed using consistent dimensions, enabling meaningful comparisons across different brand types and communication styles.

### 3.6.3 Pre-Test Validation

A pre-test was conducted to refine the measurement scales and survey items prior to distributing the main survey. This pre-test ensured the clarity of the questions, the relevance of the items to the constructs being measured, and their alignment with the study's objectives. Based on the feedback, adjustments were made to improve the validity and reliability of the measures.

### 3.6.4 Statistical Validation of Constructs

During data analysis, Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the multi-item scales, ensuring the reliability of composite variables such as trust and perceptions of greenwashing. A threshold of  $\alpha \geq 0.70$  was applied, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Additionally, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to confirm that the items aligned with their intended constructs, further validating the measurement framework.

## 3.7 Data Analysis

This section outlines the analytical procedures employed to evaluate the survey data and address the research questions. The study utilized IBM SPSS Statistics, to process and analyze the collected data. The analysis was designed to assess the relationships between key constructs—trust and greenwashing perception—across four stimuli (Velaro-Visual, Velaro-Verbal, EcoQuick-Visual, EcoQuick-Verbal).

### 3.7.1 Data Cleaning and Preparation

Before conducting statistical analyses, the dataset underwent rigorous cleaning to ensure its validity and accuracy:

- **Duplicate Responses:** Duplicate IP addresses were identified and removed to avoid response duplication.
- **Missing Data:** Missing responses were addressed by excluding incomplete rows for specific tests to maintain the reliability of results.
- **Outliers:** The Mahalanobis Distance method was used to detect and remove extreme outliers, ensuring that anomalous data points did not skew the results.

- **Manipulation check:** Manipulation checks were conducted to verify that participants correctly identified the communication type (verbal or visual) and brand type (luxury or fast fashion) assigned to them. Participants who failed these checks were excluded from the analysis.

### 3.7.2 Composite Variable Creation

All key constructs were represented by composite variables, which were created to facilitate the analysis:

- **Brand Type:** A grouping variable, *Brand\_Type\_Combined* (1 = Luxury, 2 = Fast Fashion), was created to enable comparisons across brand categories.
- **Communication Type:** A classification variable, *Communication\_Type* (1 = Visual, 2 = Verbal), was manually constructed to compare responses based on the type of communication.
- **Trust and Greenwashing Perception:** These were computed by averaging the responses to multiple survey items related to each construct. Separate composite variables were generated for luxury and fast fashion stimuli, as well as for verbal and visual communication styles.

### 3.7.3 Statistical Tests

The following statistical tests were conducted to address the four research questions and test the associated hypotheses:

**Table 2:** Statistical Tests Conducted in the Study

<b>Statistical Test</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Application</b>
<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	Summarized key data points, including means, standard deviations, and ranges, to provide an overview of consumer perceptions.	Assessed differences in consumer trust and greenwashing perceptions across the stimuli.
<b>Reliability Testing (Cronbach's Alpha)</b>	Ensured internal consistency of the composite variables	Threshold: $\alpha \geq 0.70$ was considered acceptable.
<b>Independent Samples T-Test</b>	Compared means between groups for verbal and visual communication styles.	Investigated differences in perceptions of consumer trust between luxury and fast fashion brands for verbal and visual stimuli
<b>One-Way ANOVA</b>	Compared mean trust scores across brand types and communication styles.	Analyzed the impact of luxury versus fast fashion positioning on consumer trust.
<b>Correlation Analysis</b>	Explored the relationship between greenwashing perceptions and consumer trust.	Tested if higher greenwashing perceptions were associated with lower trust levels.
<b>Regression Analysis</b>	Assessed how greenwashing perceptions predict consumer trust.	Tested predictive relationships and determined explained variance.

### 3.7.4 Statistical Software and Interpretation

Analysis was conducted using SPSS, with a significance level set at  $p < 0.05$ :

- **Effect Size:** Measures such as Cohen's  $d$  and  $R^2$  were used to evaluate the strength of observed relationships.
- **Significance Testing:** Results were interpreted in relation to their relevance to the hypotheses and research questions.
- **Visualization:** Key findings were summarized using tables and charts to enhance clarity and facilitate effective presentation in the results chapter.

### 3.7.5 Relevance to Research Questions

**Table 3:** Overview of Research Questions, Analysis Methods, Purposes, and Key Variables

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Analysis Method</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Key Variables</b>
<b>RQ1:</b> Does sustainability communication from luxury brands generate higher consumer trust compared to fast fashion brands?	Independent Samples T-Test	Compare consumer trust levels between luxury and fast fashion brands based on sustainability communication.	Brand type (luxury, fast fashion); Consumer trust.
<b>RQ2:</b> How do consumers perceive sustainability claims from luxury brands compared to fast fashion brands in terms of trust?	Descriptive Statistics and T-Test	Examine consumer trust perceptions in sustainability claims across luxury and fast fashion brands.	Brand type (luxury, fast fashion); Consumer trust
<b>RQ3:</b> How does consumer trust in a brand's sustainability claims relate to perceptions of greenwashing?	Correlation and Regression Analysis	Explore the relationship between consumer trust and perceptions of greenwashing.	Consumer trust; Greenwashing perceptions.
<b>RQ4:</b> Do perceptions of greenwashing differ based on verbal versus visual sustainability communication in luxury and fast fashion brands?	Two-Way ANOVA	Examine differences in greenwashing perceptions based on brand type and communication style.	Brand type (luxury, fast fashion); Communication type (verbal, visual); Greenwashing perceptions

### 3.7.6 Justification for Analytical Approach

The analytical approach was selected carefully to ensure the results are robust and reliable and address the objectives and hypotheses of the study. Various aspects of consumer perceptions were investigated employing both parametric and non-parametric tests:

**Table 4:** Justification for Analytical Approach

Aspect	Description
<b>Parametric Tests:</b>	Parametric tests were used to compare the means across groups (e.g., luxury vs. fast fashion, verbal vs. visual communication) using T-tests and ANOVA. Significant tests showed a difference in some crucial variables: trust and perception of greenwashing.
<b>Non-Parametric Tests:</b>	Non-parametric tests were not required as parametric methods (e.g., T-tests, ANOVA) were suitable for analyzing the data. Dependent variables (trust, greenwashing) were measured on a continuous scale, and assumptions for parametric tests were met. The large sample size and robustness of these methods ensured valid and reliable results.
<b>Multi-Level Analyses:</b>	Examined interactions between factors, such as brand type and communication style, using Two-Way ANOVA to reveal subtle consumer perceptions beyond simple group comparisons.
<b>Exploratory Analyses</b>	Investigated composite variables (trust and greenwashing) to gain deeper insights into consumer perceptions across different brand types and communication styles.
<b>Relevance to Objectives</b>	The approach ensures robust and reliable findings that align with the study's objectives on sustainability communication, consumer trust, and greenwashing perceptions.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Results**

This section presents the results of the SPSS data analysis, including data cleaning, descriptive statistics, and inferential tests. Key patterns and findings are highlighted with supporting graphs and tables, while additional details are provided in the appendix. The analyses are organized to align with the study's objectives, ensuring a clear and logical presentation of the findings.

#### **4.1.1 Cleaning the Data**

##### **Missing Data**

The initial dataset contained 281 survey responses across four experimental stimuli. Following data cleaning, 35 incomplete responses, 43 duplicate entries (identified through repeated IP addresses), and 22 entries with failed manipulation checks were removed. The final dataset comprised 181 valid responses distributed, as shown in Table 6, which can be found in Appendix 2.

##### **Outlier Analysis**

Multivariate outliers were tested using Mahalanobis Distances, and no significant outliers were detected in the dataset.

##### **Manipulation Check**

The manipulation check verified whether participants correctly identified the type of communication (Visual or Verbal) and brand type (Luxury or Fast Fashion) they were exposed to during the survey. Of the initial responses, 22 failed the manipulation check and were removed, leaving 181 valid responses.

##### **Variable Creation**

Composite variables for trust and greenwashing were created by averaging related survey items (7-point Likert scale; Table 7).

**Table 6:** Description of Composite Variables for Trust and Greenwashing

Construct	Description
Trust	Measured the level of confidence in the brand's sustainability claims.
Greenwashing	Captured skepticism and perceptions of manipulation in communication.

**4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics**

**Sample Characterization**

The final sample consisted of 181 respondents. Key demographic insights are summarized as follows:

- **Gender Distribution:** The majority of respondents identified as female (93.4%, n = 169), while 6.6% (n = 12) identified as male.
- **Age Distribution:** Most respondents (65.7%, n = 119) were aged between 18–29, followed by 28.7% (n = 52) aged 30–44, and 5.5% (n = 10) aged 45 and older.
- **Clothing Purchase Frequency:** A majority reported purchasing clothing monthly (54.1%, n = 98), followed by weekly purchases (22.1%, n = 40).
- **Interest in Sustainable Fashion:** 56.4% of respondents expressed at least moderate interest in sustainable fashion (n = 102).

Demographic visualizations are in Appendix 3.

**Key Variables**

Composite variables were calculated for trust, and greenwashing. Table 7 summarizes the descriptive statistics for each variable across different communication types and brand types.

