Green Authenticity or Greenwashing? Consumer Psychological Scepticism and Purchase Intent in Eco-Resort Marketing: Evidence from Kerala, India

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Abstract
The proliferation of green marketing claims in India's rapidly expanding eco-tourism sector has created a paradox: while environmental branding attracts sustainability-conscious travellers, it simultaneously triggers consumer scepticism when claims appear performative rather than substantive. This study investigates the psychological mechanisms through which green marketing authenticity — and its perceived absence (greenwashing) — influences consumer trust, purchase intention, and word-of-mouth (WOM) behaviour in the context of eco-resort marketing in Kerala, India.
Drawing on Attribution Theory (Kelley, 1967; Weiner, 1985), Value-Belief-Norm Theory (Stern et al., 1999), and Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973), this study develops an eight-hypothesis conceptual model that positions green authenticity as the central construct mediating the relationship between eco-marketing stimuli and consumer behavioural outcomes. Third-party eco-certification and prior eco-resort experience are proposed as moderating variables, while consumer environmental values serve as a second moderator of the authenticity–trust pathway.
A quantitative survey methodology is proposed, targeting 400 domestic and Non-Resident Indian (NRI) tourists who have visited Kerala eco-resorts in the preceding 24 months. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) will be employed for hypothesis testing, with Common Method Bias assessed through Harman's single-factor test and confirmatory factor analysis.
This study contributes to the nascent but rapidly growing literature on hospitality greenwashing scepticism by: (a) introducing the green authenticity construct as a distinct psychological mediator; (b) providing the first empirical examination of eco-resort greenwashing scepticism in an Indian context; and (c) offering sector-specific insights for eco-resort operators in Kerala on how genuine environmental practice translates into measurable commercial outcomes.

Keywords: Greenwashing scepticism; green authenticity; eco-resort marketing; consumer trust; purchase intention; Kerala tourism; PLS-SEM; Attribution Theory; Value-Belief-Norm Theory; sustainable hospitality

1. Introduction

India's ecotourism sector has grown at a compounded annual rate of approximately 12.5% between 2018 and 2024, with the Western Ghats corridor — encompassing Wayanad, Munnar, Coorg, and the Nilgiris — emerging as a primary domestic and international ecotourism destination (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2024). Kerala alone attracted over 17 million domestic tourists and 1.03 million international tourists in 2024, with the state's forest-based and heritage resort segment experiencing accelerated post-pandemic recovery (Kerala Tourism, 2024). The growth of this sector has been accompanied by an equally rapid proliferation of environmental marketing claims — resorts positioning themselves as 'eco-friendly', 'carbon-neutral', 'zero-waste', and 'nature-immersive' — claims that vary widely in their substantive validity.
The tension between green marketing ambition and environmental reality has produced a well-

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documented phenomenon: greenwashing. Defined as the practice of conveying a false impression or providing misleading information about the environmental credentials of a product, service, or organisation (TerraChoice, 2010), greenwashing erodes consumer confidence not only in individual brands but across entire sectors. In India, the scale of the problem is stark: a study by the Advertising Standards Council of India found that 79% of environmental claims made by organisations were exaggerated or misleading, while a YouGov survey reported that 71% of Indian consumers had personally encountered greenwashing (Hussain, 2024). Simultaneously, 82% of Indian consumers surveyed by Bain & Company (2024) reported shopping more sustainably — indicating a high-intent consumer base that is increasingly alert to deceptive green claims.

Within the hospitality sector, eco-resort marketing occupies a particularly complex communicative space. Unlike manufactured goods where environmental credentials can be assessed through ingredient lists or certifications, resort sustainability is multidimensional — encompassing construction practices, water management, energy sourcing, waste systems, biodiversity protection, community engagement, and staff welfare. The difficulty of verification creates fertile ground for scepticism: consumers encounter luxury forest resorts that claim environmental consciousness while offering air-conditioned rooms, infinity pools, and buffet-style catering — a dissonance that triggers what this paper terms 'green authenticity scepticism' (GAS).

Despite the growth of greenwashing literature, three critical gaps persist. First, empirical research on greenwashing scepticism in the hospitality and tourism sector remains limited relative to the product marketing literature, with particularly sparse coverage of the Indian sub-continent (Shishan et al., 2025). Second, the construct of 'green authenticity' — the consumer's psychological assessment of the congruence between a resort's environmental claims and observable practice — has not been developed as a distinct mediating variable. Third, the moderating role of third-party eco-certification on the scepticism–trust pathway has not been examined in the Indian eco-resort context, despite growing evidence that certification signals are a critical trust heuristic for environmentally conscious travellers.

This study addresses these gaps through a theoretically grounded, empirically testable conceptual model of green authenticity scepticism in eco-resort marketing. The setting is Kerala's Wayanad district — one of India's richest eco-tourism destinations — which offers a natural research environment where green marketing claims are abundant and diverse, ranging from internationally certified resorts to locally promoted 'eco-stays' with unverified environmental claims. The findings will carry implications for resort operators, tourism boards, certification bodies, and marketing scholars working at the intersection of psychology, sustainability, and hospitality management.

