# HOW GREEN IS THIS? CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNAL VS. EXTERNAL GREEN SERVICE INITIATIVES

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, I investigate how consumers assess green service claims and perceive the environmental value of various sustainability initiatives in the retail service context. It distinguishes between internal corrective actions, such as implementing energy-efficient environments, and external efforts like charitable donations. These internal initiatives are further sub-categorized according to key service quality dimensions, offering a nuanced view of how consumers differentiate and evaluate the relative greenness of these approaches. I employ a scenario-based methodology across two studies. Participants evaluated six types of green service initiatives—four internally directed and two externally directed. ANOVA with post-hoc testing was used to assess differences in perceived greenness. The varied internally focused initiatives, such as offering green products and adopting energy-efficient buildings, are perceived as equally green initiatives by consumers. In contrast, externally directed efforts, such as donations to environmental causes, are viewed as significantly less green. This research contributes to the literature on sustainability perceptions by differentiating between internal corrective and external green initiatives. The findings highlight that internal efforts are seen as more authentic, offering guidance for service firms aiming to enhance their green credibility.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Green Initiative, Service, Retailing

## INTRODUCTION

As sustainability becomes a defining concern in business strategy, firms are increasingly integrating environmentally responsible practices into their operations. This shift aligns with growing consumer demand as products featuring environmental, social, and governance claims have seen a 28 percent increase in sales over a five-year period (McKinsey & Company, 2023). However, this surge in green marketing is accompanied by rising consumer skepticism. For instance, a global YouGov survey found that 60 percent of consumers question the credibility of companies' environmental claims (Fernandes, 2023).

Much of this distrust is fueled by greenwashing where firms exaggerate or misrepresent their environmental efforts. Studies show that consumers struggle to verify the authenticity of sustainability claims (Field, 2023), prompting increasing calls for regulatory oversight (Holger, 2023). For service firms, where sustainability can manifest across different elements of the customer experience, the challenge lies in how consumers interpret and evaluate diverse green initiatives.

In this research I address a critical gap in understanding how consumers assess the "greenness" of services. As service providers adopt a range of sustainability strategies, from offering eco-friendly products and redesigning store environments to donating to environmental causes, it remains

unclear whether consumers interpret these efforts as equally meaningful. Do internal operational changes convey greater environmental credibility than external philanthropic contributions?

To structure this investigation, I draw on and adapt the typology of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives proposed by Nickerson, Lowe, Pattabhiramaiah and Sorescu (2022), applying it specifically to green services. The typology distinguishes among three forms of sustainability initiatives: corrective, compensating, and cultivating. Corrective initiatives aim to reduce the firm's own environmental footprint—such as improving operational efficiency or reducing waste—and are internally focused. Compensating initiatives attempt to offset the firm's impact through external contributions, like carbon offset programs or reforestation efforts. Cultivating initiatives involve supporting broader environmental causes, such as environmental education, without directly addressing the firm's own impact. While corrective measures are internal, compensating and cultivating efforts are externally oriented. This internal versus external distinction forms the theoretical basis of this study.

It is hypothesized that the type of green initiative—specifically, whether it is internally or externally directed, significantly shapes consumer perceptions of greenness. Prior findings suggest that corrective and compensating efforts are perceived as more credible than cultivating ones (Nickerson et al., 2022). Building on prior work, this study proposes that consumers will perceive internally focused corrective actions as more authentic and impactful than externally focused efforts. By comparing responses to different types of green initiatives across two studies, this research aims to clarify how the *type and location* of sustainability efforts influence perceptions of service greenness and contribute to firms' environmental credibility.

