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Evaluation of the Influence of Green Marketing Credibility and Consumer Trust on Consumer Behaviour in the UK Online Retail Fashion Industry: A Comparative Study of ASOS and Boohoo's Sustainability Communications

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted for another award. All sources used have been acknowledged through citation and referencing. The study uses publicly available secondary material and follows the approved ethical approach. I understand that I remain responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the submitted work.

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Generative AI tools were used only for limited support with language and writing. The free versions of ChatGPT and Gemini were used to help express ideas more clearly, generate and revise text, shorten content, and correct grammar. These tools were not used to collect or categorize data, create artificial data, or analyse the research findings. Any text produced with AI assistance was carefully reviewed, compared with the cited sources, and edited by the student before inclusion. The student takes full responsibility for the accuracy, interpretation, and final content of the dissertation.

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Table of Contents

Declaration	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
AI Acknowledgement.....	4
Abstract	8
List of Tables and Figures	9
List of Abbreviations	10
Chapter 1 - Introduction.....	11
1.1 Introduction	11
1.2 Background and Context.....	11
1.3 Research Problem	12
1.4 Research Aim	13
1.5 Research Objectives.....	13
1.6 Research Questions.....	13
1.7 Significance of the Study.....	14
1.8 Scope and Boundaries	14
1.9 Key Terms Used in the Dissertation.....	15
1.10 Dissertation Structure.....	15
1.11 Conclusion	16
Chapter 2 - Thematic Literature Review	17
2.1 Introduction	17
2.2 Green Marketing Credibility in Sustainable Fashion.....	17
2.3 Greenwashing, Claim Quality and Accountability.....	18
2.4 Sustainability Communication, Authenticity and Interpretation	20
2.5 Consumer Trust, Scepticism and Behaviour.....	21
2.6 Theoretical Perspectives	23
Signalling theory	23
Attribution theory and authenticity.....	23
Stimulus-organism-response model.....	24
Supporting perspectives and theoretical choice	24
2.7 Critical Literature Review	25
2.8 Critical Synthesis and Literature Gap	28
2.10 Theoretical Framework and Analytical Propositions.....	29
2.11 Conclusion	31
Chapter 3 - Research Methodology	33
3.1 Introduction	33
3.2 Research philosophy.....	33
3.3 Research approach	33
3.4 Research design and case boundaries.....	34

3.5 Sampling and source selection.....	34
3.6 Data collection and source access.....	35
3.7 Thematic data analysis	36
3.8 Research quality and reflexivity.....	37
3.9 Ethical considerations	38
3.10 Methodological limitations	38
3.11 Chapter summary	38
Chapter 4 - Findings and Results	39
4.1 Introduction	39
4.2 Source profile and analytical transparency	39
4.3 Theme 1: Sustainability messages and communication channels	42
4.4 Theme 2: Substantiation and transparency of environmental claims	43
4.5 Theme 3: Accountability through progress and limitations.....	44
4.6 Theme 4: The scope of certification and partnership claims	45
4.7 Theme 5: Consumer trust and conditional behavioural implications	46
4.8 Chapter summary.....	47
Chapter 5 - Discussion	48
5.1 Introduction	48
5.2 Sustainability messages and communication channels	48
5.3 Credibility, transparency, substantiation and accountability.....	49
5.4 Credibility, trust and behavioural implications.....	52
5.5 Evaluation of the theoretical framework	53
5.6 Implications for practice	53
5.7 Chapter summary.....	54
Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Recommendations.....	55
6.1 Introduction	55
6.2 Summary of key findings	55
6.3 Contribution of the study.....	56
6.4 Recommendations.....	57
6.5 Limitations	58
6.6 Future research.....	59
6.7 Conclusion.....	59
References.....	60
Appendix.....	68
Appendix A: Source Selection.....	68
Appendix B: Source Matrix.....	71
Appendix C: Claim Episodes.....	75
Appendix D: Findings	81

Abstract

This dissertation evaluates the influence of green marketing credibility and consumer trust on consumer behavior in the context of UK online retail fashion. This study conducts a secondary qualitative comparison of ASOS and Boohoo's sustainability communications. Claim episodes and an objective-linked thematic framework has been utilized in order to evaluate public corporate, regulatory, and independent records, which were published within the study period. The analysis focused on multiple factors, such as claim scope, substantiation, qualifications, progress reporting, accountability and third-party signals. According to the available evidence, both case demonstrate structured sustainability narratives. Meanwhile, ASOS material formed a more consolidated reporting chain. Apart from that, Boohoo-related evidence crossed historical and group-level sources. Credibility proof to be more assessable in those cases where claims identified boundaries, methods, baselines, progress and limitations. Delayed or unassessable outcomes can contribute to strengthening accountability through candour. However, it leaves delivery unresolved. Certifications and partnerships emerge as informative only within their stated scope. The discussion derives a possible pathway from assessable communication to trust-related behavioural tendencies by using signaling theory, attribution theory and the stimulus-organism-response model. This study did not measure consumer trust and purchasing behavior directly. In addition to that, the findings do not establish environmental performance or any legal compliance. The dissertation provides several recommendations, such as connected evidence chains, transparent target changes, visible adverse outcomes and scoped third-party claims.