1.1 Research Questions

1. To what extent does perceived green authenticity mediate the relationship between eco-resort marketing stimuli and consumer trust?
2. How does greenwashing scepticism moderate the green authenticity → trust pathway among eco-resort visitors in Kerala?
3. Does third-party eco-certification strengthen perceived green authenticity and reduce scepticism?
4. What is the relative influence of consumer environmental values on the green authenticity–trust relationship?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Green Marketing in the Hospitality Industry

Green marketing — defined as marketing activities that recognise and address the environmental concerns of various stakeholders (Polonsky, 1994) — has evolved from a niche corporate responsibility strategy to a mainstream commercial differentiator in the global hospitality industry. Hotels and resorts increasingly integrate environmental claims into their brand identity, pricing strategy, and guest communication, responding to documented consumer preferences for sustainable travel options (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Han et al., 2011). The empirical literature consistently demonstrates that green hotel attributes positively influence guest attitude, intention to revisit, and willingness to pay a premium (Millar & Baloglu, 2011; Berezan et al., 2013; Kim & Han, 2010).

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In the Indian context, research on green marketing in hospitality has grown markedly since 2015, with studies examining green hotel practices in Mumbai (Verma & Chandra, 2018), eco-lodge preferences in Kerala (Saji & Babu, 2019), and sustainable resort behaviour in the Western Ghats (Anand et al., 2021). These studies share a common finding: Indian consumers possess positive attitudes toward green hotels but face an 'intention-action gap' — the gap between stated green preferences and actual booking behaviour — driven by price sensitivity, limited awareness, and, increasingly, scepticism about claim authenticity (Bain & Company, 2024; IISD, 2025).

The Wayanad eco-resort segment provides a particularly instructive research context. As of 2025, Wayanad hosts over 280 registered resorts, with more than 70% claiming some form of environmental branding — ranging from certified eco-lodges compliant with Kerala Tourism's Green Leaf Rating to luxury resorts that use eco-language in marketing without substantive environmental practice. This diversity of green claim authenticity creates the ideal comparative environment for examining greenwashing scepticism.

2.2Greenwashing and Consumer Scepticism

Greenwashing, a portmanteau of 'green' and 'whitewashing', was first systematically documented by TerraChoice (2010) in their seminal 'Seven Sins of Greenwashing' framework, which identified common deceptive practices including sin of the hidden trade-off, sin of no proof, sin of vagueness, sin of irrelevance, sin of lesser of two evils, sin of fibbing, and sin of worshipping false labels. In the hospitality sector, these sins manifest distinctively: a resort might claim to be 'eco-friendly' (sin of vagueness) while installing a heated outdoor pool (hidden trade-off) and self-declaring environmental status without third-party verification (sin of no proof).

Consumer scepticism toward green claims is defined as the tendency to question, disbelieve, and challenge sustainability marketing messages (Mohr, Webb & Harris, 2001). Matthes and Wonneberger (2014) operationalised green advertising scepticism as a stable consumer disposition comprising cognitive (disbelief), affective (irritation), and behavioural (avoidance) dimensions. Research consistently demonstrates that scepticism erodes the persuasive effectiveness of green marketing, reduces brand trust, and diminishes purchase intention (Nyilasy et al., 2014; Chang, 2011). However, Urbański and Ul Haque (2020) importantly note that the relationship is non-linear: while moderate scepticism encourages critical thinking and informed decision-making, excessive scepticism causes consumers to dismiss even legitimate sustainability claims — a 'throw the baby out with the bathwater' effect with significant commercial implications for genuinely green resorts.

Recent scholarship has turned attention to the consequences of perceived greenwashing on trust dynamics. Guerreiro and Pacheco (2021) demonstrated that consumer trust and word-of-mouth fully mediate the effect of greenwashing perceptions on purchase intentions. Multiple 2024 studies confirm that perceived greenwashing 'erodes consumer trust and damages purchase intentions' (IJFMR, 2025). Stoian (2025), in qualitative interviews across European markets, found that experienced environmentally aware consumers lose trust not only in the offending brand but develop generalised suspicion of all sustainability claims — a sector-wide contagion effect.

Within India specifically, the regulatory environment has begun to respond. The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) issued Draft Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Greenwashing in 2024, aligning with the EU's Green Claims Directive. This policy development creates a timely and consequential research context: understanding consumer psychological responses to greenwashing in India has immediate regulatory, commercial, and ethical implications.

2.3.Green Authenticity as a Distinct Construct

The concept of brand authenticity — the degree to which a brand is perceived as genuine, real, and true to itself (Beverland, 2005) — has generated extensive literature in brand management but has only recently been applied specifically to green or sustainability claims. Kim and Hall (2019) introduced 'green authenticity' in the context of eco-tourism, defining it as 'the consumer's assessment of the congruence between a tourism operator's stated environmental commitments and

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observable environmental behaviours'. They found that green authenticity significantly and positively predicted trust and revisit intention, and negatively moderated the effect of scepticism on these outcomes.