**Table 7:** Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables (Appendix 10 containing the tests).

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's Alpha
Consumer Trust (Luxury Visual)	16.77	3.14	5.75	20.50	0.911
Consumer Trust (Luxury Verbal)	19.87	2.58	13.00	22.75	0.896
Consumer Trust (Fast Fashion Visual)	9.90	2.18	3.50	17.25	0.834
Consumer Trust (Fast Fashion Verbal)	13.92	2.38	8.50	18.50	0.889
Greenwashing (Luxury Visual)	10.03	3.85	4.50	20.50	0.915
Greenwashing (Luxury Fashion Verbal)	7.26	4.36	3.25	19.25	0.944
Greenwashing (Fast Fashion Visual)	19.33	2.46	8.50	22.75	0.793
Greenwashing (Fast Fashion Verbal)	13.18	3.48	6.50	18.25	0.940

#### 4.1.3 Inferential Statistics

Multicollinearity diagnostics confirmed no significant multicollinearity (VIF < 5, tolerance > 0.2). See Appendix 3 for results.

#### 4.1.4 Hypothesis Testing

**Hypothesis 1:** Consumers perceive sustainability claims from luxury brands as more trustworthy than those from fast fashion brands, particularly when communicated verbally compared to visually. (Appendix 6)

- **Luxury Brand:** Verbal communication (mean = 19.87, standard deviation = 2.58) was rated higher than visual communication (mean = 16.77, standard deviation = 3.14),  $t(91) = -5.26, p < 0.001$ .
- **Fast Fashion Brand:** Verbal communication (mean = 13.92, standard deviation = 2.38) outperformed visual communication (mean = 9.90, standard deviation = 2.18),  $t(85) = -8.10, p < 0.001$ .

**Hypothesis 2:** Sustainability communication from luxury brands generates higher consumer trust compared to fast fashion brands. (Appendix 5)

Descriptive Statistics:

- Luxury brands: Mean trust score = 18.27, Standard Deviation = 3.27, N = 93.
- Fast fashion brands: Mean trust score = 11.70, Standard Deviation = 3.03, N = 87.
- The mean difference in trust scores between the two groups is 6.57.

Independent Samples T-Test:

- Levene's Test for Equality of Variances:  $p = 0.758$  (greater than 0.05), so equal variances are assumed.
- The T-Test result:  $t(178) = 13.98, p < 0.001$ .
- This indicates a statistically significant difference in consumer trust between luxury and fast fashion brands.

Effect Size:

- Cohen's  $d = 2.09$ , which represents a very large effect size.

- This shows that the difference in trust scores between luxury and fast fashion brands is substantial.

**Consumer Trust:** Luxury brands (mean = 18.27, standard deviation = 3.27) scored significantly higher than fast fashion brands (mean = 11.70, standard deviation = 3.03),  $t(178) = 13.98, p < 0.001$ .

**Hypothesis 3:** Higher consumer trust in a brand's sustainability claims will reduce perceptions of greenwashing. (Appendix 7)

- A strong negative correlation was observed between trust and greenwashing ( $r = -0.883, p < 0.001$ ).
- Regression results showed that greenwashing significantly predicted consumer trust ( $B = -0.690, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.779$ ), explaining 77.9% of the variance in trust.

**Hypothesis 4a:** Perceptions of greenwashing differ based on verbal versus visual sustainability communication in luxury and fast fashion brands. (Appendix 8)

- **Brand Type:** Perceptions of greenwashing were higher for fast fashion brands (mean = 16.53) compared to luxury brands (mean = 8.68),  $F(1, 177) = 201.49, p < 0.001$ .
- **Communication Style:** Visual communication led to higher greenwashing perceptions (mean = 14.68) compared to verbal communication (mean = 10.04),  $F(1, 177) = 69.28, p < 0.001$ .
- **Interaction Effect:** A significant interaction effect was observed ( $F(1, 177) = 9.98, p = 0.002$ ), indicating that the influence of communication style on greenwashing perceptions was particularly stronger for fast fashion brands.

**Hypothesis 4b:** Verbal communication is more effective in reducing perceptions of greenwashing than visual communication. (Appendix 9)

- **Luxury Brands:**
  - Verbal communication (mean = 10.04, standard deviation = 4.94) resulted in significantly lower greenwashing perceptions compared to visual communication (mean = 14.68, standard deviation = 5.68),  $t(179) = 5.83$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .
- **Fast Fashion Brands:**
  - Verbal communication (mean = 10.04, standard deviation = 4.94) also led to lower greenwashing perceptions than visual communication (mean = 14.68, standard deviation = 5.68), consistent across the combined data.

The individual statistical tests presented above provide initial insights into each hypothesis. However, these analyses do not control for all variables simultaneously. To further validate these findings, a full model test was conducted, examining the combined effects of communication type, consumer trust, and luxury positioning on greenwashing perceptions. The results of this analysis are presented in the following Section.

#### **4.1.5 Full Model Test**

A moderated mediation analysis was conducted to examine the combined effects of communication type, consumer trust, and luxury positioning on greenwashing perceptions. Process model 7 from Hayne's was used to perform the statistical analysis. The analysis tested (1) whether consumer trust mediates the effect of communication type on greenwashing perceptions and (2) whether luxury positioning moderates this mediation effect. (Appendix 11).

The first step in the analysis consisted of checking the differences between the direct effect of Brand Communication on the Perception of Greenwashing and the indirect effect through the Consumer Trust mediation. When it comes to the relative indirect effect of Brand Communication on the Perception of Greenwashing, there is statistical evidence for its significance since the CI excludes zero (BootLLCI = -4.7994; BootULCI = -2.11546). However, the same does not happen for the direct effect, where the CI includes zero (BootLLCI = -1.4149; BootULCI = 0.2629). This indicates we have a full mediation with a significant indirect effect but no significant direct effect.

The second step was to analyze the interaction between our moderator, Luxury Positioning, and the Perception of Greenwashing. The CI for this interaction includes zero (BootLLCI = -0.6251; BootULCI = 2.4535) indicating that there is no statistical evidence for its significance.

When looking at the index of moderated mediation (difference between conditional indirect effects), we do not have significant statistical evidence since the CI includes zero (BootLLCI = -2.6788; BootULCI = 0.6658). Concluding, we only find evidence of a full mediation, not finding evidence that supports the moderation and moderated mediation.

**Table 15:** Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Earlier Tests (T-Tests, ANOVA, Regression)	Full Model Test	Conclusion
H1: Luxury brands generate higher trust than fast fashion brands.	✔ Supported	✔ Supported	Confirmed
H2: Verbal communication builds more trust than visual communication.	✔ Supported	+ Not supported	Partially Supported
H3: Higher trust reduces greenwashing perceptions.	✔ Supported	✔ Supported	Confirmed
H4a: Greenwashing perceptions differ based on communication type.	✔ Supported	+ Not supported	Not supported
H4b: Luxury positioning moderates the mediation effect of trust.	✔ Supported	+ Not supported	Not supported

#### 4.1.6 Additional Research

This section presents the results of exploratory analyses conducted to supplement the primary findings.

#### Composite Variables Analysis

To assess overall consumer perceptions, responses from related items for each construct were averaged, leading to the creation of the following composite variables (Appendix 5 & 11).

### **Consumer Trust**

Trust levels differed across brand types and communication styles. Luxury brands demonstrated higher trust scores, particularly for verbal communication (Mean = 19.87, Standard Deviation = 2.58), compared to visual communication (Mean = 16.77, Standard Deviation = 3.14). In contrast, trust levels for fast fashion brands were generally lower, with verbal communication scoring higher (Mean = 13.92, Standard Deviation = 2.38) than visual communication (Mean = 9.90, Standard Deviation = 2.18).

### **Greenwashing**

Perceptions of greenwashing also varied significantly. For fast fashion brands, visual communication produced the highest greenwashing scores (Mean = 19.33, Standard Deviation = 2.46), while verbal communication resulted in lower scores (Mean = 13.18, Standard Deviation = 3.48). Luxury brands had lower greenwashing perceptions overall, with visual communication scoring higher (Mean = 10.03, Standard Deviation = 3.85) compared to verbal communication (Mean = 7.26, Standard Deviation = 4.36).

These findings highlight the critical role of trust for luxury brands, particularly in verbal communication, while greenwashing remains a prominent concern, especially for fast fashion visual communication.

### **Additional Regression Analysis**

To further investigate the relationship between greenwashing perceptions and trust, a regression analysis was conducted: (APPENDIX 7)

#### **Findings:**

The regression model accounted for 77.9% of the variance in trust ( $R^2 = 0.779$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Greenwashing perceptions had a significant negative effect on trust ( $B = -0.690$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that as perceptions of greenwashing increase, consumer trust decreases.

These results highlight the harmful effect of greenwashing on trust, underscoring the importance for brands to adopt transparent and consistent sustainability communication practices.

### **Segmentation by Brand Type and Communication Style**

The segmentation analyses provided deeper insights into the relationship between brand type (luxury vs. fast fashion) and communication style (visual vs. verbal) in shaping consumer perceptions. Key findings include:

#### **Trust**

Verbal communication proved to be more effective at building trust across both brand types, emphasizing the importance of clear and explicit messaging. Overall, luxury brands achieved higher trust levels compared to fast fashion brands.

