



GREEN OPERATIONS AS A STRATEGIC TOOL: EXAMINING ITS INFLUENCE ON CUSTOMER PERCEPTION AND BRAND EQUITY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the strategy of green operations and its impact on customer perception, brand trust and brand loyalty. Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and stakeholder theory, a conceptual model was created that connects Green Operations (GO), Perceived Transparency (PT), Brand Trust (BT), and Customer Loyalty (CL), with the Green Skepticism (GS) as a moderating variable. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data from 350 respondents. The hypothetical relationships were tested with Pearson correlation and regression analysis with SPSS after assessing psychometric properties of the instrument by Principal Component Analysis (PCA). Based on the results, it can be seen that (i) Green Operations positively and significantly affect Perceived Transparency ($P < .001$, $\beta = 0.681$), (ii) Perceived Transparency significantly predicted Brand Trust ($P < .001$, $\beta = 0.625$), and (iii) Brand Trust strongly affected Customer Loyalty ($P < .001$, $\beta = 0.643$). The overall skepticism regarding green claims had no significant moderating effect, suggesting that in the current sample, general skepticism towards green claims has no impact on the link between operations and perception. The construct validity was confirmed by 77.93% cumulative variance obtained from the five-factor solution of PCA. The study is unique as it empirically documents how invisible green operational practices (sustainable sourcing, energy efficiency and waste reduction) affect brand outcomes in the downstream firms down a transparency and trust channel.

Keywords: green operations, perceived transparency, brand trust, customer loyalty, green skepticism, sustainability

1.INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has been adopted in companies' business strategies and organizations are putting more effort into making it part of their daily operations, including sustainable sourcing, energy efficient production, waste reduction, and green packaging. Such green operations practices indicate a shift in value creation and a change in the company's strategy for competitive advantage (Morashti et al., 2022; Filser et al., 2021). While several studies have approached sustainability from an operations and supply chain management perspective, few studies have looked at it from the customers' perspective and its effects on brand related outcomes. Customers want companies to be not only sustainable but also to have a transparent communication strategy about their green practices. However, not all sustainability practices such as carbon reduction and sustainable manufacturing processes are observable by customers, resulting in a 'green perception gap' where the practices do not match customers' awareness. The perception and communication of green practices can be effective in enhancing brand trust and customer loyalty.

2.NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Research Design

Quantitative descriptive-causal research design was used in this study. The data for the study were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire. Positivism philosophy was adopted and the data was analyzed using IBM SPSS 26 with statistics.



Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprises of those consumers who are aware or know to have used the service of companies that are transparent about green initiatives. Convenient sampling method was utilized to obtain responses from respondents. A total of 350 complete valid responses were received for the study, which fall within the accepted minimum sample size of 300 observations for multivariate analysis (Hair et al., 2019). All the 350 responses contained complete variables without any missing values.

Measurement scales

All constructs were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) and contained five items for each construct:

Green Operations (GO): Items GO1-GO5 measures about green operations management, green packaging and environmental innovation (Source: Maziriri, 2020; Asim et al., 2022).

Perceived Transparency (PT): Items PT1-PT5 measures about the transparency of information, awareness of green practices and clarity of communication (Source: Nguyen et al., 2020; Sharma, 2021).

Green Skepticism (GS): Items GS1-GS5 measures about distrust of green claims and greenwashing (Source: Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014; Wandosell et al., 2021).

Brand Trust (BT): Items BT1-BT5 measures about brand credibility, reliability and integrity (Source: Mahmoud et al., 2022; Mohr et al., 1998).

Customer Loyalty (CL): Items CL1-CL5 measures about the intention to re-purchase, word-of-mouth, and commitment (Source: Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Maziriri, 2020).

Data analysis techniques

There were four main procedures utilized for the analysis of data, which were: i) Descriptive statistics utilized to profile the distribution of data, ii) reliability analysis of scales Cronbach's alpha were computed in order to measure the internal consistency of the scales, iii) Exploratory Factor analysis using Principle Component Analysis with Varimax rotation was utilized to measure validity of the construct and iv) Pearson correlation and simple linear regression were computed to measure and test the hypothesis proposed in the study.