Keywords: *green marketing credibility; consumer trust; consumer behaviour; sustainability communication; ASOS; Boohoo; UK online fashion retail*

List of Tables and Figures

Table 2.1: Selective synthesis of central literature 22

Table 3.1: Source roles and selection criteria 29

Table 3.2: Analytical themes and boundaries 32

Table 4.1: Sources and evidence included in the study 35

Table 4.2: Literature and evidence supporting the objective-linked themes 37

Figure 2.1: Integrated signalling, attribution and S-O-R framework 25

Figure 2.2: Literature gap and study response 26

Figure 3.1: Evidence-to-interpretation analytical model 31

List of Abbreviations

CMA	Competition and Markets Authority
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
ESG	Environmental, social and governance
FWI	Fashion with Integrity
FY	Financial year
GHG	Greenhouse gas
RE100	Global corporate renewable electricity initiative
RQ	Research question
SBTi	Science Based Targets initiative
S-O-R	Stimulus-organism-response
UK	United Kingdom

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Environmental responsibility has become an important part of how fashion retailers present their products, operations and relationships with customers. In online fashion retail, sustainability messages can appear a range of materials, such as product descriptions, search filters, collection names, brand webpages, social media content, annual reports and supply-chain disclosures. These channels allow retailers to communicate quickly and at scale. However, they also create a credibility challenge. For instance, consumers may be asked to trust claims about recycled materials, responsible sourcing, packaging or emissions even when the underlying evidence is difficult to verify at the point of purchase.

This is a crucial challenge in fashion due to fact that the sector has been associated with high production volumes, short product cycles, synthetic fibres, waste and complex supply chains (Niinimäki et al. 2020). Sustainability communication can communicate genuine commitments. On the other hand, it can also create favorable environmental impressions when a claim is vague, selective or insufficiently supported. As a result, this dissertation treats credibility as a question of how clearly a claim is framed and what evidence supports it. Furthermore it also analyzes credibility based on how its limits are communicated and whether responsibility is connected to visible accountability.

1.2 Background and Context

Green marketing credibility is closely related to the debate on greenwashing. Delmas and Burbano (2011) link greenwashing to the tension between positive environmental communication and environmental performance. Lyon and Montgomery (2015) on the other hand, emphasise selective disclosure and symbolic communication. These perspectives do not indicate that every sustainability statement is misleading. Instead, they show why green claims should be evaluated through specificity, evidence, balance and substantiation.

The UK regulatory context makes this issue particularly relevant to online fashion. The Competition and Markets Authority's Green Claims Code requires environmental claims to be truthful, clear, complete, fair and supported by appropriate evidence (CMA, 2021). Its fashion-sector guidance also stresses prominence, specific material claims, stated criteria for environmental ranges and verifiable strategies for target claims (CMA, 2024a). In March 2024, ASOS and Boohoo gave formal undertakings after the CMA's

fashion green-claims investigation, covering claims, materials, ranges, imagery, filters, targets and accreditation information (CMA, 2024e). This provides a relevant benchmark without proving that either company has failed in its wider environmental performance.

ASOS and Boohoo offer a meaningful comparison as both are visible online fashion brands with public sustainability communication and both appear in the CMA fashion case. ASOS presents Fashion with Integrity around Planet, Product and People, including targets, circularity, materials and supply-chain responsibilities (ASOS plc, 2026a). Boohoo-related evidence requires careful attribution. Boohoo remains a consumer-facing brand. However, current group-level material is published through Debenhams Group, the trading name of boohoo group plc. The group communicates interim ESG commitments, responsible sourcing, factory-list publication and supply-chain mapping (Debenhams Group, 2026a; 2026b). Group-level evidence cannot automatically be considered as a Boohoo-specific product claim.

Credibility, trust and consumer behaviour provide the conceptual reason for examining these communications. Trust involves confidence that an organisation will act reliably and with integrity, supporting continuing relationships and loyalty (Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol, 2002). Consumers may not be able to inspect the material or life-cycle evidence behind an environmental claim. Chen and Chang (2013) connect greenwashing with reduced green trust through confusion and perceived risk. Schmuck, Matthes and Naderer (2018) on the other hand, show that misleading green advertising can shape consumer responses. Therefore, credibility must be examined through claims, evidence, presentation and accountability, utilizing behaviour discussed through secondary literature.

1.3 Research Problem

The research problem is not simply whether ASOS or Boohoo uses sustainability language. The deeper problem is how credibility is constructed in these communications and how it may influence trust-related consumer behaviour. A product-page statement may depend on evidence about fibres, suppliers, standards, targets or the boundary of a collection. On the other hand, a corporate target requires information about baseline, timeframe, scope, measurement and progress. If these features are difficult to locate or understand, consumers may struggle to distinguish a substantiated claim from a broad environmental impression.

Existing greenwashing and green-trust research explains confusion, perceived risk, scepticism and consumer response. On the other hand, regulation offers criteria for

assessing fashion claims. A focused comparison can prove to be valuable as credibility is shaped by context, channel and organisational presentation. The same term may operate differently in a product filter, brand webpage, group report or regulator's undertaking. Comparing ASOS and Boohoo connects general theory to UK online fashion practice.