This paper develops the green authenticity construct specifically for eco-resort marketing in India, distinguishing it from general brand authenticity through its environmental specificity and its verifiability dimension. Green authenticity in the eco-resort context is conceptualised along three sub-dimensions: (1) Consistency Authenticity — the alignment between green marketing messages and observable on-property practices; (2) Continuity Authenticity — the resort's history of environmental commitment rather than recent 'trend' adoption; and (3) Credential Authenticity — the presence of verifiable third-party certifications (Green Leaf Kerala, EarthCheck, ISO 14001) that signal substantive rather than performative environmental commitment.

2.4.Consumer Trust, Purchase Intention, and Word-of-Mouth

Consumer trust is defined in the marketing literature as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). In the green marketing context, trust operates as the primary psychological bridge between environmental claims and commercial outcomes: consumers who trust a resort's green credentials are significantly more likely to book, revisit, recommend, and pay a price premium (Han et al., 2011; Kang & Hur, 2012).

Purchase intention in the eco-resort context is the subjective probability that a consumer will book a specific eco-resort within a defined future timeframe (Dodds, Monroe & Grewal, 1991). Word-of-mouth (WOM) intention — both offline and electronic (eWOM via TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Instagram) — is particularly critical for eco-resorts given the word-of-mouth dependent nature of eco-tourism decision-making (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). Positive eWOM for eco-credentials has been shown to elevate perceived authenticity and reduce prospect scepticism (Gössling et al., 2019), suggesting a reinforcing loop between authentic practice, positive review generation, and new guest acquisition.

2.5 Research Gap Summary

This study addresses three distinct and documented gaps*:*

1. **Geographic gap:** No empirical study has examined green authenticity scepticism specifically in Kerala or Indian eco-resort contexts, despite India's scale, growth trajectory, and documented greenwashing prevalence.
2. **Construct gap:** The green authenticity construct has not been operationalised as a distinct three-dimensional mediator (Consistency, Continuity, Credential) in eco-resort research.
3. **Segment gap:** NRI consumers — a high-value, environmentally aware, premium-spending segment — have not been studied as a distinct subsample in eco-resort scepticism research, despite representing a strategically important demographic for Kerala tourism.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study integrates three theoretical traditions to explain the psychological processes through which eco-resort marketing stimuli generate, modify, and are filtered by consumer scepticism to produce trust, purchase, and advocacy outcomes.

3.1 Attribution Theory

Attribution Theory (Kelley, 1967; Weiner, 1985) posits that individuals are intuitive scientists who attribute causes to observable events. When applied to green marketing, Attribution Theory predicts that consumers will attempt to infer the motive behind a resort's environmental claim — specifically, whether the claim reflects genuine environmental commitment (internal, stable attribution) or commercial opportunism driven by green trend exploitation (external, unstable attribution). Kelley's (1967) covariation model specifies that attributions are made based on three informational dimensions: Consensus (do other resorts make similar claims?), Distinctiveness (is this resort's claim unique?), and Consistency (does the resort's observable behaviour align with its claims over time?).

In the eco-resort marketing context, Attribution Theory predicts that consumers exposed to green claims will evaluate them

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against their prior knowledge of greenwashing prevalence (consensus high → scepticism elevated), the specificity of the claim (vague claims → external attribution), and visible behavioural evidence (pool heating, plastic amenities, buffet waste → consistency cue that triggers dissonance). This paper operationalises Attribution Theory through the Consistency Authenticity sub-dimension of the Green Authenticity construct.

3.2 Value-Belief-Norm Theory

The Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory (Stern et al., 1999) provides a causal chain — Values → Beliefs → Personal Norms → Behaviour — that explains pro-environmental consumer behaviour as a function of underlying value orientations. In the VBN framework, altruistic and biospheric values activate beliefs about the adverse consequences of environmental degradation, which in turn create personal moral norms obligating pro-environmental action, ultimately driving green purchase behaviour. VBN Theory has been extensively validated in the eco-tourism context (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017; Choi & Ritchie, 2014) and is employed in this study to explain why consumers with strong biospheric values exhibit heightened sensitivity to green authenticity cues and show lower tolerance for perceived greenwashing.

In the proposed model, consumer environmental values (operationalised through Stern's New Ecological Paradigm scale) serve as a moderator of the green authenticity → consumer trust pathway. High biospheric values are expected to amplify the positive effect of authentic green practice on trust (rewarding genuinely green resorts disproportionately) while also amplifying the negative effect of perceived inauthenticity (punishing greenwashing more severely). This moderation hypothesis represents a novel contribution to the VBN application in hospitality research.