To examine these hypotheses, Study 1 broadly investigates whether consumers differentiate between internally and externally directed green service actions. Study 2 builds on this by comparing six specific types of initiatives—four internally focused (core service, process, environment, and peripheral) and two externally focused (compensating and cultivating). Together, these studies offer a more detailed understanding of how consumers interpret different sustainability strategies and how the type of initiative influences perceived environmental credibility.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Green initiatives are often broadly defined as actions undertaken by firms to reduce the environmental impact associated with the lifecycle of their products or services (Chen, Ngniatedema & Li, 2018). However, these definitions often focus on internal operational measures and may underrepresent externally oriented sustainability efforts, such as charitable environmental contributions. A more inclusive understanding of green practices must consider both inward-facing corrective actions and outward-facing commitments.

Green initiatives have been categorized in various ways. One common framework is the lifecycle-based approach, which organizes initiatives into pre-production, production/post-production, and end-of-life stages (International Organization for Standardization, 2024). Pre-production initiatives focus on sustainable design and sourcing; production efforts emphasize energy and

resource efficiency; and end-of-life strategies target recycling and waste reduction, often guided by ISO standards.

Another approach uses environmental impact as the basis for classification (Initiative for Climate Action Transparency, 2021). This framework identifies three categories of green activity: carbon reduction (e.g., renewable energy adoption), resource conservation (e.g., water-saving technologies), and biodiversity preservation (e.g., habitat protection). These typologies emphasize different environmental dimensions but often overlook how firms balance internal versus external responsibility.

To address this, Nickerson et al. (2022) proposed a corporate social responsibility (CSR)-based classification that distinguishes among three forms of sustainability initiatives: corrective, compensating, and cultivating. Corrective initiatives aim to reduce a firm's own environmental footprint, such as by using recycled materials or minimizing emissions. Compensating initiatives offset impact by supporting related causes, such as carbon offset programs. Cultivating initiatives support unrelated environmental efforts, such as donations to local green campaigns. Corrective initiatives are generally internal, while compensating and cultivating efforts are externally directed.

Corrective actions can be implemented across different components of a service operation. Leisen Pollack (2021) identified four areas where green practices may influence consumer perceptions: the core service (e.g., sustainable products), the service process (e.g., paperless receipts), the service environment (e.g., energy-efficient buildings), and peripheral services (e.g., recycling programs). Each of these represents a point of contact through which customers may infer the firm's environmental responsibility.

This perspective aligns with foundational service quality models. Grönroos (1984) proposed that service quality consists of technical quality (the service outcome) and functional quality (the service process). Bitner (1990) emphasized the importance of the physical service environment in shaping perceptions. Rust and Oliver (1994), followed by Brady and Cronin (2001), extended this into three components: service product, service delivery, and service environment. These models collectively suggest that consumers form evaluations based not only on what a service offers, but also how it is delivered and in what context.

Corrective green initiatives can span all of these service dimensions and are often perceived as more sincere and effortful than external efforts. They represent a firm's direct commitment to addressing its environmental impact and thus reflect a higher level of accountability (Nickerson et al., 2022). However, it is not yet clear whether consumers evaluate each type of corrective effort equally, or whether some dimensions (e.g., core service vs. peripheral service) have a stronger influence on perceived greenness.

Compensating initiatives are more indirect. Rather than changing the firm's operations, they involve financial or symbolic efforts to support external environmental goals. For example, a café that continues to use single-use plastics may donate to plastic recycling programs. Such efforts may signal concern but do not necessarily demonstrate a reduction in the firm's own environmental harm.

Cultivating initiatives are even further removed from the firm's operations. These involve support for unrelated environmental causes without addressing the firm's own footprint. For instance, an airline donating to a river clean-up campaign may be seen as well-intentioned, but not necessarily accountable. Consumers may interpret such efforts as symbolic or even deceptive. According to Earth.Org (2022), greenwashing occurs when companies present misleading or exaggerated environmental claims. As consumers, especially younger and more environmentally aware demographics, become more discerning, superficial efforts may damage brand credibility. To this end, Nickerson et al. (2022) suggest that consumers generally favor firms that engage in corrective and compensating efforts over those relying on cultivating strategies. While cultivating initiatives may improve public image, they are often perceived as attempts to fulfill CSR expectations rather than to address actual environmental issues.