The dissertation tackles this problem through public secondary evidence. Corporate claims are not treated as independently verified performance. In addition to that, actual purchasing behaviour is not measured. The study evaluates visible credibility signals. It uses academic, regulatory, industry and media evidence to interpret how communication may affect several factors, such as trust, purchase intention, preference, loyalty, scepticism or avoidance. This makes the study achievable through secondary qualitative thematic research.

1.4 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to evaluate how green marketing credibility and consumer trust influence consumer behaviour in the UK online retail fashion industry, using a secondary qualitative thematic comparison of ASOS and Boohoo's sustainability communications.

1.5 Research Objectives

- 1.To analyse the main sustainability messages and green marketing claims communicated by ASOS and Boohoo through publicly available corporate and digital sources.
- 2.To evaluate how credibility, transparency, substantiation and accountability are presented in ASOS and Boohoo's sustainability communications.
- 3.To analyse the influence of green marketing credibility and consumer trust on consumer behaviour in the UK online retail fashion industry.
- 4.To develop thematic insights into how online fashion retailers can improve green marketing credibility and consumer trust to support more confident and responsible consumer behaviour.

1.6 Research Questions

- 1.How do ASOS and Boohoo communicate sustainability messages and green marketing claims through publicly available corporate and digital sources?

2. How do ASOS and Boohoo present credibility, transparency, substantiation and accountability in their sustainability communications?
3. How do green marketing credibility and consumer trust influence consumer behaviour in the UK online retail fashion industry, based on secondary qualitative evidence from ASOS and Boohoo's sustainability communications?

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study has academic, practical and methodological significance. Academically, it brings greenwashing, green trust, consumer behaviour and sustainability communication into a focused UK online fashion comparison. It shows how a credibility-and-trust lens can connect the wording and evidence of communication with behavioural implications discussed in existing research.

For practice, the research may help online fashion retailers understand that credibility does not depend only on the volume or positivity of sustainability language. Claims can be evaluated more easily through several factors, such as clear definitions, product-level specificity, visible evidence, transparent boundaries, measurable progress and accessible accountability. Recommendations will be based on completed thematic findings and will not assume that a communication practice has caused a measurable change in sales.

From a methodological perspective, the study demonstrates how a consumer-behaviour question can be investigated where primary data is absent. Company and regulatory material demonstrates the way sustainability is communicated. Aside from that, academic and independent evidence lean towards cautious interpretation. Manual thematic analysis will preserve a trail from source selection to codes, themes and cross-case comparison (Bowen, 2009; Braun and Clarke, 2006). This is feasible and consistent with a low-risk public-source research design.

1.8 Scope and Boundaries

The study is limited to the UK online retail fashion context and the cases of ASOS and Boohoo. Evidence will be derived from a range of sources, such as public company and digital communications, corporate reports, regulatory material, peer-reviewed literature, credible industry evidence and relevant media coverage. The principal evidence window will be 2020-2026, with older seminal works retained for theory and methods.

The unit of analysis is sustainability communication as opposed to whole-company environmental performance. The study will examine several elements, namely, claims, channels, evidence, criteria, visibility, limitations and accountability. Boohoo-related group material will be identified as such. It will not be presented as evidence of every Boohoo product or interaction. Consumer behaviour will be interpreted through secondary evidence and theory, including purchase intention, preference, loyalty, scepticism, avoidance and confidence. However, actual behaviour, sales and causal effects will not be measured.

The public-source boundary creates limitations. Corporate materials are organisational self-presentation. In addition to that, regulatory documents are not complete environmental audits, and academic and media sources vary in purpose and proximity. Online pages may change over time. Lastly, two cases cannot support statistical generalisation to all fashion retailers. These limits will be managed through purposive selection, an evidence matrix, consistent coding, triangulation and separation of description from interpretation.

1.9 Key Terms Used in the Dissertation

For this dissertation, green marketing credibility means the apparent quality, clarity and supportability of environmental marketing claims which will be assessed through features such as specificity, evidence, transparency, consistency, balance and accountability. Consumer trust means confidence that the retailer's sustainability-related communication is reliable and presented with integrity; it is not treated as a survey score in this study. Consumer behaviour refers to the trust-related responses and behavioural tendencies discussed in secondary research. It includes, purchase intention, preference, loyalty, scepticism and avoidance. Sustainability communications include the public corporate, digital, product, reporting and policy messages through which ASOS and Boohoo describe environmental or responsible-business commitments.