3.3 Signalling Theory

Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973) addresses information asymmetry between market participants by theorising how observable signals allow one party to credibly communicate unobservable quality attributes to another. In eco-resort marketing, the resort possesses private information about its actual environmental practices that is not easily observable by prospective guests during the booking process — the classic 'credence good' problem (Darby & Karni, 1973). Third-party eco-certifications — Green Leaf Kerala, EarthCheck, Rainforest Alliance, GSTC — function as costly, credible signals that reduce information asymmetry and provide a verifiable basis for green authenticity claims.

Signalling Theory predicts that the presence of recognised third-party certifications will significantly increase perceived green authenticity and reduce greenwashing scepticism, by providing consumers with an observable, costly, and difficult-to-fake signal of genuine environmental commitment. This signal is particularly powerful for NRI consumers who may have limited familiarity with the specific resort but high familiarity with internationally recognised certification bodies. This study's examination of certification as a moderator of the green claim → scepticism pathway represents a direct application of Signalling Theory to eco-resort psychology.

3.4.Stimulus-Organism-Response(S-O-R) Framework

Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework provides the integrating architecture for the proposed conceptual model. In this framework: Stimuli (S) are the eco-marketing messages, certification signals, and observable resort practices encountered by the consumer; Organism (O) processes are the internal psychological states — green authenticity perception, scepticism, environmental values, and trust — through which stimuli are evaluated; and Responses (R) are the behavioural outcomes of purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention. The S-O-R framework has been widely applied in hospitality and retail contexts (Ha & Perks, 2005; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) and provides the structural logic for this study's PLS-SEM model.

4.Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

Based on the theoretical framework and literature review, this study proposes a conceptual model comprising eight hypotheses (H1–H8). The model positions Green Authenticity Perception (GAP) as the central mediating construct between eco-marketing

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stimuli and consumer outcomes, with Greenwashing Scepticism (GS), Consumer Environmental Values (CEV), and Third-Party Eco-Certification (TPC) as moderating variables.

Conceptual Model — Green Authenticity Scepticism Framework

(S-O-R Framework | Attribution Theory | VBN Theory | Signalling Theory)

STIMULI (S) • Eco-marketing messages • Observable practices • Certification signals • Peer WOM/reviews	→	**ORGANISM (O)** **Green Authenticity Perception (GAP)** • *Consistency* • *Continuity* • *Credentials* **Consumer Trust**	→	**RESPONSE (R)** • Purchase Intention • Revisit Intention • WOM Intention

Moderators: Greenwashing Scepticism (GS) | Consumer Environmental Values (CEV) | Third-Party Eco-Certification (TPC) | Prior Experience (PE)

4.1 Hypothesis Development

H1 and H2: Green Authenticity → Consumer Trust

Central to the proposed model is the assertion that perceived green authenticity acts as the primary driver of consumer trust in eco-resort marketing contexts. When consumers perceive that a resort's environmental claims are consistent with observable practice (Consistency), reflect a long-standing commitment rather than trend adoption (Continuity), and are supported by verifiable external validation (Credentials), they form positive authenticity perceptions that generate trust. This relationship is grounded in Attribution Theory: internally attributed, stable, and specific green claims generate benevolent trust attributions (Kelley, 1967). Supporting evidence from Kim and Hall (2019) and multiple 2024 studies confirms that perceived authenticity is the dominant antecedent of trust in eco-tourism.

H1: Perceived Green Authenticity (GAP) positively influences Consumer Trust (CT) in eco-resort marketing.

H2: The positive relationship between Perceived Green Authenticity (GAP) and Consumer Trust (CT) is negatively moderated by Greenwashing Scepticism (GS), such that higher scepticism weakens the GAP → CT relationship

H3 and H4: Eco-Certification as Authenticity Signal

Drawing on Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973), this study proposes that third-party eco-certification functions as a credible, costly, and difficult-to-fake signal that directly increases perceived green authenticity. Certifications such as Green Leaf Kerala (issued by Kerala Tourism), EarthCheck, and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria represent externally validated commitments that reduce information asymmetry and provide a verifiable Credential Authenticity cue. Research in hotel sustainability consistently demonstrates that certification awareness and recognition positively influence perceived environmental commitment and trust (Font & Buckley, 2001; Millar & Baloglu, 2011). Importantly, the scepticism-reducing effect of certification is expected to be strongest among high-scepticism consumers — consistent with inoculation research showing that pre-existing doubts are most effectively addressed by credible external verification (Timmons et al., 2024).

H3: Third-Party Eco-Certification (TPC) positively influences Perceived Green Authenticity (GAP), such that resorts with recognised certifications are perceived as more authentically green.

H4: Third-Party Eco-Certification (TPC) negatively moderates Greenwashing Scepticism (GS), such that the presence of recognised certification reduces the negative effect of scepticism on Perceived Green Authenticity.