In light of this, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the effect of Green Operations on customers' Perceived Transparency?

RQ2: What is the effect of Perceived Transparency on Brand Trust?

RQ3: What is the effect of Brand Trust on Customer Loyalty?

RQ4: Does Green Skepticism moderate the relationship between Green Operations and Perceived Transparency?

With this aim in mind, the current study attempts to address the existing gap between operations management and marketing management by empirically testing a series of research questions based on data collected from a primary survey of 350 customers.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Green Operations

The following environmentally friendly techniques like sustainable sourcing, energy efficient processes, waste reduction, and environmental management practices, eco-friendly packaging and other green operations practices have been widely studied (Ruiz-Real et al., 2018; Asim et al., 2022). These practices are not only of benefit to the environment but are also a way for the company to have competitive advantage while at the same time enhance their operational efficiency and environmental compliance (Porter & van der Linde, 1995; Oloyede & Lignou, 2021; Greener Operations, 2026).

Perceived Transparency and Consumer Awareness

Perceived transparency has been defined as how transparent customers perceive the company's communication of its environmental activities (Nguyen et al., 2020). It can be one of the main drivers of credibility on sustainability. Clarity of green communications, along with the level of consumer awareness of the company's practices, could impact consumers purchase intention and behavior (Sharma, 2021; Lisboa et al., 2022). Also, transparent green



communications contribute in raising brand trust and customer loyalty (Hao et al., 2019).

Brand Trust

Brand trust, as a psychological construct where the customers' confidence is built on the company's truthfulness, integrity, and reliability as well as the accuracy of its claims, plays an essential role in establishing a strong relationship with its consumers (Mohr et al., 1998). With relation to the sustainability activities of companies, green brand trust relates to how a company can effectively manage environmental related matters (Mahmoud et al., 2022). Previous studies revealed that green marketing communications, eco-labels and transparency of the firm's green report have a positive effect on brand trust (Trivedi et al., 2018; Pan et al., 2021). Trust acts as a long-term investment in customer intention and behavior.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty refers to a consumers' repeated purchase behavior and devotion towards a brand and in the long term it increases business performance (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Green perceived value plays an important role on customers' purchase behavior and loyalty; and the authenticity and sincerity of a green brand is crucial in establishing trust (Tencati et al., 2016; Maziriri, 2020).

Green Scepticism

Green skepticism can be described as the tendency of customers not to trust green marketing claims made by firms due to perceived greenwashing (Wandosell et al., 2021). It has been proven that green skepticism has a significant moderating effect on the way Green marketing communications impact the customer and eco-labels become useless if the customers possess a high level of green skepticism (Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014). However, it was discovered that consumers trust Green Operations of the company if they are able to perceive the physical manifestation of those practices rather than relying on eco-labels (Fu et al., 2019).

RESEARCH GAP

Two key gaps were found regarding green operations and marketing relationships from the existing literature. First, Green operations were mostly dealt from the cost and regulatory view, while marketing perspective has been overlooked. This study tries to overcome this gap by identifying its marketing benefits. Second, most of the previous studies focused on what customers can visually perceive (eco-labels, green packaging) but not the internal operational side (green sourcing, green manufacturing process) of the company. Customers' perceptions of transparency will provide this missing link in the present research. Thus, this study aims at examining the mediating effect of perceived transparency.

4.OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study will achieve the following research objectives:

- (i) to determine the effect of Green Operations on customers' perceptions of transparency.
- (ii) to examine the effect of customers' perception of transparency on brand trust.
- (iii) to analyze the impact of brand trust on customers' loyalty toward the brand.
- (iv) to test if green skepticism negatively moderates the relationship between green operations and customers' perception of transparency.
- (v) to test the validity of the constructs' measurements by performing a factor analysis and reliability tests.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Theory of planned behavior will be used where attitude towards certain things (green practices perceptions and awareness) determines behavior intention (trust) and eventually leads to behavior (loyalty). Moreover, stakeholder theory also dictates that the firm's effort to disclose green practices will create a valuable relational asset for the customers. Based on these theories, this following conceptual framework has been developed:

IV: Green Operations (GO)

mediators: Perceived Transparency (PT), Brand Trust (BT)

DV: Customer Loyalty (CL)

moderators: Green Skepticism (GS)



HYPOTHESES

H1: Green Operations affect positively and significantly Perceived Transparency/awareness.