1.10 Dissertation Structure

Chapter 1 introduces several elements, such as context, problem, aim, objectives, research questions, significance, scope and boundaries of the study. Chapter 2 critically reviews the literature on green marketing credibility, greenwashing, consumer trust, consumer behaviour and sustainability communication, before establishing the research gap and analytical framework. Chapter 3 explains multiple factors. For example, research philosophy, comparative case-study strategy, public-source selection, manual thematic

analysis, trustworthiness procedures and ethical safeguards. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the coded ASOS and Boohoo evidence, separating communication description from interpretation. Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to the literature, the CMA context, the research objectives and the research questions. Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation and identifies its contribution and limitations. It also presents evidence-based recommendations and directions for further research.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter has established why green marketing credibility and consumer trust are important issues in UK online fashion retail. Sustainability communications can provide useful environmental information. However, their behavioural value depends on whether claims are specific, evidenced, transparent and accountable. ASOS and Boohoo provide a relevant comparative setting as both communicate sustainability publicly and both are connected to the CMA fashion green-claims context, although their group and brand evidence must be carefully distinguished. Hence, the study evaluates communication credibility and trust-related behavioural implications through public secondary evidence, without claiming direct measurement of actual consumer behaviour or independent verification of environmental performance. The next chapter develops the theoretical and empirical literature needed to support that evaluation.

Chapter 2 - Thematic Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews literature which are relevant to green marketing credibility and consumer trust in online fashion retail. The review is theory-led instead of organisation-led. It does not assume that a retailer's sustainability statement proves environmental performance. Instead, it examines how claims become credible or doubtful and how audiences interpret responsibility and motive. Additionally, it analyzes how trust or scepticism may shape behavioural tendencies under information asymmetry.

The review examines credibility in multiple aspects, such as sustainable fashion, greenwashing and accountability, communication and authenticity, trust, scepticism and behaviour. It then integrates signalling theory, attribution theory and the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model as a sensitising framework. Trust theory and the theory of planned behaviour support the framework. However, these theories are not treated as complete explanations.

2.2 Green Marketing Credibility in Sustainable Fashion

The environmental consequences of fashion make communication about materials, production, use and disposal commercially significant. The sector's long and geographically dispersed supply chains, rapid product turnover and resource intensity make environmental performance difficult for consumers to observe directly (Niinimäki et al. 2020). Sustainable fashion is consequently not a single, universally understood product category. Henninger, Alevizou and Oates (2016), drawing on qualitative research in the UK, show that its meaning depends on the person, product and context. This contextual character is useful for the present study as it indicates that credibility cannot be reduced to whether a retailer uses the word sustainable. The relevant question is what a claim means, what boundaries it has and whether its support is accessible to the audience.

Credibility is generally defined by the perceived believability of a source or message. Erdem and Swait (2004) conceptualise brand credibility through trustworthiness and expertise, arguing that credibility becomes particularly valuable when consumers face uncertainty. This is directly relevant to environmental marketing, where product quality and environmental impact are partly unobservable at the point of purchase. Kirmani and Rao (2000) add that a signal is informative only when the cost, risk or difficulty of making a false signal is meaningfully different from that of making a true one. A generic statement

such as “better for the planet” may consequently communicate little if it does not identify the benefit, the evidence or the conditions under which the claim applies.

Environmental credibility can be analyzed from multiple dimensions. Atkinson and Rosenthal (2014) found that argument specificity and the source of an eco-label can influence consumer trust, although involvement affects how such information is processed. In a similar way, Perez (2019) develops message authenticity around multiple factors, such as information, fit and specificity. Lock and Schulz-Knappe (2019) connect credible CSR communication with legitimacy, defining credibility through properties such as understandability, truth, sincerity and appropriateness. Taken together, these studies suggest that credibility is built through the relationship between an assertion and the evidence, criteria and context that allow it to be evaluated. Message volume, attractive imagery or an ambitious tone may support attention, although they cannot substitute for substantiation.

The sustainable fashion literature also provide cautions against treating information as a simple solution. McNeill and Moore (2015) show that consumers can express concern about sustainability and still retain preferences for fashionability, novelty and convenience. Mukendi et al. (2020) identify pragmatic research, focused on incremental improvements and consumer choice. It also encounters more radical research, focused on systemic transformation. A systematic review of sustainable-fashion consumer behaviour provided by Busalim, Fox and Lynn (2022), report fragmentation, under-theorisation and a need for more qualitative and context-sensitive research. The implication is that credibility should be examined as an interpretive condition within a wider consumption system. It should not be treated as a single message attribute that automatically produces responsible choices.

For this dissertation, green marketing credibility is defined as the apparent quality and supportability of an environmental marketing communication as interpreted in context. The assessment focuses on multiple factors. For example, specificity, evidence, transparency, consistency, balance, visibility, external validation and accountability. This working definition does not certify actual environmental performance. It creates an analytical boundary between what a communication presents, what a reader may reasonably infer, and what would require independent environmental verification.

2.3 Greenwashing, Claim Quality and Accountability

Greenwashing literature provides the main critical challenge to unexamined sustainability communication. However, this concept remains contested. Delmas and

Burbano (2011) describe greenwashing through the tension between positive environmental communication and weak or poor environmental performance. Lyon and Montgomery (2015) on other hand, identify selective disclosure and symbolic communication as strategic forms through which organisations may appear greener than their activities justify. These accounts are valuable as they shift attention from the presence of an environmental claim to the relationship between communication and underlying conduct. They are also difficult to apply to a public-source study if environmental performance cannot be independently established.