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H5 and H6: Consumer Trust → Behavioural Outcomes

Consumer trust, once established through authentic green perception, is posited to drive two distinct but related behavioural outcomes: purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention. The trust → purchase intention pathway is among the most replicated relationships in the consumer psychology literature (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Gefen et al., 2003), and its application to the green marketing domain is well-validated (Kang & Hur, 2012). In the eco-resort context, trust is particularly important given the experiential and credence-good nature of resort stays: guests cannot fully evaluate environmental practice prior to arrival, making trust-based booking decisions the norm. WOM intention is proposed as a distinct outcome from purchase intention, given that green-motivated travellers are disproportionately likely to engage in advocacy for resorts that they perceive as authentically environmental, creating a social amplification effect for credibly green properties.

H5: Consumer Trust (CT) positively influences Purchase Intention (PI) in eco-resort marketing.

H6: Consumer Trust (CT) positively influences Word-of-Mouth Intention (WOM), such that higher trust generates greater eWOM and referral behaviour.

H7 and H8: Consumer Environmental Values and Prior Experience

VBN Theory (Stern et al., 1999) predicts that consumers with strong biospheric values will be more attentive to and responsive to green authenticity cues, deriving greater trust amplification from authentic eco-practice than low-value consumers. This moderation is expected to operate in both directions: high-CEV consumers should experience larger trust gains from high-authenticity resorts and larger trust losses from perceived greenwashing. Prior eco-resort experience introduces a second moderator: experienced eco-resort visitors carry established benchmarks for authentic environmental practice and are therefore better positioned to detect greenwashing (Stoian, 2025; Timmons et al., 2024). This experience-based calibration is expected to reduce the trust impact of superficial green claims while amplifying the trust impact of substantive, verifiable environmental practice.

H7: Consumer Environmental Values (CEV) positively moderate the Perceived Green Authenticity → Consumer Trust relationship, such that high-CEV consumers derive greater trust from perceived authentic green practice.

H8: Prior Eco-Resort Experience (PE) positively moderates the relationship between Third-Party Eco-Certification and Perceived Green Authenticity, such that experienced visitors show higher sensitivity to certification validity.

Summary of Hypotheses

Table 1.

Summary of research hypotheses with theoretical grounding and predicted directionality

H#	Hypothesis	Direction	Theory
H1	Perceived Green Authenticity (GAP) → Consumer Trust (CT)	+	*Attribution; VBN*
H2	GS moderates GAP → CT (scepticism weakens positive effect)	**−(mod)**	*Attribution*
H3	Third-Party Eco-Certification (TPC) → GAP	+	*Signalling*
H4	TPC moderates GS → GAP (certification reduces scepticism)	**−(mod)**	*Signalling*
H5	Consumer Trust (CT) → Purchase Intention (PI)	+	*Trust Literature*
H6	Consumer Trust (CT) → Word-of-Mouth Intention (WOM)	+	*Trust; S-O-R*
H7	CEV moderates GAP → CT (values amplify authenticity effect)	**+(mod)**	*VBN Theory*

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H8	PE moderates TPC → GAP (experience raises cert sensitivity)	**+(mod)**	*Attribution; Signalling*

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a positivist, deductive research paradigm employing a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. The deductive approach is appropriate given the study's theory-driven hypotheses and its objective of testing proposed relationships within an established theoretical framework (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). Cross-sectional surveys are the dominant methodology in green hotel and eco-tourism consumer research and allow the collection of large, representative datasets at a single point in time (Han et al., 2011; Kang & Hur, 2012). A self-administered structured questionnaire using a seven-point Likert scale will be used as the primary data collection instrument, consistent with best-practice measurement in PLS-SEM research (Hair et al., 2017).

5.2 Sample, Population, and Sampling Procedure

The target population comprises adult tourists (aged 18 and above) who have stayed at an eco-resort in Wayanad or elsewhere in Kerala within the preceding 24 months. This recency criterion ensures that respondents possess sufficient experiential context to evaluate eco-resort green marketing claims accurately. The study employs a two-group comparative design: Group A — domestic Indian tourists; Group B — Non-Resident Indian (NRI) tourists, primarily from UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait. This comparative design responds to the documented research gap regarding NRI consumer behaviour in eco-tourism and the strategic importance of the NRI segment for Kerala's premium resort sector.

Sample size determination follows Cohen's (1992) statistical power guidelines and Hair et al.'s (2017) PLS-SEM minimum sample recommendations. For a model with five predictor variables in the most complex structural equation and a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) at a significance level of 0.05 with power of 0.80, a minimum sample of 140 is required. This study targets n = 400 respondents to ensure adequate power for the moderation hypotheses (H2, H4, H7, H8), which require larger samples than main effect tests, and to allow for group comparison between domestic and NRI respondents (n = 200 per group).

Sampling will employ a purposive sampling strategy augmented by snowball sampling through NRI community networks in UAE and Kerala diaspora WhatsApp and social media groups. Survey distribution will be administered through Google Forms, circulated through Kerala Tourism-affiliated eco-resort guest databases (where accessible), and through the alumni and professional networks of the researcher. Pilot testing will be conducted with n = 30 respondents to assess item clarity, Cronbach's alpha, and survey completion time prior to full deployment.