Building on the corrective–compensating–cultivating framework (Nickerson et al., 2022) and integrating insights from service quality models, this study investigates how consumers evaluate green service initiatives according to their internal or external orientation. These relationships are portrayed in Figure 1.

Given this conceptual distinction, the following hypotheses are proposed and tested in Study 1:

$H_1$: Internally corrective green initiatives (core, process, or service environment) will lead to higher consumer evaluations of service greenness than externally directed green initiatives.

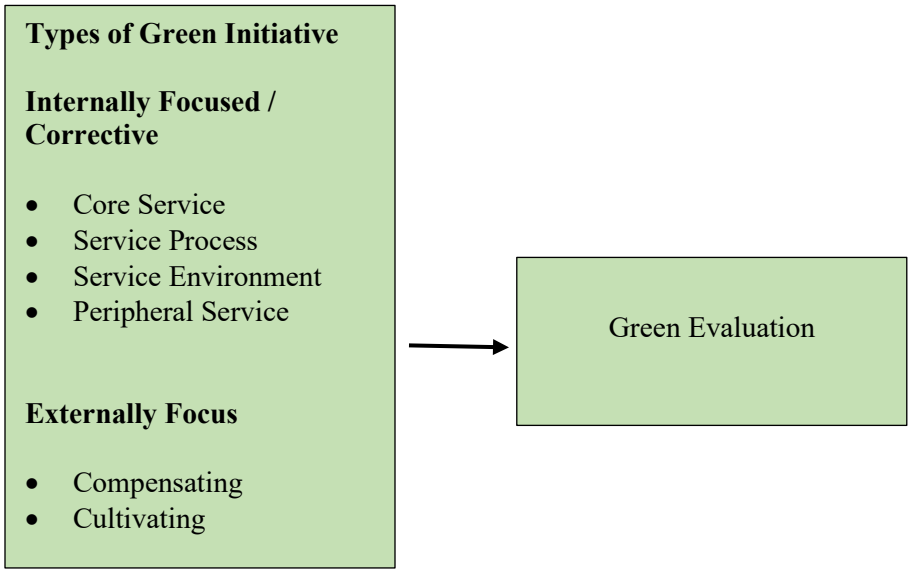


Figure 1. Consumer Evaluation of Green Initiatives

Building on this, Study 2 disaggregates internal corrective actions further and tests them against both types of external initiatives:

$H_2$: Each type of internally corrective green initiative (core, process, service environment, and

peripheral) will lead to higher evaluations of service greenness than externally directed compensating initiatives.

$H_3$: Each type of internally corrective green initiative (core, process, service environment, and peripheral) will lead to higher evaluations of service greenness than externally directed cultivating initiatives.

$H_4$: Externally compensating green initiatives will lead to higher evaluations of service greenness than externally cultivating initiatives.

## STUDY 1

### Method

The purpose of Study 1 was to broadly determine whether internally directed green service initiatives lead to significantly higher evaluations of environmental friendliness compared to externally directed efforts. Data were collected via a self-administered online questionnaire from a convenience sample of 89 undergraduate students enrolled in an "Essentials of Marketing" course at a U.S. university. Participants received extra credit for their participation. The use of student samples is considered appropriate for theory testing, as their relative homogeneity in age, education, and background reduces extraneous variability, facilitating the identification of significant effects and enhancing internal validity (Ashraf & Merunka, 2017; Calder, Phillips & Tybout, 1981; Peterson & Merunka, 2014). Prior to starting the survey, participants were informed of the study's aims/objectives and the right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any time. I confirm that this study adheres to the relevant ethical guidelines for human subjects, and that the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were maintained throughout the study. This study's procedures were reviewed and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

Four different scenarios reflecting the three major internal service dimensions, and one externally focused initiative were developed for the hypothetical clothing retailers Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Rocky Mountain. The scenarios were informed by prior literature (e.g., Leisen Pollack, 2021) and the Patagonia store served as inspiration because it is identified as one of the greenest firms. The green service dimensions were manipulated for each scenario. The identical environmental benefits (e.g., xxx uses 23% less water and produces 37% less carbon emission) was added to each scenario. At the beginning of the survey, the respondents were given some background knowledge of the environmental impact of the textile industry. The following statement, based on data from the World Economic Forum (McFall-Johnsen, 2020), was included