The definitional problem is addressed in different ways. De Freitas Netto et al. (2020), in a systematic review, distinguish firm-level and product-level forms as well as claim-level and executional forms. A firm may communicate an attractive overall environmental identity. On the other hand, a product or range claim may use colour, imagery or selective emphasis to create an environmental impression. Seele and Gatti (2017) argue for an accusation-based definition that incorporates observer interpretation and legitimacy strategies. Their position is significant due to the fact that greenwashing is not simply an objective label residing in a sentence. It is also an accusation made by an evaluator who compares a signal with expectations, evidence and organisational conduct. Siano et al. (2017) likewise show, through the Volkswagen context, that greenwashing can involve more than inaccurate words. Symbolic communication, institutional positioning and the perceived gap between promise and practice can interact.

Recent review work continues to find a fragmented field. Ziolo, Bak and Spoz (2024) identify a dispersed literature addressing forms, drivers, and consequences with information overload and scepticism recurring as important concerns. The critical consequence is that the present research should not apply a binary “green” versus “greenwashing” test to corporate material. It should trace how a claim is constructed and which elements are omitted. It should also analyze whether a benefit is bounded. In addition to that, it needs to trace how evidence is signposted and how independent actors evaluate the communication. A claim may be incomplete or difficult to assess without sufficient evidence of deliberate deception.

Content-analysis research also demonstrates the value of examining claim features and executional cues in lieu of treating green advertising as a uniform category (Segev, Fernandes and Hong, 2016).

Claim quality is central to this more cautious approach. The Green Claims Code gives a practical UK benchmark by requiring environmental claims to be truthful, clear, unambiguous, substantiated, complete and fair (Competition and Markets Authority,

2021). Guidance related to fashion makes the benchmark more concrete by handling multiple aspects, which are as follows: prominent qualifications, the basis for material claims, the criteria for ranges and the evidence supporting future targets (Competition and Markets Authority, 2024a). These principles do not replace academic theory. Nevertheless, they provide observable criteria for documentary coding. For example, specificity can be coded through the presence of a defined material, process or impact. Substantiation can be coded through evidence, methodology or external validation. Lastly, accountability can be coded through progress reporting, limits, targets, baselines or consequences for non-delivery.

Third-party assessment can strengthen a signal, although it is not automatically conclusive. Parguel, Benoit-Moreau and Larceneux (2011) argue that sustainability ratings may deter greenwashing by making environmental communication more accountable. Marschlich and Hurtado (2025) similarly examine third-party certification as a condition that can influence perceived authenticity and credibility. A logo without an identified standard, product boundary or accessible explanation can prove to be less informative compared to a specific, transparent claim without a prominent badge. As a result, the literature supports coding third-party validation as evidence to be examined.

2.4 Sustainability Communication, Authenticity and Interpretation

Sustainability communication is not a one-way transfer of facts. Morsing and Schultz (2006) distinguish stakeholder information, response and involvement strategies, showing that CSR communication can range from informing audiences to inviting dialogue and participation. Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010) argue that CSR communication must address low awareness, scepticism and unfavourable attributions if it is to generate stakeholder value. This moves the analysis away from asking only whether information is present. It also asks whether a message makes the relevant evidence findable and enables the audience to evaluate the relationship between social claims and organisational motives.

The networked character of contemporary communication complicates control over meaning. Castello, Morsing and Schultz (2013) describe CSR communication as polyphonic, which involves organisations, stakeholders, media and other actors whose interpretations interact. Hence, A corporate webpage does not settle the meaning of a claim. Independent reporting, regulatory scrutiny, certification, consumer discussion and later performance can either reinforce or challenge the initial message. For a secondary qualitative study, this supports an evidence base that distinguishes between corporate

self-presentation and regulatory, industry, academic and media interpretation. It also justifies comparing channels instead of analysing one isolated page.

Authenticity is related to credibility although not identical to it. Credibility asks whether a message appears believable and supportable. Authenticity also concerns whether the message fits perceived organisational identity, values and conduct. Perez (2019) integrates identity-based brand management, attribution and information-processing perspectives to show why fit and specificity is significant. Christensen, Morsing and Thyssen (2013) provide an important counterpoint by treating CSR as “aspirational talk”. Future-oriented communication may express an intention to improve and can create a space for change; it does not become automatically deceptive simply because performance is incomplete. The critical issue is whether aspirations are distinguished from achieved outcomes and accompanied by measurable commitments, transparent baselines and reporting.

Attribution is especially important as audiences infer why a company is communicating. Forehand and Grier (2003) show that stated company intent can influence consumer scepticism. On the other hand, Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla and Paladino (2014) use attribution theory to explain reactions to perceived inconsistency between green advertising and corporate environmental performance. Communication that appears self-serving or disproportionate to the visible evidence may invite an impression-management attribution. Communication that acknowledges trade-offs, identifies responsibility and supplies verifiable detail may support a more substantive attribution. These are interpretive possibilities. They don't indicate direct observations of a consumer's mind. A documentary analysis can identify the cues that make each interpretation more or less available.

2.5 Consumer Trust, Scepticism and Behaviour

Trust is a primary connection between environmental communication and consumer response. Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) define organisational trust as willingness to be vulnerable based on positive expectations, with ability, benevolence and integrity shaping those expectations. Morgan and Hunt (1994), Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002), and Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) connect trust with several factors, such as durable exchange, value, loyalty and performance. Credible sustainability communication may reduce uncertainty, although it cannot by itself create a stable relationship.