5.3 Measurement Instrument and Construct Operationalisation

All constructs are operationalised using established, validated scales adapted to the eco-resort context. Table 2 presents the construct measurement plan.

Table 2.

Construct measurement plan — adapted scales and sample items

Construct	Abbreviation	Adapted Scale Source	Items (n)	Sample Item
Green Authenticity Perception	*GAP*	Kim & Hall (2019); Beverland (2005)	12 (3×4)	*The eco-practices of this resort appear consistent with its environmental marketing claims.*
Greenwashing Scepticism	*GS*	Matthes & Wonneberger (2014); Mohr et al. (2001)	8	*I believe that most eco-resort claims are exaggerated or misleading.*
Third-Party Eco-Certification	*TPC*	Font & Buckley (2001); Millar & Baloglu (2011)	4	*The presence of a recognised eco-certification increases my confidence in this resort's green claims.*
Consumer Environmental	*CEV*	Stern's NEP Scale (2000); Dunlap et al.	10	*Protecting the natural environment is one of my most*

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Values		(2000)		*important personal values.*
Prior Eco-Resort Experience	*PE*	Kim & Hall (2019) adapted	3	*I have previous experience staying at eco-resorts in India.*
Consumer Trust	*CT*	Morgan & Hunt (1994); Gefen et al. (2003)	6	*I trust that this eco-resort genuinely adheres to the environmental practices it advertises.*
Purchase Intention	*PI*	Dodds et al. (1991); Zeithaml et al. (1996)	4	*I intend to book a stay at this eco-resort in the next 12 months.*
Word-of-Mouth Intention	*WOM*	Litvin et al. (2008); Gössling et al. (2019)	4	*I would recommend this eco-resort to friends and family based on its genuine green practices.*

All items will be measured on a seven-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), consistent with standard practice in PLS-SEM hospitality research (Hair et al., 2017). The questionnaire will include a cover page explaining research purpose, participant anonymity, and voluntary participation. Demographic items will capture age, gender, nationality/NRI status, educational qualification, number of eco-resort visits in the past 24 months, and household income bracket. A manipulation check will assess respondents' familiarity with eco-certifications commonly used in Kerala.

5.4 Data Analysis Strategy

Phase 1: Preliminary Analysis

1. Descriptive statistics and frequency analysis for demographic variables.
2. Missing value analysis and outlier detection using Mahalanobis distance.
3. 1Common Method Bias (CMB) assessment using Harman's single-factor test and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) criterion (VIF < 3.3 threshold per Kock, 2015).
4. Normality assessment using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests.

Phase 2: Measurement Model Assessment (CFA — SmartPLS 4)

1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess indicator reliability (outer loadings ≥ 0.70), internal consistency (Cronbach's α ≥ 0.70; Composite Reliability ≥ 0.80), and convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted, AVE ≥ 0.50).
2. Discriminant validity assessed through the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio criterion (HTMT < 0.85) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Phase 3: Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing (PLS-SEM)

1. PLS-SEM using bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples) to test path coefficients and significance for H1, H3, H5, and H6 (direct effects).
2. Moderation analysis using the product-indicator approach (Hair et al., 2017) for H2, H4, H7, and H8.
3. Effect size assessment using f^2 (Cohen, 1988): $f^2 \geq 0.02$ = small; ≥ 0.15 = medium; ≥ 0.35 = large.
4. Predictive relevance assessment using Q^2 (blindfolding procedure; $Q^2 > 0$ indicates predictive relevance).
5. Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) to compare domestic vs. NRI respondent subgroups on all structural paths.

6.Expected Results and Discussion

Based on the theoretical framework and the extant literature, this section proposes expected results for each hypothesis and discusses their theoretical and managerial significance. These expectations are grounded in prior empirical evidence from comparable contexts and are presented as testable predictions rather than predetermined conclusions.

6.1 Direct Effect Hypotheses (H1, H3, H5, H6)

H1 (GAP → CT) is expected to be supported strongly, consistent with Kim and Hall (2019) and multiple 2024 studies confirming authenticity as the dominant antecedent of trust in eco-resort contexts. The three-dimensional operationalisation of GAP (Consistency, Continuity, Credential) is expected to yield a strong path coefficient ($\beta \geq 0.45$), with Credential Authenticity showing the highest indicator loading given its verifiability advantage. H3 (TPC → GAP) is expected to be supported, with resorts carrying internationally recognised certifications

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(Green Leaf Kerala; EarthCheck) showing significantly higher mean GAP scores than uncertified resorts. This finding would have direct strategic implications for Wayanad resort operators, for whom certification investment has been debated as a cost-benefit question.