#### **Greenwashing**

Fast fashion brands were perceived as more susceptible to greenwashing, with visual communication amplifying these perceptions. In contrast, luxury brands experienced lower greenwashing perceptions, especially when using verbal communication.

## **4.2 Discussion**

This section presents the study's findings on consumer perceptions of sustainability communication in luxury and fast-fashion brands, aligning with the research objectives and hypotheses. It explores trust and greenwashing perceptions across brand types and communication styles, contextualizing results within existing literature, including Commitment-Trust Theory and greenwashing frameworks.

The discussion compares findings with prior research, addressing trends like challenges in fast fashion and the advantages of luxury brand positioning. It reviews the study's methodology, noting strengths like experimental design and validated scales, while acknowledging limitations like generalizability and reliance on self-reported data.

Focusing on core themes, the analysis offers actionable insights for enhancing sustainability communication and discusses broader implications for both academic and industry settings.

#### **4.2.1 Relationship to Research Objectives**

**Research Question 1:** *Does sustainability communication from luxury brands generate higher consumer trust compared to fast fashion brands?*

✔ **Supported in both earlier tests and full model test ( $p < 0.001$ )**

The findings suggest that consumers place significantly higher trust in luxury brands compared to fast fashion brands. Specifically, luxury brands achieved markedly higher trust scores (mean = 18.27, standard deviation = 3.27), whereas fast fashion brands received much lower scores (mean = 11.70, standard deviation = 3.03). An Independent Samples T-Test confirmed this difference as statistically significant ( $t(178) = 13.98, p < 0.001$ ) with a large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 2.09$ ). These results strongly support Hypothesis 1, which posits that sustainability communication from luxury brands generates more consumer trust compared to fast fashion brands.

This outcome aligns with Morgan and Hunt's Commitment-Trust Theory (1994), which highlights that trust relies on perceived reliability and integrity. Luxury brands benefit from a well-established reputation for high-quality craftsmanship and long-term sustainability initiatives, which instill consumer confidence. Previous research, such as studies by Oliveira et al. (2017), underscores that concrete sustainability actions—like circular fashion initiatives and carbon neutrality commitments—further reinforce trust in luxury brands. In contrast, fast fashion brands face ongoing challenges in building trust due to their association with unsustainable practices, overproduction, and perceptions of greenwashing (Garcia-Torres et al., 2017).

**Research Question 2:** *How do consumers perceive sustainability claims from luxury brands compared to fast fashion brands in terms of trust?*

+ Earlier tests found a significant effect, but the full model test did not confirm this.

Initial statistical analyses suggested that verbal communication led to higher consumer trust compared to visual communication for both luxury and fast fashion brands. However, when tested within the full model, this effect was no longer statistically significant. This suggests that while verbal messaging may be perceived as clearer or more explicit, it does not independently determine trust when controlling for other factors.

These findings partially align with Verbal Communication Theory (de Saussure & Rocci, 2016), which argues that explicit verbal claims, such as “100% organic materials” or “carbon neutral,” enhance consumer trust more than vague visual representations. While the initial analyses supported this argument, the full model test suggests that verbal messaging alone does not have a decisive impact on trust. Instead, other brand-related factors—such as reputation, prior sustainability efforts, and overall credibility—likely play a more significant role. Luxury brands often emphasize verbal communication to highlight measurable sustainability efforts, reinforcing their established reputation. In contrast, fast fashion brands face greater skepticism, even when using verbal messaging, due to their perceived inconsistencies in sustainability efforts. However, the full model results suggest that the trust consumers place in a brand’s sustainability claims is not determined by communication type alone, but rather by broader brand-related factors. These results suggest that while verbal communication may still contribute to trust perceptions, its influence is not statistically significant when examined alongside other factors in a comprehensive model.

**Research Question 3:** *How does consumer trust in a brand’s sustainability claims relate to perceptions of greenwashing?*

✔ Supported in both earlier tests and full model test ( $p < 0.001$ ).

The results of the analysis revealed a significant and strong negative relationship between consumer trust and perceptions of greenwashing. The correlation analysis showed that higher consumer trust in a brand’s sustainability claims is associated with lower perceptions of greenwashing, with a correlation coefficient of negative 0.883 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Further regression analysis confirmed that greenwashing perceptions significantly predict consumer trust, explaining 77.9 percent of the variance in trust (R-squared = 0.779). Specifically, the regression coefficient was negative 0.690 ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that as perceptions of greenwashing increase, consumer trust declines.

These findings provide statistical support for **Hypothesis 3** and underscore the inverse relationship between consumer trust and greenwashing perceptions. This result is consistent

with existing literature. Oliveira et al. (2017) emphasize that trust mediates the relationship between sustainability claims and perceived value, while De Freitas Netto et al. (2020) highlight that greenwashing directly erodes trust, thereby undermining brand equity.

Overall, these results reinforce the critical role of minimizing greenwashing to foster consumer trust, which in turn enhances perceptions of a brand's overall credibility and value.

**Research Question 4:** *Do perceptions of greenwashing differ based on verbal versus visual sustainability communication in luxury and fast fashion brands?*

+ Earlier tests found a significant effect, but the full model test did not confirm this.

The initial statistical analyses (ANOVA, t-tests) suggested that verbal communication was more effective in reducing perceptions of greenwashing compared to visual communication, particularly for fast fashion brands. Specifically, verbal communication led to lower greenwashing perceptions across both luxury and fast fashion categories. However, the full model test did not confirm a significant direct effect of communication type on greenwashing perceptions when controlling for all variables. This suggests that while earlier tests indicated an effect, communication style alone does not significantly shape greenwashing perceptions when examined in a comprehensive model. These findings challenge the assumption that verbal communication alone is sufficient to reduce greenwashing perceptions.

While prior research (Delmas & Burbano, 2011) suggests that vague or stylized visual sustainability communication can trigger consumer skepticism and amplify greenwashing concerns, the full model results indicate that communication format alone is not a decisive factor. Instead, consumer trust appears to play a more dominant role in shaping greenwashing perceptions. Additionally, the findings suggest that fast fashion brands remain more vulnerable to greenwashing perceptions, regardless of their communication style, likely due to their association with unsustainable business practices (Kim & Oh, 2020).

Conversely, luxury brands may benefit from their established reputation, which helps mitigate greenwashing concerns, independent of whether they use verbal or visual communication. These results indicate that while verbal communication may still be a useful tool for brands, it does not independently determine greenwashing perceptions when tested in a full model. Instead, greenwashing perceptions are shaped by a combination of factors, including consumer trust and brand reputation.

#### **4.2.2 Connection to the Literature**

This section places the findings of the study within the broader academic discussions surrounding sustainability communication, consumer trust, and greenwashing, exploring how these results align with or differ from established theories and previous research.

#### **Consumer Trust in Luxury Brands**

The results reveal that luxury brands are seen as more trustworthy in their sustainability communication compared to fast fashion brands. This is consistent with earlier research, such as Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau (2014), which highlights how attributes like exclusivity, quality, and craftsmanship naturally align with sustainability narratives. Integrating sustainability into their heritage strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of luxury brands. Gucci's "Equilibrium" platform, for example, underscores this by promoting transparency and long-term sustainability efforts (Gucci, 2023).

These findings support the theoretical perspective that luxury brands' reputational equity is a critical factor in fostering consumer trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). The association of luxury brands with integrity—a core element of trust—demonstrates their ability to align sustainability claims with actual practices. Consistently bridging the gap between brand identity and sustainability initiatives enhances credibility and mitigates consumer skepticism.

#### **Greenwashing and Fast Fashion**

Fast fashion brands are more closely associated with greenwashing perceptions, reflecting criticisms of their business models as inherently unsustainable (Joy et al., 2012). The tension between fast fashion's focus on affordability and overproduction and its sustainability claims fuels consumer skepticism. For instance, initiatives like H&M's "Conscious" collection have faced criticism for their limited scope and questionable environmental impact (Garcia-Torres et al., 2017).

These findings align with Delmas and Burbano's (2011) framework, which suggests that vague or overstated sustainability claims—often communicated through visual elements—undermine consumer trust. Visual strategies lacking substantive evidence, such as eco-labels and stylized

imagery, contribute to perceptions of greenwashing. This reflects the “vagueness” and “irrelevance” sins identified in the Seven Sins of Greenwashing model (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020), which are often linked to fast fashion brands, further amplifying consumer skepticism.

### **Verbal Communication and Its Role in Building Trust**

The study initially suggested that verbal communication is more effective than visual communication in reducing greenwashing perceptions and increasing trust. This aligns with Eynullaeva and Woodward-Smith’s (2012) argument that specificity and clarity are essential for trust-building. However, the full model test did not provide strong evidence that communication format alone significantly influences trust or greenwashing perceptions when other factors are considered.

These results indicate that verbal communication alone is not sufficient to drive changes in consumer trust or greenwashing perceptions. This challenges prior research, such as Turunen & Halme (2021), which emphasized the emotional appeal of visual communication as a less effective strategy compared to verbal messaging. While verbal communication may still be preferred by consumers, the findings suggest that it does not independently determine trust or greenwashing perceptions when tested in a more complex model.