> *Making clothing has a negative impact on the environment. The fashion industry produces 10% of all humanity's carbon emissions, is the second-largest consumer of the world's water supply and pollutes the oceans with microplastics. The making of clothing includes environmentally harmful dying processes. What is more, 85% of all textiles go to the dump each year. And washing some types of clothes sends thousands of bits of plastic into the ocean.*

The respondents then received instructions on the four service scenarios. For the scenario related to core service greenness, these read

> *Please read the following scenario about shopping at the clothing retailer Yosemite. Imagine, as best as you can, that you are buying a new high performance outdoor sweater for your hiking activities. Yosemite is a clothing retailer specialized in selling high performance outdoor clothing. Yosemite embraces the environmental movement and offers a clothing line made from recycled materials. The making of these clothing uses 23% less water and produces 37% less carbon emission.*

For the service process dimension, an almost identical scenario was presented except the third and fourth sentenced was replaced with

> *Grand Canyon is a clothing retailer specialized in selling high performance outdoor clothing. Grand Canyon embraces the environmental movement and uses recycled paper bags for the purchased clothing and paperless receipts.*

For the service environment, the altered sentences read

> *Yellowstone is a clothing retailer specialized in selling high performance outdoor clothing. Yellowstone embraces the environmental movement and uses a store design involving solar energy and green building materials.*

And lastly, for the external (compensating) service dimension these read

> *Rocky Mountain is a clothing retailer specialized in selling high performance outdoor clothing. Rocky Mountain embraces the environmental movement and donates money to environmental preservation causes.*

Also included were four manipulation check variables for the green service components. The question *xxx offers environmentally friendly products made from recycled materials* was the variable assessing core service greenness (mean for core service scenario = 4.72, mean for service process scenario = 3.56, mean for service environment scenario = 3.43, mean for peripheral service scenario = 3.15; $F = 27.672$, $p < 0.000$). The question *xxx uses recycled paper bags for the purchased clothing and paperless receipts* was the variable assessing service process greenness (mean for core service scenario = 3.51, mean for service process scenario = 4.74, mean for service environment scenario = 3.37, mean for peripheral service scenario = 3.20; $F = 25.751$, $p < 0.000$). The question *xxx's environmentally friendly store design uses solar energy and green building materials* was the variable assessing service environment greenness (mean for core service scenario = 3.56, mean for service process scenario = 3.33, mean for service environment scenario = 4.48, mean for peripheral service scenario = 3.21; $F = 32.478$, $p < 0.000$). The question *xxx donates money to environmental preservation causes* was the variable assessing external service greenness (mean for core service scenario = 3.46, mean for service process scenario = 3.28, mean for service environment scenario = 3.39, mean for peripheral service scenario = 4.99; $F = 36.978$, $p < 0.000$). The study employed a within-subject design, with each participant exposed to all scenarios.

Perceptions of environmental friendliness were measured using an adapted version of the scale by Gershoff and Frels (2015), with sample items such as "This company deserves to be labeled environmentally friendly." The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency: Cronbach's alpha was .86 for both the core and process conditions, and .91 for both the service environment and external initiative conditions. All items used a 6-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.

## Results

The data were analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA to assess whether perceived environmental friendliness varied across the four green service initiatives. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity was violated; therefore, the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied. The results revealed a significant main effect of initiative type on perceived greenness, $F$ (2.70, df-adjusted) = 7.79, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.081$. The mean green ratings for the corrective core service (M = 4.40), corrective service process (M = 4.20), corrective service environment (M = 4.36), and externally oriented initiative (M = 4.05) are graphically displayed in Figure 2.