H5 (CT → PI) and H6 (CT → WOM) are expected to be supported, replicating the trust → behavioural outcome chain across the green marketing context. Of particular interest will be the relative effect sizes: if the CT → WOM path coefficient exceeds CT → PI, this would suggest that eco-resort consumers prioritise advocacy over personal re-booking — consistent with the altruistic motivational profile of biospheric-value consumers who wish to direct peers toward genuinely green properties.

6.2 Moderation Hypotheses (H2, H4, H7, H8)

H2 (GS moderates GAP → CT negatively) is the most theoretically central and practically significant hypothesis. The expected negative interaction aligns with the broader greenwashing literature (Nyilasy et al., 2014; Stoian, 2025) but the magnitude of the moderation effect in an Indian eco-resort context is unknown. A critical expected finding is the identification of a 'trust threshold' — the minimum GAP score at which even high-scepticism consumers begin to trust eco-resort claims, which would represent the psychological breakeven point for green marketing investment. This threshold is expected to be higher for NRI consumers (who bring comparative exposure to international eco-certification standards) than for domestic Indian tourists.

H4 (TPC moderates GS → GAP negatively) draws on Signalling Theory and Timmons et al.'s (2024) pre-bunking research. The expected finding is a significant negative interaction, indicating that third-party certification attenuates the otherwise negative impact of greenwashing scepticism on perceived authenticity. This would provide the first empirical evidence of certification's scepticism-buffering function in Indian eco-resort marketing — a finding with direct implications for Kerala Tourism's Green Leaf certification programme and its promotion among sceptical, high-value travellers.

H7 (CEV moderates GAP → CT positively) and H8 (PE moderates TPC → GAP positively) are expected to be supported based on VBN Theory and Attribution Theory respectively. The H7 moderation is expected to be stronger in the NRI subsample, where biospheric values are hypothesised to be higher given exposure to GCC sustainability regulations and ESG discourse. The H8 moderation for experienced eco-resort visitors is expected to manifest as a higher sensitivity to specific, verifiable certification attributes and lower sensitivity to generic green language — consistent with the 'calibration effect' of experience on environmental quality evaluation.

6.3 Group Comparison: Domestic vs. NRI Tourists

The Multi-Group Analysis is expected to reveal significant differences between domestic Indian tourists and NRI consumers on several structural paths. NRI consumers — shaped by exposure to rigorous sustainability standards in UAE and GCC markets, international eco-certification awareness, and premium hospitality benchmarks — are hypothesised to show: (1) higher baseline greenwashing scepticism; (2) stronger positive responses to third-party certification; (3) larger trust premiums for high-authenticity resorts; and (4) stronger WOM intention upon experiencing authentic green practice. These expected findings align with Kerala Tourism's strategic positioning of Wayanad as a premium NRI destination and would provide actionable segmentation insights for resort marketing strategy.

7. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes four distinct theoretical contributions to the psychology of sustainable marketing and eco-tourism consumer behaviour literature.

Construction of the Green Authenticity Perception (GAP) Construct: This study's three-dimensional operationalisation of GAP (Consistency, Continuity, Credential) represents the first rigorously developed measurement instrument for eco-resort green authenticity in an Indian hospitality context. The construct advances the authenticity literature by distinguishing eco-specific authenticity from general brand authenticity, providing a replicable measure for future

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comparative research across eco-tourism destinations.

Integration of Signalling Theory into Eco-Resort Greenwashing Research: Previous greenwashing research has predominantly employed Attribution Theory and VBN Theory. This study's integration of Signalling Theory to explain the certification → authenticity → scepticism pathway extends the theoretical vocabulary of green marketing research and provides a more complete account of why third-party validation reduces scepticism beyond simple information provision — specifically, through costly signalling that changes the attributional calculus for consumers evaluating green claims.

Non-Linear Scepticism Model: By testing the moderation of scepticism on the GAP → CT pathway, this study advances Urbański and Ul Haque's (2020) theoretical argument that scepticism is non-linearly related to trust outcomes. If H2 is supported, the study will identify the empirical threshold at which scepticism transitions from a helpful critical filter to a counterproductive barrier — providing the first quantification of this theoretical non-linearity in the eco-resort domain.

NRI Consumer Segment in Eco-Tourism: This study is the first to treat NRI consumers as a theoretically distinct sub-population in eco-resort consumer psychology research. The comparative MGA design generates a theoretical proposition about how cross-cultural exposure to higher-standard sustainability environments (GCC/UAE) creates systematically different green scepticism profiles and certification responsiveness patterns — a proposition with generalisable implications for eco-tourism in emerging market destinations dependent on diaspora tourism.

8. Managerial And Policy Implications

8.1 For Eco-Resort Operators in Kerala and Wayanad

Obtain and prominently display third-party eco-certification (Green Leaf Kerala, EarthCheck, GSTC): the expected H3 and H4 findings indicate that certification is the single highest-leverage tool for converting sceptical prospects into trusting, booking guests — particularly among high-value NRI travellers.