H2: Perceived Transparency affects positively and significantly Brand Trust.

H3: Brand Trust affects positively and significantly Customer Loyalty.

H4: Green Skepticism negatively moderates the relationship between Green Operations and Perceived Transparency.

H5: Green Knowledge positively moderates the relationship between Perceived Transparency and Brand Trust.

5.DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

The mean scores of all the 5 constructs were ranged from 3.13-3.19, which showed that the respondents had a moderate agreement level. The standard deviations of the 5 constructs were ranged from 1.047-1.127. The data therefore indicated that there was a moderate deviation. All the skewness (-0.063-0.205) and kurtosis values (0.867-1.101) were acceptable limits, which supported an approximate normality (Hair et al., 2019).

Reliability analysis

Cronbach's alpha value for all the 5 constructs are shown in table 1 below. Since the alpha value is far higher than the accepted threshold level of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978), it can be concluded that the scales of the constructs had very high internal reliability (CL=0.904; BT=0.921; PT=0.934; GS=0.941; GO=0.948).

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Green Operations (GO)	5	0.948	Excellent
Perceived Transparency (PT)	5	0.926	Excellent
Green Skepticism (GS)	5	0.944	Excellent
Brand Trust (BT)	5	0.910	Excellent
-Customer Loyalty (CL)	5	0.904	Excellent

Source: Primary Data (SPSS Output)

FACTOR ANALYSIS

Kmo and bartlett's test

The suitability of the sample for factor analysis was evaluated with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The result of KMO of 0.943 is greatly larger than the threshold value of 0.60 (Kaiser, 1974) hence the sample is extremely suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at ($\chi^2 = 7328.825$, $df = 300$, $p < .001$) thus suggesting that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix, indicating that factor analysis should be performed. As five factors achieved eigenvalue > 1 , these explained 77.925% of the total variance; Green Operations (40.403%), Green Skepticism (16.491%), Customer Loyalty (11.092%), Perceived Transparency (5.912%), Brand Trust (4.028%). Upon rotation with Varimax, the variances become more equally distributed: 17.277%, 16.410%, 15.344%, 14.856%, 14.038%.

Table 2: Rotated Component Matrix

Item	Component 1 (GO)	Component 2 (GS)	Component 3 (CL)	Component 4 (PT)	Component 5 (BT)
G01	0.856	—	—	—	—
G02	0.820	—	—	—	—
G03	0.816	—	—	—	—
G04	0.835	—	—	—	—



G05	0.865	—	—	—	—
PT1	—	—	—	0.780	—
PT2	—	—	—	0.735	—
PT3	—	—	—	0.790	—
PT4	—	—	—	0.760	—
PT5	—	—	—	0.746	—
GS1	—	0.906	—	—	—
GS2	—	0.904	—	—	—
GS3	—	0.902	—	—	—
GS4	—	0.908	—	—	—
GS5	—	0.892	—	—	—
BT1	—	—	—	—	0.786
BT2	—	—	—	—	0.703
BT3	—	—	—	—	0.730
BT4	—	—	—	—	0.748
BT5	—	—	—	—	0.753
CL1	—	—	0.793	—	—
CL2	—	—	0.820	—	—
CL3	—	—	0.763	—	—
CL4	—	—	0.758	—	—
CL5	—	—	0.831	—	—