Bonferroni-adjusted post hoc comparisons were conducted to examine specific group differences. Results showed that both the core service initiative ($p < 0.001$) and the service environment initiative ($p < 0.001$) were rated significantly higher in perceived greenness than the externally oriented initiative, supporting $H_1$. However, the service process initiative was not rated significantly different from the external initiative ($p = 0.116$), indicating that consumers did not clearly distinguish this internal process improvement from the externally focused green action. Additionally, no significant differences were found among the three internally focused initiatives (all $p > 0.05$), suggesting that consumers evaluate internal corrective efforts as similarly green, regardless of the specific service component.

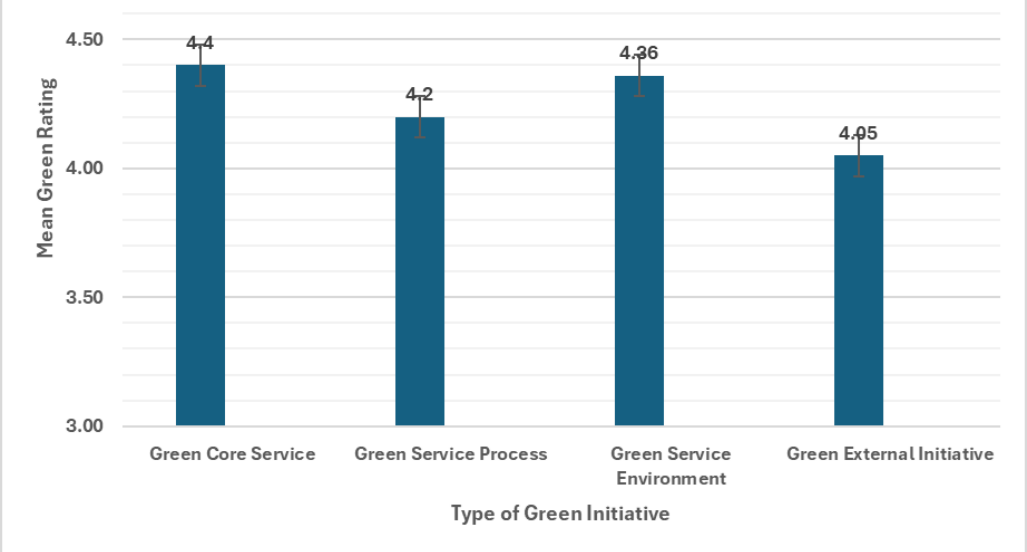


Figure 2. Mean Green Ratings of Service Initiatives from Study 1

## Discussion

The findings from Study 1 offer several theoretical and practical insights. Theoretically, it is expected that core service greenness, such as offering environmentally friendly products, would yield higher ratings of perceived environmental friendliness. However, it is noteworthy that service process and service environment initiatives were evaluated similarly to the core initiative. This suggests that consumers may apply a holistic lens when assessing internal sustainability efforts, viewing all internally focused corrective actions as comparably credible and impactful, regardless of where in the service delivery system they occur.

# STUDY 2

## Method

The objective of Study 2 was to assess how consumers evaluate different types of green service initiatives, specifically, corrective, compensating, and cultivating efforts, and to test three hypotheses regarding their perceived environmental friendliness. The data were collected from a convenience sample of 65 undergraduate students enrolled at a U.S. university. Participants received extra credit for completing a self-administered online questionnaire. Prior to starting the survey, participants were informed of the study's aims/objectives and the right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any time. I confirm that this study adheres to the relevant ethical guidelines for human subjects, and that the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were maintained throughout the study. This study's procedures were reviewed and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

Consistent with Study 1, each participant evaluated six distinct green service scenarios, allowing for within-subject comparisons. Each scenario was tied to a fictional clothing retailer and represented one of six sustainability initiative types: four internally focused corrective initiatives (core, process, environment, and peripheral) and two externally directed initiatives (compensating and cultivating). The six hypothetical retailers, Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Rocky Mountain, Denali, and Glacier, served as the basis for scenario presentation. The scenarios were informed by Study 1 and prior literature (e.g., Leisen Pollack, 2021).