Develop 'Consistency Authenticity' as a marketing asset: make observable eco-practices visible to guests — composting stations, solar panel displays, no-plastic notices, wildlife corridor signage. The H1 expected findings indicate that consistency between claim and visible practice is the dominant authenticity dimension.

Communicate environmental history and continuity: the expected H1 (Continuity sub-dimension) finding suggests that resorts with a long-standing, documented environmental commitment outperform recent 'eco-converts' in authenticity perception. Build and publicise a longitudinal environmental report.

Segment NRI marketing communication: the expected MGA findings suggest that NRI consumers respond more strongly to certification signals and less to generic eco-language. Resort OTA and social media content targeting UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait audiences should foreground specific certification credentials.

8.2 For Kerala Tourism and Policy Bodies

Strengthen and promote the Green Leaf Kerala certification programme as a consumer-facing signal: the expected H3/H4 findings indicate that certification awareness is a critical moderating variable. Kerala Tourism should invest in consumer-facing awareness campaigns that explain what Green Leaf certification means and how to verify it.

Develop a greenwashing reporting mechanism aligned with CCPA's 2024 Draft Guidelines: the documented 79% rate of misleading green claims in India (ASCI) is corrosive to the authentic eco-resort sector. A Kerala Tourism greenwashing complaint portal would protect genuinely green operators from unfair competitive dilution.

Use research findings in NRI tourism promotion: the Kerala Diaspora Tourism Initiative should leverage eco-authenticity as a strategic differentiator, emphasising verifiable environmental practice and certification to high-scepticism, high-value NRI travellers from GCC markets.

9. Limitations And Future Research

This study, like all empirical research, operates within boundaries that define the scope and generalisability of its conclusions. Four limitations are acknowledged and addressed through future research directions.

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#	Limitation	Future Research Direction
1	Cross-sectional design: The survey captures attitudes at a single point in time and cannot establish causal directionality with certainty.	*Future research should employ a longitudinal or experimental panel design tracking scepticism and trust changes before and after eco-resort stays to establish temporal precedence.*
2	Self-reported measures: All constructs rely on self-reported Likert responses, which may be subject to social desirability bias — particularly for environmental value items.	*Neurophysiological measures (eye-tracking, galvanic skin response) should be integrated in future studies examining implicit scepticism responses to eco-resort marketing stimuli (Bigné et al., 2025).*
3	Geographic scope: The Kerala/Wayanad setting limits generalisability to other Indian eco-tourism destinations with different consumer profiles and certification landscapes.	*Comparative multi-destination studies spanning Kerala, Coorg, Kaziranga, and Spiti Valley would test generalisability and identify geographic moderators of greenwashing scepticism.*
4	Sample accessibility: Purposive and snowball sampling may introduce selection bias toward environmentally engaged respondents, potentially overestimating environmental value scores.	*Future research should employ probability sampling through hotel partner databases to access a representative cross-section of resort visitors including low-environmental-value consumers.*

10. Conclusion

This paper has proposed a theoretically grounded, methodologically rigorous study of green authenticity scepticism in eco-resort marketing — a phenomenon at the intersection of consumer psychology, sustainability marketing, and hospitality management. The Green Authenticity Scepticism (GAS) framework, integrating Attribution Theory, Value-Belief-Norm Theory, and Signalling Theory within an S-O-R architecture, offers an original and empirically testable model of the psychological mechanisms through which eco-resort marketing claims are evaluated, trusted, or dismissed by contemporary Indian consumers.

The study's Kerala and Wayanad setting is not merely a convenient geographic choice but a theoretically motivated field site: with 79% of Indian green claims found exaggerated (ASCI) and 71% of consumers reporting direct greenwashing encounters (Hussain, 2024), the Indian eco-tourism sector presents a high-stakes environment where the psychological distance between green authenticity and greenwashing scepticism has direct commercial and ethical consequences. Genuinely eco-committed resorts — like Flora Vythiri, which abstained from felling a single tree during its construction and maintains documented environmental practices — are commercially disadvantaged when consumers cannot distinguish authentic environmental commitment from performative green branding.

By developing the Green Authenticity Perception (GAP) construct, identifying third-party certification as a scepticism-buffering signal, and extending the analysis to NRI consumers as a theoretically distinct and commercially significant segment, this study provides a comprehensive and actionable research contribution. The expected findings carry specific implications for Wayanad resort operators, Kerala Tourism policy bodies, and the broader hospitality sustainability discourse — collectively advancing the understanding of how, when, and for whom green marketing authenticity converts scepticism into trust, and trust into bookings.

The ultimate aspiration of this research is not merely academic contribution but practical impact: a clearer understanding of the psychology of green authenticity scepticism will help position Kerala's genuinely eco-committed resorts for the premium environmental travel market — creating a virtuous cycle where authentic practice is commercially rewarded, scepticism is information-efficiently resolved, and the extraordinary natural heritage of Wayanad's rainforest is protected by the economic sustainability of the resorts that depend on it.

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