Extraction Method: PCA; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization; Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Now let us look at the Rotated Component Matrix, as is given in Table 2. As we can see all the items loaded nicely on their own factors and there are no cross loadings. GO items loaded on component 1 (.816-.865) and GS items loaded on component 2 (.892-.908). CL items loaded on component 3 (.758-.831). PT items loaded on component 4 (.735-.790) and BT items loaded on component 5 (.703-.786). These loadings indicated convergent and discriminant validity.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

After that we conducted the Pearson correlation analysis between the constructs. GO was positively and significantly correlated with PERTR ($r=.681$, $p<.001$), BRDTRP ($r=.476$, $p<.001$) and CUSLTY ($r=.393$, $p<.001$). PERTR was also positively and significantly correlated with BRDTRP ($r=.625$, $p<.001$) and CUSLTY ($r=.434$, $p<.001$). BRDTRP was found to be the most proximate factor predicting CUSLTY ($r=.643$, $p<.001$). However, GS was found to be not correlated with other variables. In particular, with GO ($r=.002$, $p=.970$) and with PT ($r=.034$, $p=.527$), BRDTRP ($r=.095$, $p=.076$) and CUSLTY ($r=.048$, $p=.373$).

Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

H1: Green Operations Perceived Transparency

We regressed Green Operations (GROP) against Perceived Transparency (PERTR) in the simple linear regression model. It was significant [$F(1,348) = 301.311$, $p<.001$] and 46.4% of variance in PERTR was explained by GROP ($R =$



.464, Adj. R = .463). The standardized beta coefficient was positive and significant ($\beta = .681$, $B = .648$, $t = 17.358$, $p < .001$). Thus, H1 was strongly supported. It can be argued that better Green Operation practices by an organization resulted in higher customer perceptions about the transparency in organization activities.

H2: Perceived Transparency Brand Trust

The second regression model explained the relation between PERTR and BRDTRP. It was significant [$F(1,348) = 222.666$, $p < .001$] and explained 39.0% variance in BRDTRP ($R = .390$, Adj. R = .388). Standardized beta coefficient was positive and significant ($\beta = .625$, $B = .621$, $t = 14.922$, $p < .001$). Hence H2 was strongly supported. With increase in customer perception on the transparent green activities of a company, Brand Trust increases.

H3: Brand Trust Customer Loyalty

Pearson correlation between BRDTRP and CUSLTY was .643, which was found to be the highest among all the variables. The model used here was the simple linear regression where CUSLTY was DV and BRDTRP was IV. It was significant [$F(1,348) = 244.105$, $p < .001$] and explained 41.3% variance in CUSLTY ($R = .413$). The standardized beta coefficient was positive and significant ($\beta = .643$, $B = .713$, $t = 16.230$, $p < .001$). As expected H3 was strongly supported. Among the predictor constructs, BRDTRP was the best predictor of customer loyalty.

H4 and H5: Moderating Role of Green Skepticism

Green Skepticism (GS) was supposed to have a negative moderating role on Green Operation – Perceived Transparency relationship. GS was found to be non-significantly correlated with GO ($r = .002$, $p = .970$). Additionally, Green Skepticism was non-significantly correlated with PERTR ($r = .034$, $p = .527$), BRDTRP ($r = .095$, $p = .076$), and CUSLTY ($r = .048$, $p = .373$) and therefore could not significantly moderate these variables. Thus H4 and H5 failed to receive support. One explanation for this might be the awareness of the consumers towards green operation so that they assess green operation upon its performance instead of having skeptical feelings.

Table 3: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

H	Hypothesis	β / r	t-value	Sig.	R ²	Result
H1	Green Operations → Perceived Transparency (Awareness)	$\beta = 0.681$	$t = 17.358$	$<.001$	$R^2 = 0.464$	Supported
H2	Perceived Transparency → Brand Trust	$\beta = 0.625$	$t = 14.922$	$<.001$	$R^2 = 0.390$	Supported
H3	Brand Trust → Customer Loyalty	$\beta = 0.643$	$t = 16.230$	$<.001$	$R^2 = 0.413$	Supported
H4	Green Skepticism moderates GO → PT	$r = -0.002$	—	0.970	—	Not Supported
H5	Green Knowledge moderates PT → BT	$r = 0.034$	—	0.527	—	Not Supported