The scenarios followed a consistent narrative structure, differing only in the specific green initiative described. Below is the full text of the scenario for the corrective core service initiative (Yosemite):

> *"Please read the following scenario about shopping at the apparel retailer Yosemite. Imagine, as best as you can, that you are buying a new outdoor sweater for your hiking activities. Yosemite is an apparel retailer specialized in selling outdoor clothing. The sweater that you are interested in is offered at a price you can afford. The store recently announced that it now offers a clothing line made from recycled materials."*

The other scenarios used the same structure, with the final sentence altered to reflect each green initiative: Corrective – process: *The store recently announced that it now uses recycled paper bags for the purchased clothing and paperless receipts*.; Corrective – environment: *The store recently announced that it uses a store design involving solar energy and green building materials.*;

Corrective – peripheral: *The store recently announced that it offers a trade-in program for worn clothing items.*; Compensating: *The store recently announced that it makes financial donations to a third-party clothing recycling program.*; Cultivating: *The store recently announced that it makes financial donations to a local community garden.* Manipulation checks revealed statistically significant differences across conditions ($\chi^2$ (df = 25) = 1704, $p < 0.001$), confirming the validity of the experimental manipulations.

Following each scenario, participants responded to a single item measuring perceived environmental friendliness. For instance, the item following the Yosemite scenario read: "Offering clothing made from recycled material reduces Yosemite's environmental harm." The item was measured using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree).

**Results**

The data were analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA to compare participants' ratings of environmental friendliness across six green service initiatives. As indicated by Mauchly's test, the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied. The analysis revealed a significant effect of green initiative type on perceived environmental friendliness, F (3.38, *df*-adjusted) = 16.651, p < .001, $\eta^2$ = 0.206. Bonferroni-adjusted post hoc comparisons were conducted to examine specific differences between initiative types.

The mean ratings of environmental friendliness for each initiative were as follows: corrective core service (M = 4.42), corrective service process (M = 4.42), corrective service environment (M = 4.74), corrective peripheral service (M = 4.35), compensating service initiative (M = 3.86), and cultivating service initiative (M = 3.71). The mean ratings are graphically displayed in Figure 3.