Green trust is more specific than general brand attachment. Chen and Chang (2012) link green perceived value, risk and trust with green purchase intentions. On the other hand, Chen and Chang (2013) show that greenwashing can weaken green trust through confusion and perceived risk. The mechanism is important. Unclear claims may make an environmental benefit difficult to understand and increase the perceived risk of being misled. Consequently, trust is not the same as liking a brand or agreeing with an environmental message.

Scepticism provides the corresponding critical response. Mohr, Eroglu and Ellen (1998) show why consumers question marketers' motives and evidence. Nyilasy et al. (2014) connect reactions with the interaction between advertising and perceived environmental performance. According to, Schmuck, Matthes and Naderer (2018), misleading green advertising can shape responses through affect, reasoning and involvement. These mostly quantitative or experimental studies identify plausible mechanisms. However, they provide less explanation of how multiple public communications accumulate into a credibility judgement over time.

Transparency may mitigate uncertainty only when it is understandable and relevant. Li, Sun and Hu (2022) associate scepticism and transparency with green brand authenticity and evangelism. According to Atkinson and Rosenthal (2014), specific arguments can contribute to strengthening trust. The quality and accessibility of information is more important than disclosure volume. A long report and a short product claim may be connected. The consumer must be able to follow that connection at the decision point.

Behavioral models require further qualification. Follows and Jobber (2000) demonstrate that environmentally responsible purchase behaviour has several determinants. Ajzen (1991) uses attitudes, norms and perceived control in order to demonstrate intention. On the other hand, White, Habib and Hardisty (2019) emphasise social influence, habit, feelings and cognition. These perspectives show why a communication-centred study should not claim that credibility causes purchases.

The intention-behaviour gap is particularly important in fast fashion. Carrington, Neville and Whitwell (2010) identify situational interruptions. Johnstone and Tan (2015) connect green rhetoric with price, convenience, availability, habit and identity. McNeill and Moore (2015) demonstrate tension between sustainability attitudes and fashion consumption. Jung, Tian and Oh (2024) provide fashion-specific evidence linking message authenticity and transparency with purchase intentions. Nonetheless, their quantitative context does not establish actual behaviour or transfer automatically to UK

online retail. As a result the present study can discuss several aspects, such as intention, preference, loyalty, advocacy, avoidance and confidence as behavioural implications. It leaves actual sales and observed conduct outside its evidence boundary.

Trust is consequently neither guaranteed nor sufficient. The research will analyse how communication presents conditions for trust or scepticism and interpret behavioural implications through this wider literature.

2.6 Theoretical Perspectives

Signalling theory

Signalling theory explains why sustainability communication is pertinent under information asymmetry. Spence (1973) argues that signals help an informed party communicate qualities which another party cannot directly observe. In online fashion, consumers cannot readily inspect supply-chain conditions, material composition or lifecycle effects. Hence, labels, targets, certifications, reports and progress updates can signal responsibility. Kirmani and Rao (2000) suggest that signals are more credible when they are costly or difficult for low-quality actors to imitate. For this study, the relevant indicators are specificity, scope, evidence, external validation and disclosure of limitations. Erdem and Swait (2004), Atkinson and Rosenthal (2014) further support the importance of credibility and argument specificity under consumer uncertainty.

Signalling theory does not explain motive or audience interpretation by itself. A detailed claim may still appear self-serving. Meanwhile, a modest aspiration may seem credible if it is bounded and accountable. As a consequence It is used as the first lens for coding what a communication makes observable and how diagnostic that information appears. It is not a proof that an audience has accepted the signal.

Attribution theory and authenticity

Attribution theory adds perceived motive. Audiences may interpret environmental communication as evidence of responsibility, regulatory compliance, reputation management or sales promotion. Forehand and Grier (2003) show that stated intent can influence scepticism. On the other hand, Nyilasy et al. (2014) connect perceived inconsistency between advertising and environmental performance with negative attributions. Perez (2019) links attribution with message authenticity through perceived fit, information and specificity.

This lens suits qualitative thematic analysis as motive is communicated indirectly through several ways, such as commitments, moral language, target dates, evidence,

admissions of difficulty and responses to criticism. The analysis will not discover an organisation's true intention. It will identify the interpretive cues available in the public record and distinguish stated motive from analytical inference. Attribution also explains why identical signals may be read differently according to prior belief and perceived performance which reinforces the need to evaluate claims across channels and contexts.

Stimulus-organism-response model

Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) S-O-R model organises the relationship between communication and behavioural implications. Here, sustainability messages and evidential features are stimuli. Perceived credibility, trust, confusion, risk and scepticism are organism-level interpretive states. Approach or avoidance tendencies can be categorized as responses. The model connects claim specificity and accountability with purchase intention, preference, loyalty or resistance without asserting direct causation.

S-O-R is too general to specify what makes a claim credible. For this reason, signalling theory supplies information asymmetry and diagnosticity. On the other hand, attribution explains motives and authenticity. Trust theory adds vulnerability and reliability. The intention-behaviour literature adds habit, resources, norms and context. A combination of these perspectives form a sensitising framework instead of a statistical model.