Fast fashion brands, which were initially expected to benefit from verbal communication, may not experience a significant reduction in skepticism solely by changing their communication format. The full model results suggest that other factors—such as consumer trust and prior brand perceptions—play a greater role in shaping responses to sustainability claims.

Overall, while verbal communication remains an important tool for brands to communicate sustainability efforts, it does not have a decisive impact on trust or greenwashing perceptions when controlling for other variables.

### **4.2.3 Theoretical Implications**

#### **Consumer Trust Theories**

The findings confirm the Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing by Morgan and Hunt (1994), emphasizing trust as a key factor in fostering positive consumer-brand relationships and long-term loyalty. This study extends the theory by illustrating how consumer trust mediates the link between perceived greenwashing and trust. Regression analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between perceptions of greenwashing and trust, indicating that misleading sustainability claims undermine consumer confidence.

The study also supports Chaudhuri and Holbrook's (2001) three-dimensional trust model, identifying competence, integrity, and benevolence as critical trust components. Among these, integrity—defined as the alignment between sustainability claims and actual practices—proved particularly influential. Luxury brands demonstrate this alignment through transparent initiatives like Gucci's "Equilibrium" platform, which reinforces sustainability commitments and meets consumer expectations. These findings highlight integrity's crucial role in building trust, especially in competitive, sustainability-focused markets.

### **Greenwashing Frameworks**

This study extends the framework of Delmas and Burbano (2011) and shows that the perception of greenwashing varies greatly depending on the type of brand. Fast fashion brands are more often associated with greenwashing because they rely on high production cycles and inconsistent sustainability claims.

Furthermore, the results are consistent with the seven sins of greenwashing model (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). The visually dominant communication strategies of fast fashion brands often fall into these categories and contribute to a stronger perception of greenwashing. However, while previous analyses suggested that verbal communication could help mitigate these perceptions, the full model test did not provide clear evidence that communication format alone plays a crucial role in shaping greenwashing perceptions.

These results suggest that greenwashing perceptions are driven by consumers' overall trust in the brand rather than the format of the communication alone. This calls into question previous research that found the type of communication to be a key factor in greenwashing perceptions.

### **Sustainability Communication in Luxury and Fast Fashion**

The results validate theoretical distinctions between sustainability communication strategies in luxury and fast fashion brands. As Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau (2014) argue, luxury brands' associations with timelessness, quality, and exclusivity naturally align with sustainability principles. This study supports this perspective, as it found higher trust levels for luxury brands. These brands' ability to integrate sustainability into their heritage narratives enhances perceived authenticity and aligns with consumer expectations for trustworthy sustainability practices.

Conversely, fast fashion brands face inherent challenges due to their business models, which prioritize affordability and rapid production cycles. These attributes conflict with sustainability narratives, as highlighted by Joy et al. (2012), contributing to consumer skepticism. The findings emphasize the need for fast fashion brands to adopt more transparent and substantive sustainability practices to reduce greenwashing perceptions and foster trust.

### **Implications for Verbal and Visual Communication Theories**

This study challenges traditional beliefs and views on the effectiveness of visual communication in sustainability communication. While visually advertising has long been valued for its ability to evoke emotion (Fionda & Moore, 2009), previous quantitative testing suggested that verbal communication may be more effective in promoting trust and mitigating perceptions of greenwashing. However, when tested within the full model, this effect was not independently significant.

These results suggest that while verbal communication remains a useful tool in sustainability communication, it is not the determining factor for building trust or reducing greenwashing perceptions when other variables are taken into account. This is contrary to previous research, such as Kusá and Urmínová (2020), who argued that verbal communication helps to reduce ambiguity by providing clear, detailed information.

Instead, this study shows that consumer trust plays a far more significant role in the perception of sustainability claims than the mere choice between verbal and visual communication. This challenges the assumption that verbal messages are inherently superior to visual messages and suggests that brands should take a holistic approach to building credibility rather than focusing solely on the format of their sustainability communications.

#### **4.2.4 Practical Implications**

This section outlines actionable recommendations for enhancing trust in sustainability communication, tailored to luxury and fast fashion brands. These insights aim to address the specific challenges and opportunities identified in the study, with practical strategies for effective verbal and visual communication and reducing perceptions of greenwashing.

#### **Insights for Enhancing Trust**

##### **Luxury Brands**

With their strong reputations for quality, heritage, and exclusivity, luxury brands are well-positioned to enhance consumer trust. The following strategies are recommended:

1. **Incorporate Sustainability into Storytelling:** Luxury brands can build trust by weaving sustainability into their heritage narratives. Highlighting aspects like durability, artisanal craftsmanship, and long-lasting materials aligns with what consumers expect and enhances credibility. For example, demonstrating how traditional methods contribute to sustainable practices can strengthen this connection.
2. **Focus on Clear Verbal Communication:** While luxury brands often rely on evocative visuals, the study suggests combining these with detailed verbal claims. Transparent, clear, and specific verbal messaging adds a layer of credibility that resonates with consumers and reinforces trust.

##### **Fast Fashion Brands**

Fast fashion brands face significant challenges when it comes to earning consumer trust due to perceived inconsistencies between their business practices and sustainability goals. To address these challenges, the following strategies are suggested:

1. **Adopt Transparent Practices:** Building trust requires making sustainability claims that are specific, measurable, and verifiable. For instance, detailed product descriptions—such as highlighting the use of recycled materials or water-saving

production techniques—can convey authenticity and reduce concerns about greenwashing.

2. **Engage in Consumer Education:** Educational campaigns can help simplify sustainability efforts by using accessible language. By presenting these initiatives with visuals and straightforward statistics, brands can highlight the tangible environmental benefits, fostering greater consumer understanding and trust.

## **Recommendations for Effective Communication**

### **Visual Communication:**

While visuals can enhance emotional engagement, this study highlights their limitations in reducing perceptions of greenwashing. Here are some recommendations for improving visual communication:

1. **Avoid Ambiguity:** Eco-labels and green imagery should be accompanied by clear, fact-based explanations to ensure the message is transparent and understandable.
2. **Design in Tune with Message:** Luxury brands should focus on high-end visuals that reflect craftsmanship and durability, while fast fashion brands should prioritize simple and straightforward designs to convey accountability.

### **Verbal Communication:**

This study finds that verbal communication is more effective for building trust and credibility. Practical suggestions include:

1. **Provide Specific Details:** Instead of vague statements like “eco-friendly,” brands should share fact-based claims, such as, “This product uses 50% recycled cotton, saving 200 liters of water.”
2. **Highlight Accountability:** Showcase third-party certifications, audits, and credible partnerships. For example, luxury brands like Prada often collaborate with sustainability certification organizations to enhance their credibility.

## **Minimizing Perceptions of Greenwashing**

Brands can reduce greenwashing perceptions by adopting these strategies:

1. **Consistency Across Channels:** Ensure that messaging across all platforms, from advertisements to social media, is aligned with the brand's sustainability narrative. Inconsistency leads to consumer skepticism.
2. **Simplify Messaging:** Avoid overloading consumers with overly technical details. Clear and straightforward communication that identifies problems and presents solutions is more effective in building trust and educating consumers.

### **4.2.5 Methodology and Data Collection Reflection**

This section evaluates the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the findings by examining the positive and negative aspects of the study's methodology and data collection process.

**Table 8:** Strengths and Weaknesses of Research Methodology Components

Aspect	Strengths	Weaknesses
Survey Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Robust survey with validated scales.</li> <li>- Use of 7-point Likert scale for nuanced perceptions.</li> <li>- Reliable composite variables for robust results.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Simplified constructs (e.g., greenwashing, trust) may omit multidimensional subtleties.</li> </ul>
Experimental Stimuli	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Four stimuli (luxury visual, luxury verbal, fast fashion visual, fast fashion verbal) enabled comparisons.</li> <li>- Isolated unique effects of brand type and communication style.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Each participant exposed to one stimulus only, limiting within-subject comparisons.</li> <li>- Constrained depth of multi-stimuli perception analysis.</li> </ul>
Sample Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 181 valid responses ensured adequate statistical power.</li> <li>- Cleaning enhanced data quality (e.g., removal of incomplete or biased responses).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited generalizability due to younger, female-dominant sample familiar with luxury and fast fashion.</li> </ul>
Validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Manipulation checks confirmed accurate participant understanding of stimuli, enhancing internal validity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases (e.g., social desirability, inaccuracies), even though anonymity was ensured.</li> </ul>

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The final chapter provides a summary of the study's key findings and draws conclusions by integrating the collected data with insights from existing literature. It also highlights the

managerial and academic implications, discusses the study's limitations, and offers recommendations for future research

## **5.1 Main Findings & Conclusions**

Concluding this study, this master thesis's primary research objective was to explore the impact of sustainability communication on consumer trust and perceptions of greenwashing in the context of luxury and fast fashion brands.

Therefore, this study found that luxury fashion brands consistently enjoy greater consumer trust compared to fast fashion brands. This difference is due to the luxury fashion brand's reputation for quality and longevity, which perfectly aligns with its sustainability message. Consumers find these so-called luxury brands more credible due to their long-term commitment to environmentally friendly practices, such as the traceability of the materials being used. This also underlines the importance of aligning sustainability messages with real operational practices to maintain trust.