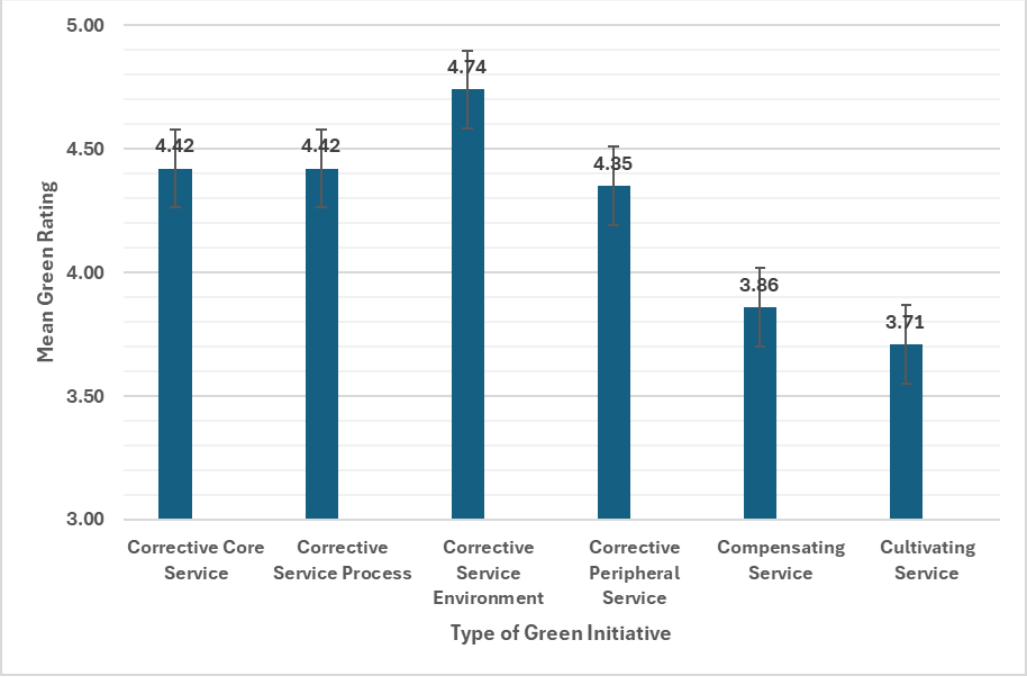


Figure 3. Mean Green Ratings of Service Initiatives from Study 2

$H_2$ was confirmed for all four corrective initiatives: core ($p < 0.01$), process ($p < 0.001$), environment ($p < 0.001$), and peripheral service features ($p < 0.001$). Each was rated significantly greener than the externally directed compensating initiative. $H_3$ was also supported, showing that all corrective initiatives, core ($p < 0.001$), process ($p < 0.001$), environment ($p < 0.001$), and peripheral ($p < 0.001$), were perceived as significantly greener than the cultivating initiative. $H_4$ was not supported. No significant difference was found between the compensating and cultivating initiatives, suggesting that consumers evaluate both types of externally directed green efforts as equally green.

**Discussion**

The findings from Study 2 reinforce the distinction between internally and externally focused green initiatives in shaping consumer perceptions. Specifically, internally directed corrective actions, whether applied to the core service, service process, physical environment, or peripheral features, were consistently rated as more environmentally friendly than their externally directed counterparts. This pattern held across all comparisons with both compensating and cultivating initiatives.

As in Study 1, a notable finding is the absence of significant differences among the four corrective initiatives. This implies that consumers may rely on a general heuristic—when a company implements direct, visible efforts to reduce its environmental impact internally, the initiative is viewed as credible and authentic, irrespective of where within the service system it occurs.

Conversely, the results indicate that externally focused initiatives, whether compensating for environmental harm or cultivating general goodwill, are viewed with more skepticism. The fact that no significant difference emerged between compensating and cultivating initiatives suggests that consumers may not distinguish between efforts to offset harm and those aimed at unrelated environmental causes. Both may be perceived as less substantial or sincere compared to corrective actions that alter the firm's own operations.

## CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings from both studies consistently affirm that consumers perceive internally directed corrective actions as more environmentally responsible than externally focused initiatives. Across the studies, all types of internal actions, whether tied to the product, process, environment, or peripheral features, were evaluated similarly, suggesting that consumers rely on a broad heuristic: visible, internal efforts are trusted as authentic, regardless of their specific location within the service system. These findings reinforce the relevance of the internal versus external distinction in classifying green initiatives.

The findings have significant implications for both marketing theory and practice. Service firms have two primary routes to signal their environmental commitment. Internal measures directly reduce the environmental impact through actions like using recycled materials, adopting biodegradable packaging, or investing in renewable energy. Such tangible efforts are easily observed and evaluated by consumers, fostering trust and demonstrating a more genuine commitment. Such corrective measures send the message as the service firm is taking direct

responsibility for its environmental footprint. Consumers of such services may feel that they are more active participants in a greener future. This alignment with their values resonates most likely with eco-conscious individuals. Conversely, external initiatives focus on influencing stakeholders through activities like charitable donations or environmental advocacy. While often well-intentioned, their impact on the firm's own environmental footprint may seem less apparent, leading to lower perceived greenness. Further, such initiatives may signal a deflection of accountability and a lack of authenticity, potentially leading consumers to interpret them as greenwashing.

Given this, managers should prioritize corrective internal initiatives whether offering green products, using solar powered energy sources, or adopting sustainable processes. This means that firms have flexibility in choosing which internal initiatives to pursue, as long as the effort visibly reduces the company's own environmental footprint. Managers can therefore select initiatives that align best with their operational capabilities and strategic goals, without concern that one type will be perceived as less green than another.