Supporting perspectives and theoretical choice

Trust theory clarifies the relational consequences of credibility. Ability, benevolence and integrity in Mayer et al. (1995) can be translated cautiously into documentary indicators. Competence may be suggested by method and evidence. Benevolence can be recommended by attention to impact and stakeholders. Apart from this, integrity can be suggested by consistency between commitments, boundaries and reporting. Morgan and Hunt (1994), Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) support trust's relationship with continuity and loyalty. However, they do not make sustainability communication the sole driver of choice.

Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour and White et al.'s (2019) SHIFT framework are boundary perspectives. They explain why intention depends on attitudes, norms, control, habit, social influence and cognition, although the present study has no survey measures of these variables. As a result, the final choice is deliberate. Signalling guides information-quality coding. Then, attribution guides motive, fit and authenticity coding. S-O-R organises the movement from communication through trust or scepticism

to behavioural tendencies. This combination aligns with the objectives and preserves the public-secondary evidence boundary.

2.7 Critical Literature Review

The following selective matrix consolidates central studies used in this chapter. It is designed to make the evidence base transparent by showing each study's method, context, contribution and limitation. The matrix is selective as opposed to exhaustive. The wider reference list contains the full conceptual, empirical, regulatory and review literature supporting the argument.

Table 2.1: Selective synthesis of central literature

Author	Journal / Publisher	Title / Topic	Methodology	Coverage / Country / Industry	Summary of Key Findings	Gaps / Limitations
Delmas and Burbano (2011)	California Management Review	The drivers of greenwashing	Conceptual literature synthesis and framework	International, cross-industry environmental communication	Identifies organisational and external drivers that can encourage positive environmental communication without equivalent performance; establishes the communication-performance tension.	Does not empirically examine UK online fashion, consumer interpretation or multi-channel claims; public sources may not establish underlying performance.
Chen and Chang (2013)	Journal of Business Ethics	Greenwash and green trust	Quantitative survey and structural equation modelling	Taiwanese consumers; information and electronics products	Greenwashing is negatively related to green trust, with green consumer confusion and perceived risk mediating the relationship.	Country, product and survey context limit transfer to UK online fashion; does not analyse real corporate communication across channels.
Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla and Paladino (2014)	Journal of Business Ethics	Perceived greenwashing and consumer reactions	3 x 3 experiment with 302 participants	Corporate green advertising and environmental-performance conditions	The interaction between advertising and perceived environmental performance shapes brand attitudes and purchase intentions; attribution theory explains the reactions.	Controlled exposure to a single stimulus does not represent longitudinal, multi-channel communication or actual behaviour.
Mukendi, Davies, McDonagh and Glozer (2020)	European Journal of Marketing	Sustainable fashion: current and future research directions	Systematic literature review of 465 papers	Management literature, 2000 to June 2019; global sustainable-fashion field	Maps pragmatic and radical change approaches and identifies seven research streams, showing a fragmented and developing field.	Broad management coverage is not a claim-level study of online retailer communication and predates much recent UK regulatory activity.

Author	Journal / Publisher	Title / Topic	Methodology	Coverage / Country / Industry	Summary of Key Findings	Gaps / Limitations
Busalim, Fox and Lynn (2022)	International Journal of Consumer Studies	Consumer behaviour in sustainable fashion	Systematic review: 167 articles identified and 88 synthesised; descriptive and S-O-R analysis	Global sustainable, fast and slow fashion consumer research, 2009-2019	Finds that qualitative, experimental, cross-cultural and longitudinal studies are under-represented, theory use is limited and the attitude-behaviour gap requires further study.	Reviews existing studies rather than analysing public communication; does not provide a UK online retailer comparison.
Jung, Tian and Oh (2024)	Fashion and Textiles	CSR message authenticity, transparency and purchase intention	Experimental study using information-disclosure stimuli with 412 consumers	Clothing consumers in Shandong, China	Perceived corporate social performance influences authenticity and subjective norms; transparency and authenticity relate to purchase intention.	Single-province cultural setting and purchase-intention outcome limit transfer; controlled stimuli do not show how real retailer archives communicate over time.

Table 2.1 supports the chapter's central synthesis. The literature establishes plausible relationships between several factors, such as claim quality, greenwashing, authenticity, trust and behavioural intention. However, it also reveals a repeated separation between controlled consumer-response studies and the actual communication records through which online fashion claims are encountered. The present study addresses that separation through a bounded, comparative analysis of public sustainability communications. It retains the limitations identified in the matrix.

2.8 Critical Synthesis and Literature Gap

The literature establishes that environmental communication is consequential, although it does not yield a complete explanation. Greenwashing research identifies communication-performance tensions, selective disclosure and accusation. However, it often separates organisational drivers from consumer interpretation. Credibility and trust studies identify specificity, evidence, confusion, perceived risk and scepticism. It frequently examine single messages or controlled stimuli. Sustainable-fashion research documents the intention-behaviour gap and the importance of price, fashionability, convenience and habit. On the other hand, consumer-behaviour reviews report fragmentation and under-theorisation. CSR communication research explains dialogue, legitimacy, authenticity and aspirational talk, although it is not consistently integrated with green-claim evaluation.