On the other hand, the fast fashion industry struggles to build and maintain trust because it is known to be connected and associated with the overproduction of products, short product lifecycles, and frequent accusations of greenwashing. While some fast fashion brands have embraced sustainability messages, these efforts are often undermined by inconsistencies in their business models.

While earlier statistical analyses suggested that verbal communication influenced consumer trust and greenwashing perceptions, the full model test did not provide strong evidence that communication format alone has a meaningful impact when other factors are considered. This indicates that communication format alone does not significantly shape consumer trust or perceptions of greenwashing when other variables are taken into account. Instead, trust itself—rather than the choice of verbal or visual communication—proved to be the most critical determinant of greenwashing perceptions."

Another key finding is the relationship between consumer trust and the perception of greenwashing. The study found that brands with higher consumer trust were less likely to be associated with greenwashing. Clear, transparent and actionable communication reduced concerns about greenwashing, while vague or contradictory claims increased consumer doubt. This was particularly problematic for fast fashion brands, where a discrepancy between

sustainability communication and actual practices led to trust issues. For luxury brands, their reputation helped to allay these concerns, but even they were not entirely exempt from scrutiny.

Finally, this research underlines the strategic importance of sustainability communication for consumer trust with regard to the perception of greenwashing. A good reputation and long-term commitment to sustainability puts luxury brands in a good position to maintain consumer trust. In contrast, fast fashion companies need to ensure that their business model is reflected in their sustainability claims in order to overcome the high levels of consumer skepticism towards them. The findings suggest that brands should focus on the credibility and consistency of their sustainability messages rather than relying solely on the format of their communication (verbal or visual) to influence consumer trust and perceptions of greenwashing.

**5.2 Managerial / Academic Implications**

**Table 9:** Managerial Implications

Category	Implications
Strategic Use of Verbal Communication	Managers should focus on credibility and consistency in sustainability messaging rather than relying solely on communication format (verbal vs. visual). Transparency should be maintained through clear and substantiated sustainability claims.
Addressing Challenges in Fast Fashion	Fast fashion brands should align sustainability claims with verifiable business practices to strengthen consumer trust. Inconsistencies between communication and operational behavior contribute to skepticism and greenwashing perceptions.
Integrating Visual and Verbal Elements	Combining clear verbal details with visual communication strengthens authenticity. Sole reliance on visuals (e.g., eco-labels) risks perceptions of superficiality and should be avoided.
Targeted Consumer Engagement	Younger, sustainability-aware consumers are particularly sensitive to greenwashing. Tailored messaging emphasizing education and transparency can resonate more effectively with this segment.

Long-Term Trust Building	Both luxury and fast fashion brands should adopt long-term strategies demonstrating measurable progress in sustainability commitments to foster lasting trust and loyalty.
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**Table 10:** Academic Implications

Category	Implications
Expanding Theoretical Frameworks	Applying theories like the Commitment-Trust Theory and greenwashing concepts enriches understanding of how communication strategies affect consumer perceptions in the fashion industry.
Empirical Insights into Sustainability Communication	Provides comparative insights into luxury versus fast fashion communication, highlighting how verbal and visual elements influence trust and greenwashing perceptions.
Stimulating Further Research	Calls for research on cross-cultural differences in sustainability communication and longitudinal studies on the impact of consistent communication strategies on consumer trust over time.
Methodological Contributions	Introduces a replicable framework using experimental stimuli and composite variables for trust and greenwashing, applicable to other industries.

### 5.3 Limitations and Further Research

As with any research, this study has its limitations, which provide opportunities for further exploration. One notable limitation is the demographic composition of the respondents. The majority of participants were women, which might have skewed the results. A more balanced gender distribution could provide a broader perspective. Similarly, many respondents were students, as the survey was shared through WhatsApp groups and other student-heavy platforms. This could mean that the responses reflect the perspectives of individuals still in the process of educating themselves, potentially affecting their understanding of sustainability-related issues.

Another limitation is the use of survey exchange websites due to time constraints, which made it challenging to control who participated. While these platforms provided quick access to respondents, the lack of control may have impacted the quality and relevance of some responses.

The use of fictional brands (Velaro and EcoQuick) was another constraint. While these were designed to eliminate brand biases, real-world perceptions of actual brands might differ. Incorporating established brands in future studies could provide more practical insights.

For future research, several directions could deepen the understanding of sustainability communication.

<b>Future Research</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Cross-Cultural Differences</b>	Exploring how trust and greenwashing perceptions vary across cultures to uncover global insights, as cultural values significantly shape consumer responses.
<b>Long-Term Effects of Communication</b>	Investigating how consistent verbal and visual communication strategies impact consumer trust and greenwashing perceptions over time for a comprehensive view.
<b>Diverse Sample Populations</b>	Expanding the participant pool to include diverse countries and demographics to improve the generalizability of the findings on sustainability communication.
<b>Sustainability Education</b>	Examining how educational campaigns or interventions about greenwashing and sustainability affect consumer understanding, perceptions, and behavior.
<b>Incorporating Qualitative Methods</b>	Interviews alongside surveys will be used to provide richer, more detailed insights into consumer motivations and attitudes, complementing quantitative findings.

In conclusion, while this study has laid important groundwork for understanding sustainability communication, addressing these limitations and pursuing these research directions could provide more nuanced and actionable insights for both academic and practical applications.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Qualtrics Survey

INTRODUCTION TEXT Welcome! Thank you for participating in this survey. This research study is being conducted as part of the thesis for the McS in Management. All data collected through this survey will be used solely for academic purposes within the scope of the MSc thesis. Analysis will concentrate on identifying trends and patterns across groups rather than individual responses. Your responses will remain completely anonymous. No personal identifying information will be collected, and results will be reported in aggregate form only, ensuring individual anonymity. In this survey, 'greenwashing' refers to environmental claims that may appear genuine but are exaggerated or misleading, giving the impression of sustainability without substantial commitment. Please review each brand message and image carefully before answering the questions. **Note that all brands and images are fictional and created solely for this survey!** Thank you for your time and valuable contribution to this research! P.S: This survey contains credits to get free survey responses at SurveySwap.io

What is your gender: What is your gender:

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / third gender (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Stimulus 1: LUX+PIC Stimulus 1: Velaro "The following image represents a brand's visual communication of its sustainability commitment." **IMAGE:**

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(1) Brand Com. Brand Communication Perception

	1.Strongly Disagree (1)	2.Disagree (2)	3.Somewhat Disagree (3)	4.Neutral (4)	5.Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7.Strongly Agree (7)
“The sustainability claim in this brand’s message seems credible.” (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I find the brand’s communication about its environmental efforts to be believable.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“This brand appears genuinely committed to sustainability.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(1) Luxury Po. Luxury Positioning

	1.Strongly Disagree (1)	2.Disagree (2)	3.Somewhat Disagree (3)	4.Neutral (4)	5.Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7.Strongly Agree (7)
“This brand’s positioning feels luxurious.” (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s message reflects a high-end, luxury identity.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s sustainability efforts align with a luxury brand image.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(1) Consumer Trust Consumer Trust

	1.Strongly Disagree (1)	2.Disagree (2)	3.Somewhat Disagree (3)	4.Neutral (4)	5.Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7.Strongly Agree (7)
“I trust this brand’s commitment to its sustainability goals (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s message makes me feel confident in its authenticity.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I would trust this brand’s environmental claims more than others.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I believe this brand acts responsibly toward the environment.” (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(1) Perception Greenw Perception of Greenwashing

	1. Strongly Disagree (1)	2. Disagree (2)	3. Somewhat Disagree (3)	4. Neutral (4)	5. Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7. Strongly Agree (7)
“I feel that this brand may be exaggerating its environmental efforts.” (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s message seems more like marketing than a true commitment to sustainability.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I believe this brand is engaging in greenwashing.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The sustainability claim from this brand aligns poorly with its overall practices.” (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Stimulus 2: Velaro "Please carefully read the following sustainability and brand messages. Then, answer the questions below based on your impressions and understanding of these statements."

- **Sustainability Message:** “At Velaro, sustainability is our legacy. Our Eternal Collection is crafted with 100% certified organic materials, focusing on durability and elegance. We’re committed to achieving carbon neutrality across all operations by 2025, reducing our footprint while elevating luxury. Each piece is meticulously designed to stand the test of time, honoring both our environment

and our customers.” • **Brand Message:** “Velaro: Crafted for a Greener World. Join us in a journey where luxury meets responsibility. Discover fashion with a purpose, one timeless piece at a time.”