Additionally, the research reveals that consumers do not differentiate between compensating and cultivating external initiatives, viewing both with similar skepticism. This suggests that external efforts—such as donations to environmental causes or support for unrelated green campaigns—may lack the perceived authenticity of internal actions. Managers should be cautious when relying on these strategies, especially if their goal is to build trust with environmentally conscious consumers.

The lack of differentiation among the four internal measures, as well as among the two external measures, is a surprising finding. Future research could examine if this uniformity potentially arises from limited environmental literacy. Thus, incorporating a measure of objective knowledge in future studies would be beneficial to explore this possibility more directly.

Future research into the types of green initiatives may want to explore whether internal green initiatives can effectively improve the perception of companies with a negative environmental reputation? This study used Patagonia, a renowned green company, as a model. Could companies with a poor "green" image achieve similar results? Can firms with weak reputations improve perceptions with corrective initiatives? Additionally, how long would these initiatives need to be implemented for a significant reputational shift? Does repeated exposure to external initiatives change consumer attitudes over time?

Future research should test the hypotheses using a broader sample. Although the use of student samples is justified for theory testing due to their relative homogeneity, future research should consider employing a more diverse sample from the general population to assess the robustness and external validity of the findings.

The present research contributes to the development of guidelines regarding *who* should promote their green initiatives and *what* communication tools are most effective in engaging sustainability-conscious audiences. While this study demonstrates that green initiatives positively influence consumer perceptions and purchase intentions, not all firms may benefit equally from publicizing their efforts.

Amores-Salvadó, Martin-de Castro, and Albertini (2023) propose a matrix to guide such decisions, categorizing firms based on environmental performance (low to high) and environmental disclosure (low to high). This framework yields four strategic types: *Green Leading Companies*, *Green Quiet Companies*, *Green Parrot Companies*, and *Blackbird Companies*.

*Green Leading Companies* such as Patagonia excel in both performance and disclosure. These firms incorporate sustainability across their operations, from ethical sourcing and recycled materials to consumer education and environmental advocacy (Patagonia, 2024). REI follows a similar path, emphasizing durable product design, waste reduction, and renewable energy use (REI, 2024).

In contrast, *Green Quiet Companies* like Walmart and Aldi demonstrate strong environmental performance but engage in limited promotion. Reasons for this restraint may include risk aversion, reputational caution, or concerns about being accused of greenwashing (Birch, 2024; Visram, 2023). This aligns with the emerging trend of *greenhushing*, where companies underreport their sustainability actions to avoid public scrutiny (Joselow, 2023; Letzing, 2022).

*Green Parrot Companies* engage in environmental communication but lack credible performance. This positioning can damage consumer trust and backfire, reinforcing perceptions of insincerity or greenwashing (Ginder, Kwon, and Byun, 2021). Meanwhile, *Blackbird Companies*, low on both dimensions, show minimal environmental engagement or transparency.

This framework underscores the importance of ethical alignment between sustainability performance and messaging. Even *Green Leading Companies* must consider the relative importance of green attributes compared to core product features. Dalsace and Challagalla (2024) argue that effective green messaging must be tailored to consumer segments whose values align with environmental goals. For these audiences, sustainability messages carry greater persuasive power when combined with high-quality service delivery.

As for *what* communication tools could be effective, emerging research points to the role of marketing communication in shaping green attitudes and behavioral intentions. One promising area is influencer marketing. Influencers who advocate for eco-friendly lifestyles and products can help normalize green behaviors and embed them within consumer identity (Zhao, Zhu, Shan, Cao, & Chen, 2024). Such a social endorsement may enhance credibility and may help bridge the gap between consumer awareness and action.

As I indicated, in this research I examine how consumers evaluate green service claims and perceive the environmental value of different sustainability initiatives within the retail service context. I have identified the significance of internal corrective green initiatives as more authentic indicators of environmental responsibility. I suggest that visible, credible, and operationally integrated green practices can enhance consumers' perceptions of the firm's environmental commitment.

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