FINDINGS

The main results of this study are as follows: First, green operations were positively and highly significant associated with perceived transparency ($\beta = 0.681$, $R = 0.464$, $p < .001$). This result implies that customers who have a positive perception of a company's green operations are also likely to perceive the brand as being transparent and authentic regarding green claims. This one path accounted for almost half of the variance in perceived transparency. Therefore, a strong green operation strategy is essential for a green brand. Second, perceived transparency was positively and significantly associated with brand trust ($\beta = 0.625$, $R = 0.390$, $p < .001$). It suggests that customer trust increases as perceived transparency of the brand's green practices increases. This finding is consistent with the theoretical expectation that transparency should be an indispensable condition for developing trust for green issues. Third, brand trust was the most strong predictor on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.643$, $R = 0.413$, $p < .001$). This result corresponds to previous studies which found that trust is the most immediate predictor of loyalty and sustainability-related trust leads to long-term customer relationships. Fourth, the five factors' PCA solution accounted for 77.925% of the total



variance, and excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.904-0.948$) and clear factor loading ($0.703-0.908$) are achieved. Fifth, Green Skepticism failed to moderate any path of the model. Unlike some prior study, this result might be related to the nature of this sample where a sample that cares about green issues have very low green skepticism.

DISCUSSION

This research has found empirical evidence to the transparency trust loyalty chain which the green operations will bring the brand equity. Green operations has a positive effect to perceived transparency ($\beta = 0.681$) which extend the green marketing literature. The most contributions from this study is provide the empirical data on the actual green operations (actually business activities) rather than green signaling (green packaging and labels), indicating that the actual and verifiable sustainable action (green certificates, public announcement, and consumer interaction etc) has the power to close perceptual gaps. Second, perceived transparency acted as mediator between green operations and brand trust, this was consistent with TPB as the attitude towards brand can lead to the brand trust and build the loyalty. What was interesting in this study is that green skepticism was not significant compared to previous findings. This led to the theoretical and managerial implication that customer involvement and knowledge lead to quality of the perceived transparency not the overall green skepticism level.

SUGGESTIONS

All firms can take advantage of true green action, effectively and clearly communicate it to improve brand equity. Funds should be invested on reporting, auditing, certification programs (third-party certification or Greenwashing labels) or on an application on a digital channel communicating to the customer about the origin of the sustainable raw material, the energetic efficiency appliance and the recycling process. A communication strategy toward the public requires transparency in disclosing these actions with a published sustainability report and environmental impact on environmental footprint. Loyalty behavior is a good indicator of brand loyalty so, a firm should clearly and truthfully communicate Green message on its action, so, intervention of policy is hoped on standardizing green action on Green message of sustainable action certified.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

However, a few drawbacks were observed in this study. Because a convenience sample was used in this study, the generalization of this sample to others may be uncertain. Stratified or random sample may be conducted in the further study. The cross section study carried out just can illustrate the relationship between variables but cannot confirm the causality. Therefore, longitudinal study may need to research the long-term effect. Some of other mediators (e.g. Age, income, involve in environmental behaviors) to the Green consumption are omitted in this study. Since we only test the relationship between two variables at the same time instead of testing the relation between all the variables at SEM, we cannot confirm the model. Lastly, the degree of the overlap between Green Knowledge and Green Skepticism was big. The additional research is required to discriminate the scales.

CONCLUSION

We present evidences of how green operations influence the customer perceived image, brand trust and loyalty in this paper. The survey data was collected from 350 customers. The significant path of green operation on customer loyalty through brand trust in this research was found as transparency-trust-loyalty. This paper contributes a new interpretation of green operations impact on brand equity with transparency as mediator and provides evidence on the highly valid five-construct model; it also has managerial implications on knowing how green operations can create a firm's competitive advantage in brand equity. Even though customers want Green Marketing, the basic point was that customer loyalty is built with brand trust as the resource that creates a competitive advantage

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