(2) Brand Com. Brand Communication Perception

	1.Strongly Disagree (1)	2.Disagree (2)	3.Somewhat Disagree (3)	4.Neutral (4)	5.Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7.Strongly Agree (7)
“The sustainability claim in this brand’s message seems credible.” (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I find the brand’s communication about its environmental efforts to be believable.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“This brand appears genuinely committed to sustainability.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(2)Luxury Pos. Luxury Positioning

	1.Strongly Disagree (1)	2.Disagree (2)	3.Somewhat Disagree (3)	4.Neutral (4)	5.Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7.Strongly Agree (7)
“This brand’s positioning feels luxurious.” (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s message reflects a high-end, luxury identity.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s sustainability efforts align with a luxury brand image.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(2) Consumer Trust Consumer Trust

	1.Strongly Disagree (1)	2.Disagree (2)	3.Somewhat Disagree (3)	4.Neutral (4)	5.Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7.Strongly Agree (7)
“I trust this brand’s commitment to its sustainability goals (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s message makes me feel confident in its authenticity.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I would trust this brand’s environmental claims more than others.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I believe this brand acts responsibly toward the environment.” (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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(2) Perception Green Perception of Greenwashing

	1. Strongly Disagree (1)	2. Disagree (2)	3. Somewhat Disagree (3)	4. Neutral (4)	5. Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7. Strongly Agree (7)
“I feel that this brand may be exaggerating its environmental efforts.” (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s message seems more like marketing than a true commitment to sustainability.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I believe this brand is engaging in greenwashing.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The sustainability claim from this brand aligns poorly with its overall practices.” (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q21 Stimulus 3: EcoQuick Image:** "The following image represents a brand’s visual communication of its sustainability commitment."

(3) Brand Com. Brand Communication Perception

	1.Strongly Disagree (1)	2.Disagree (2)	3.Somewhat Disagree (3)	4.Neutral (4)	5.Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7.Strongly Agree (7)
“The sustainability claim in this brand’s message seems credible.” (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I find the brand’s communication about its environmental efforts to be believable.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“This brand appears genuinely committed to sustainability.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(3) Luxury Pos. Luxury Positioning

	1.Strongly Disagree (1)	2.Disagree (2)	3.Somewhat Disagree (3)	4.Neutral (4)	5.Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7.Strongly Agree (7)
“This brand’s positioning feels luxurious.” (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s message reflects a high-end, luxury identity.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s sustainability efforts align with a luxury brand image.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(3) Consumer Trust Consumer Trust

	1.Strongly Disagree (1)	2.Disagree (2)	3.Somewhat Disagree (3)	4.Neutral (4)	5.Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7.Strongly Agree (7)
“I trust this brand’s commitment to its sustainability goals (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s message makes me feel confident in its authenticity.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I would trust this brand’s environmental claims more than others.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I believe this brand acts responsibly toward the environment.” (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(3) Perception Green Perception of Greenwashing

	1. Strongly Disagree (1)	2. Disagree (2)	3. Somewhat Disagree (3)	4. Neutral (4)	5. Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7. Strongly Agree (7)
“I feel that this brand may be exaggerating its environmental efforts.” (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s message seems more like marketing than a true commitment to sustainability.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I believe this brand is engaging in greenwashing.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The sustainability claim from this brand aligns poorly with its overall practices.” (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q27 Stimulus 4: EcoQuick** "Please carefully read the following sustainability and brand messages. Then, answer the questions below based on your impressions and understanding of these statements." • **Sustainability Message:** “EcoQuick’s EcoVibe Collection is designed for the eco-conscious trendsetter. Featuring items made from recycled materials and an exclusive recycling program, we’re making it easier to choose green fashion. Bring back your used clothes for discounts on new styles and join us in creating a sustainable future!” • **Brand Message:** “EcoQuick: EcoVibe Collection – Choose Green Fashion Today. Be part of the change, one stylish step at a time.”

(4) Brand Com. Brand Communication Perception

	1.Strongly Disagree (1)	2.Disagree (2)	3.Somewhat Disagree (3)	4.Neutral (4)	5.Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7.Strongly Agree (7)
“The sustainability claim in this brand’s message seems credible.” (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I find the brand’s communication about its environmental efforts to be believable.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“This brand appears genuinely committed to sustainability.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(4) Luxury Pos. Luxury Positioning

	1.Strongly Disagree (1)	2.Disagree (2)	3.Somewhat Disagree (3)	4.Neutral (4)	5.Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7.Strongly Agree (7)
“This brand’s positioning feels luxurious.” (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s message reflects a high-end, luxury identity.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s sustainability efforts align with a luxury brand image.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(4) Consumer Trust Consumer Trust

	1.Strongly Disagree (1)	2.Disagree (2)	3.Somewhat Disagree (3)	4.Neutral (4)	5.Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7.Strongly Agree (7)
“I trust this brand’s commitment to its sustainability goals (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s message makes me feel confident in its authenticity.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I would trust this brand’s environmental claims more than others.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I believe this brand acts responsibly toward the environment.” (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(4) Perception Greenw Perception of Greenwashing

	1. Strongly Disagree (1)	2. Disagree (2)	3. Somewhat Disagree (3)	4. Neutral (4)	5. Somewhat Agree (5)	6. Agree (6)	7. Strongly Agree (7)
“I feel that this brand may be exaggerating its environmental efforts.” (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The brand’s message seems more like marketing than a true commitment to sustainability.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“I believe this brand is engaging in greenwashing.” (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“The sustainability claim from this brand aligns poorly with its overall practices.” (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Categorize Brand How would you categorize the brand you just viewed?

- A high-luxury fashion brand (1)
- A fast fashion brand (2)
- Not sure (3)

Visual or Verbal What type of communication strategy was primarily used in the brand's message?

- Verbal (focused on written text) (1)
- Visual (focused on images) (2)
- Both (3)
- Not sure (4)

AGE Age

- 18-29 (1)
- 30-44 (2)
- 45-59 (3)
- 60 and above (4)

How often purchase? How often do you purchase clothing?

- Weekly (1)
- Monthly (2)
- Every few months (3)
- Rarely (4)

Interest in Sustain How interested are you in sustainable fashion?

- 1.Strongly Disagree (1)
- 2.Disagree (2)
- 3.Somewhat Disagree (3)
- 4.Neutral (4)
- 5.Somewhat Agree (5)
- 6.Agree (6)
- 7.Strongly Agree (7)

Education Level What is your highest level of education completed?

- High school or equivalent (1)
- Some college (2)
- Bachelor's degree (3)
- Master's degree (4)
- Doctorate (5)
- Prefer not to answer (6)

Annual Income What is your approximate annual income level?

- Below €25,000 (1)
- €25,000–€49,999 (2)
- €50,000–€74,999 (3)
- €75,000–€99,999 (4)
- €100,000 and above (5)
- Prefer not to answer (6)

## Appendix 2: Summary of Data Cleaning and Final Observations

**Table 6:** Summary of Data Cleaning and Final Observations

Stimuli	Initial Observations	Non-Finished Surveys	Repeated IPs	Failed Manipulation	Outliers	Valid Observations
Stimulus 1	63	-	12	5	0	46
Stimulus 2	62	-	11	5	0	46
Stimulus 3	59	-	10	2	0	47
Stimulus 4	62	-	10	10	0	42
Total	281	35	43	22	0	181

## Appendix 3: Demographic and Behavioral Insights

Figure 2: Gender Distribution

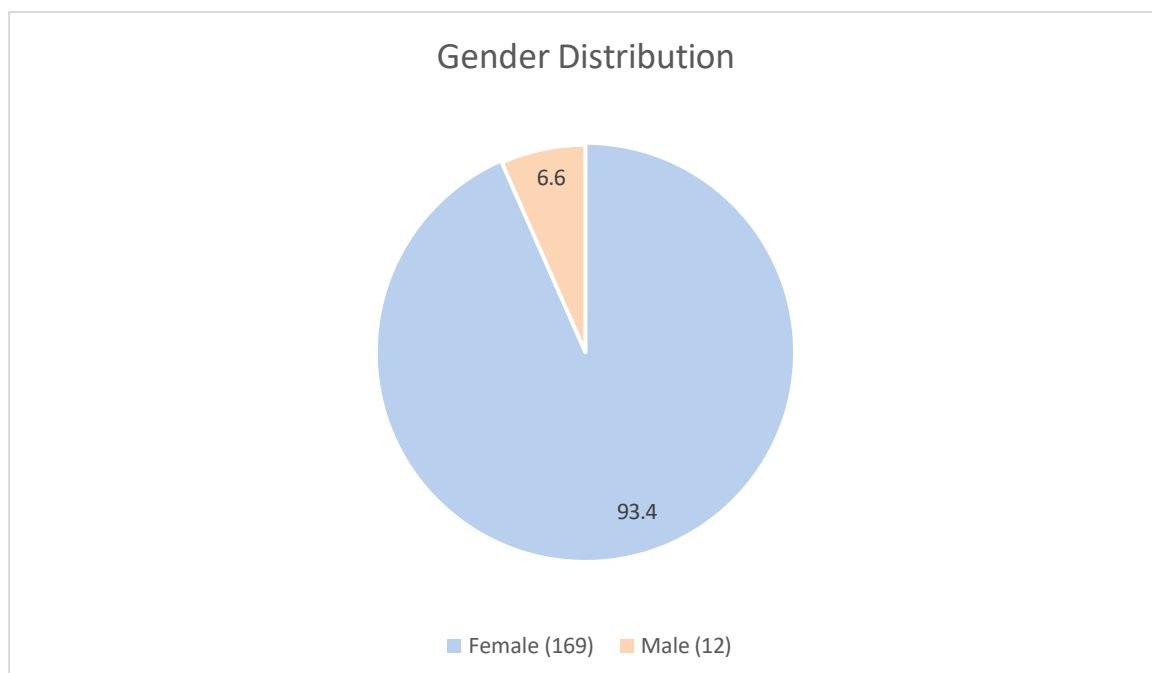


Figure 3: Age Distribution

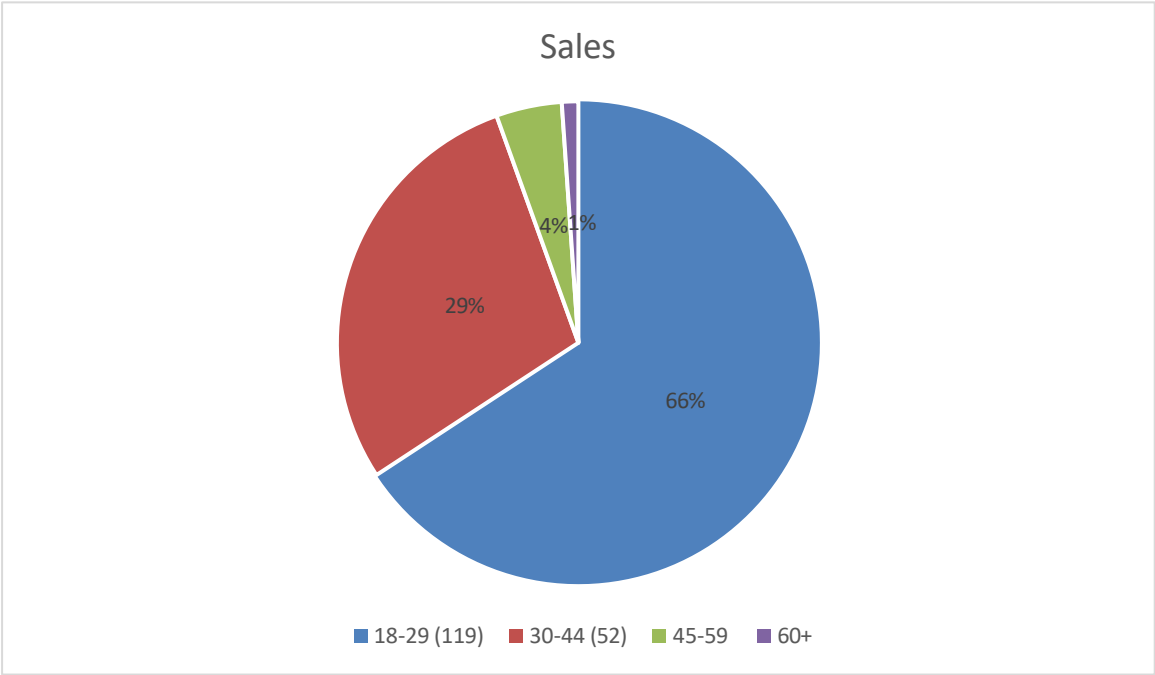


Figure 4: Clothing Purchase Frequency

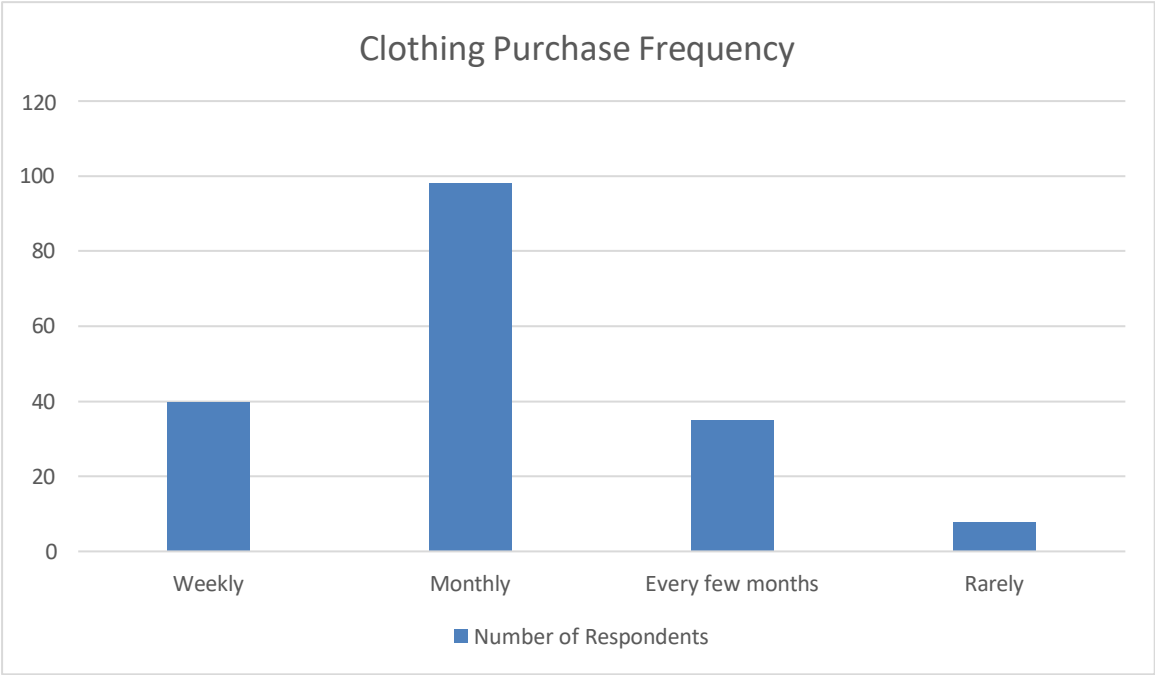
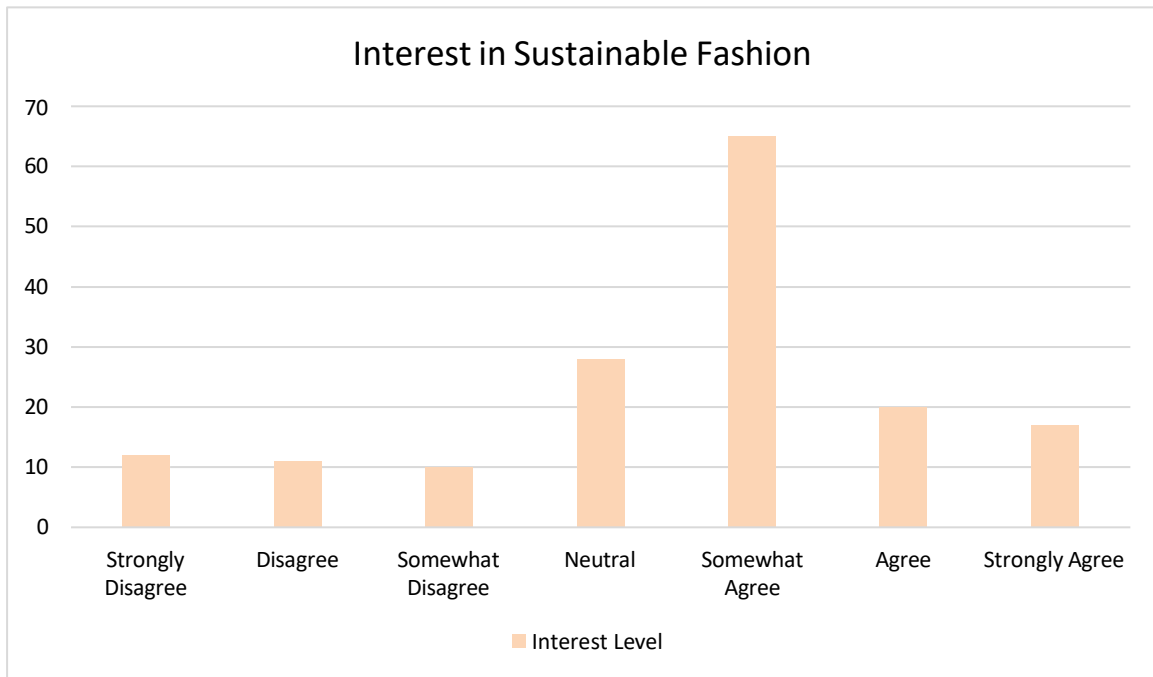


Figure 5: Interest in Sustainable Fashion



#### Appendix 4: Multicollinearity Diagnostics for Regression Analysis

##### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	23.703	.379		62.498	<.001		
	Greenwashing_Combined	-.690	.028	-.883	-25.039	<.001	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Trust\_Combined

##### Collinearity Diagnostics<sup>a</sup>

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions	
				(Constant)	Greenwashing_Combined
1	1	1.907	1.000	.05	.05
	2	.093	4.520	.95	.95

a. Dependent Variable: Trust\_Combined

## Appendix 5: Hypothesis 1 - Independent Samples T-Test

### Group Statistics

	Brand_Type_Combined	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Trust_Combined	1.00	93	18.2688	3.26527	.33859
	2.00	87	11.6983	3.02512	.32433
Greenwashing_Combined	1.00	93	8.6855	4.31345	.44728
	2.00	88	16.5341	4.26867	.45504

### Independent Samples Effect Sizes

		Standardizer <sup>a</sup>	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Trust_Combined	Cohen's d	3.15153	2.085	1.719	2.447
	Hedges' correction	3.16489	2.076	1.712	2.436
	Glass's delta	3.02512	2.172	1.733	2.605
Greenwashing_Combined	Cohen's d	4.29174	-1.829	-2.174	-1.479
	Hedges' correction	4.30983	-1.821	-2.165	-1.473
	Glass's delta	4.26867	-1.839	-2.235	-1.437

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.

Cohen's d uses the pooled standard deviation.

Hedges' correction uses the pooled standard deviation, plus a correction factor.

Glass's delta uses the sample standard deviation of the control (i.e., the second) group.

## Independent Samples Test

Measure	Equal Variance Assumed	F	Sig.	t	df	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Trust_Combined	Yes	0.095	0.758	13.978	178	< 0.001	6.57054	0.47006	5.64293	7.49816
Trust_Combined	No	N/A	N/A	14.014	177.985	< 0.001	6.57054	0.46886	5.64529	7.49579
Greenwashing_Combined	Yes	0.008	0.927	-12.297	179	< 0.001	-7.84861	0.63825	-9.10807	-6.58915
Greenwashing_Combined	No	N/A	N/A	-12.301	178.636	< 0.001	-7.84861	0.63806	-9.10772	-6.58949

## Appendix 6: Hypothesis 2 - Two-Way ANOVA

### Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Trust\_Combined

Brand_Type_Combined	Communication_Type	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1.00	1.00	16.7656	3.14474	48
	2.00	19.8722	2.57591	45
	Total	18.2688	3.26527	93
2.00	1.00	9.8958	2.17874	48
	2.00	13.9167	2.38439	39
	Total	11.6983	3.02512	87
Total	1.00	13.3307	4.37765	96
	2.00	17.1071	3.87926	84

Total	15.0931	4.55169	180
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### Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Trust\_Combined

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2512.604 <sup>a</sup>	3	837.535	123.260	<.001	.678
Intercept	40815.905	1	40815.905	6006.859	<.001	.972
Brand_Type_Combined	1837.258	1	1837.258	270.388	<.001	.606
Communication_Type	567.411	1	567.411	83.506	<.001	.322
Brand_Type_Combined * Communication_Type	9.336	1	9.336	1.374	.243	.008
Error	1195.899	176	6.795			
Total	44712.563	180				
Corrected Total	3708.504	179				

a. R Squared = .678 (Adjusted R Squared = .672)

### Appendix 7: Hypothesis 3 - Pearson Correlation & Linear Regression

#### Correlations

		Trust_Combined	Greenwashing_C ombined
Trust_Combined	Pearson Correlation	1	-.883**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	180	180
Greenwashing_Combined	Pearson Correlation	-.883**	1

	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	180	181

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.883 <sup>a</sup>	.779	.778	2.14645

a. Predictors: (Constant), Greenwashing\_Combined

### ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2888.414	1	2888.414	626.929	<.001 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	820.089	178	4.607		
	Total	3708.504	179			

a. Dependent Variable: Trust\_Combined

b. Predictors: (Constant), Greenwashing\_Combined

### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	23.703	.379		62.498	<.001
	Greenwashing_Combined	-.690	.028	-.883	-25.039	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Trust\_Combined

## Appendix 8: Hypothesis 4a - Two-Way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)

## Descriptive Statistics

### Dependent Variable: Greenwashing\_Combined

Brand_Type_Combined	Communication_Type	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1.00	1.00	10.0260	3.85172	48
	2.00	7.2556	4.35938	45
	Total	8.6855	4.31345	93
2.00	1.00	19.3333	2.46050	48
	2.00	13.1750	3.48357	40
	Total	16.5341	4.26867	88
Total	1.00	14.6797	5.67621	96
	2.00	10.0412	4.94190	85
	Total	12.5014	5.81297	181

## Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Greenwashing\_Combined

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	3791.029 <sup>a</sup>	3	1263.676	97.618	<.001	.623
Intercept	27889.168	1	27889.168	2154.419	<.001	.924
Brand_Type_Combined	2608.352	1	2608.352	201.493	<.001	.532
Communication_Type	896.893	1	896.893	69.284	<.001	.281
Brand_Type_Combined * Communication_Type	129.122	1	129.122	9.975	.002	.053
Error	2291.283	177	12.945			
Total	34369.813	181				

Corrected Total	6082.312	180				
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a. R Squared = .623 (Adjusted R Squared = .617)

### Appendix 9: Hypothesis 4b - Independent Samples T-Test

#### Group Statistics

	Communication_Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Greenwashing_Combined	1.00	96	14.6797	5.67621	.57933
	2.00	85	10.0412	4.94190	.53602

#### Independent T-Test

Measure	Equal Variances Assumed	F	Sig.	t	df	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Greenwashing_Combined	Yes	4.545	0.034	5.828	179	< 0.001	4.63851	0.75993	3.06789	6.20913
Greenwashing_Combined	No	N/A	N/A	5.877	178.954	< 0.001	4.63851	0.78927	3.08105	6.19598

#### Independent Samples Effect Sizes

Standardizer <sup>a</sup>	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower	Upper

Greenwashing_Combined	Cohen's d	5.34420	.868	.561	1.172
	Hedges' correction	5.36672	.864	.559	1.167
	Glass's delta	4.94190	.939	.612	1.261

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.

Cohen's d uses the pooled standard deviation.

Hedges' correction uses the pooled standard deviation, plus a correction factor.

Glass's delta uses the sample standard deviation of the control (i.e., the second) group.

## Appendix 10: Descriptive Statistics for Trust and Greenwashing by Brand Type and Communication Style

### Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Trust_Luxury_Visual	48	5.75	20.50	16.7656	3.14474
Trust_Luxury_Verbal	45	13.00	22.75	19.8722	2.57591
Trust_FastFashion_Visual	48	3.50	17.25	9.8958	2.17874
Trust_FastFashion_Verbal	39	8.50	18.50	13.9167	2.38439
Greenwashing_Luxury_Visual	48	4.50	20.50	10.0260	3.85172
Greenwashing_Luxury_Verbal	45	3.25	19.25	7.2556	4.35938
Greenwashing_FastFashion_Visual	48	8.50	22.75	19.3333	2.46050
Greenwashing_FastFashion_Verbal	40	6.50	18.25	13.1750	3.48357

Measure	Cronbach's Alpha
Consumer Trust Luxury Visual	.911
Consumer Trust Luxury Verbal	.896
Consumer Trust Fast Fashion Visual	.834

Consumer Trust Fast Fashion Verbal	.889
Greenwashing Luxury Visual	.915
Greenwashing Luxury Verbal	.944
Greenwashing Fast Fashion Visual	.793
Greenwashing Fast Fashion Verbal	.940

## Appendix 11: Full Model Test

Model : 7

Y : GreenCom

X : CommType

M : TrustCom

W : BrandCom

Sample

Size: 180

\*\*\*\*\*

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

TrustCom

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.8231	.6775	6.7949	123.2596	3.0000	176.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	21.4431	1.8998	11.2867	.0000	17.6936	25.1925
CommType	2.1924	1.2190	1.7985	.0738	-.2134	4.5981
BrandCom	-7.7840	1.2074	-6.4472	.0000	-10.1668	-5.4013
Int_1	.9142	.7800	1.1722	.2427	-.6251	2.4535

Product terms key:

Int\_1 : CommType x BrandCom

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0025	1.3739	1.0000	176.0000	.2427

\*\*\*\*\*

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

GreenCom

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.8835	.7805	7.5317	314.7779	2.0000	177.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	29.9429	.7921	37.8008	.0000	28.3797	31.5062
CommType	-.5255	.4507	-1.1661	.2452	-1.4149	.3639
TrustCom	-1.1055	.0495	-22.3188	.0000	-1.2033	-1.0078

\*\*\*\*\* DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y \*\*\*\*\*

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	
	-.5255	.4507	-1.1661	.2452	-1.4149	.3639

Conditional indirect effects of X on Y:

INDIRECT EFFECT:

CommType -> TrustCom -> GreenCom

BrandCom	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
----------	--------	--------	----------	----------

1.0000	-3.4345	.6507	-4.7494	-2.1546
2.0000	-4.4452	.5584	-5.5607	-3.3491

Index of moderated mediation (difference between conditional indirect effects):

	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
BrandCom	-1.0107	.8533	-2.6788	.6658

Bootstrap estimates were saved to a file

Map of column names to model coefficients:

	Conseqnt	Antecdnt
COL1	TrustCom	constant
COL2	TrustCom	CommType
COL3	TrustCom	BrandCom
COL4	TrustCom	Int_1
COL5	GreenCom	constant
COL6	GreenCom	CommType
COL7	GreenCom	TrustCom

#### BOOTSTRAP RESULTS FOR REGRESSION MODEL PARAMETERS

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

TrustCom

	Coeff	BootMean	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
constant	21.4431	21.3858	2.1014	17.2404	25.3193
CommType	2.1924	2.2240	1.2865	-.2930	4.7599
BrandCom	-7.7840	-7.7581	1.2218	-10.0938	-5.2998
Int_1	.9142	.8997	.7670	-.6133	2.4012

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

GreenCom

	Coeff	BootMean	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
--	-------	----------	--------	----------	----------

constant	29.9429	29.9490	.6934	28.6074	31.3067
CommType	-.5255	-.5270	.4573	-1.4289	.3677
TrustCom	-1.1055	-1.1058	.0410	-1.1879	-1.0255