Four connected gaps emerge from the literature reviewed here. They don't indicate a claim that no comparable study exists. First, the literature on greenwashing, credibility, trust and behaviour remain insufficiently integrated at the level of communication practice. Second, signalling and attribution are often used separately, even though environmental credibility requires both evidence quality and motive interpretation. Third, quantitative surveys and experiments dominate the explanation of consumer response, leaving less attention to how a longitudinal and multi-channel public communication record creates patterns of meaning. Fourth, there is limited communication-centred qualitative comparison of UK online fashion retailers using public evidence across corporate, digital, regulatory and independent sources. Therefore, the gap does not refer that no study has considered greenwashing or trust. Rather, it indicates that the relationship among claim design, perceived credibility, trust and behavioural implications is fragmented as well as insufficiently evaluated by comparative documentary analysis.

This gap has a practical and epistemological dimension. Communication may be visible although environmental performance remains partly hidden. Consumer response

may be discussed in the literature without being observable in a corporate archive. A suitable design must preserve uncertainty. It should not be filled with assumed attitudes or sales effects. A comparative thematic review can contribute by showing how credibility is assembled across claims, evidence and accountability.

2.9 How the Present Research Addresses the Gap

The present research tackles this gap utilizing a secondary qualitative thematic comparison of ASOS and Boohoo's sustainability communications in UK online retail fashion. They are suitable examples to represent the application setting for the broader framework. The study does not assume either has engaged in greenwashing. It examines multiple factors, such as public claims, visible credibility signals, transparency, accountability and trust-related behavioural implications.

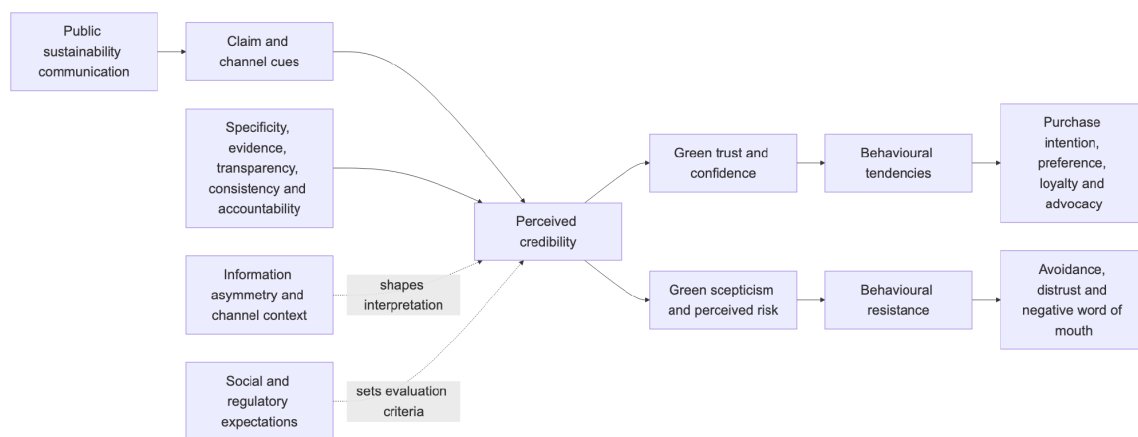
The study addresses Objective 1 and Research Question 1 through message purpose, claim type, channel, target and boundary coding. Apart from that, Objective 2 and Research Question 2 are handled through several aspects, such as specificity, evidence, qualifications, validation, consistency, accessibility and accountability. On the other hand, Objective 3 and Research Question 3 are tackled by interpreting trust, confusion, risk, scepticism, preference, loyalty and avoidance. Lastly, Objective 4 is reserved for recommendation based on findings.

The methodological response is proportionate. A purposive set of public sources and manual thematic coding can reveal the manner in which sustainability is framed and supported across channels. Academic, regulatory, industry and media evidence can be triangulated without independently verifying every environmental outcome. The approach is achievable within four months. It preserves the defined no-participant, no-confidential-data and no-direct-behaviour-measurement boundary.

2.10 Theoretical Framework and Analytical Propositions

The following framework translates the literature into coding logic. Communication provides potential stimuli and signals. Credibility and trust represent interpretive mechanisms and behaviour denotes possible tendencies. The relationships guide interpretation as opposed to statistical testing.

Figure 2.1: Integrated signalling, attribution and S-O-R framework



The model generates three analytical propositions. First, environmental claims are more likely to function as credible signals when their benefit, boundary, evidence and accountability are visible and understandable. This is a sensitising expectation derived from Spence (1973), Kirmani and Rao (2000), Atkinson and Rosenthal (2014) and the CMA guidance. It will be examined. Second, the interpretation of a claim depends on perceived motive and fit as well as informational detail. This follows the attribution and authenticity literature, especially Forehand and Grier (2003), Nyilasy et al. (2014) and Perez (2019). Third, credible communication may support trust and approach-oriented behavioural tendencies. Meanwhile, vague, inconsistent or weakly supported communication may support confusion, risk and scepticism. However, factors such as price, habit, fashionability, norms and perceived control may interrupt the movement from intention to behaviour.

Figure 2.2: Literature gap and study response

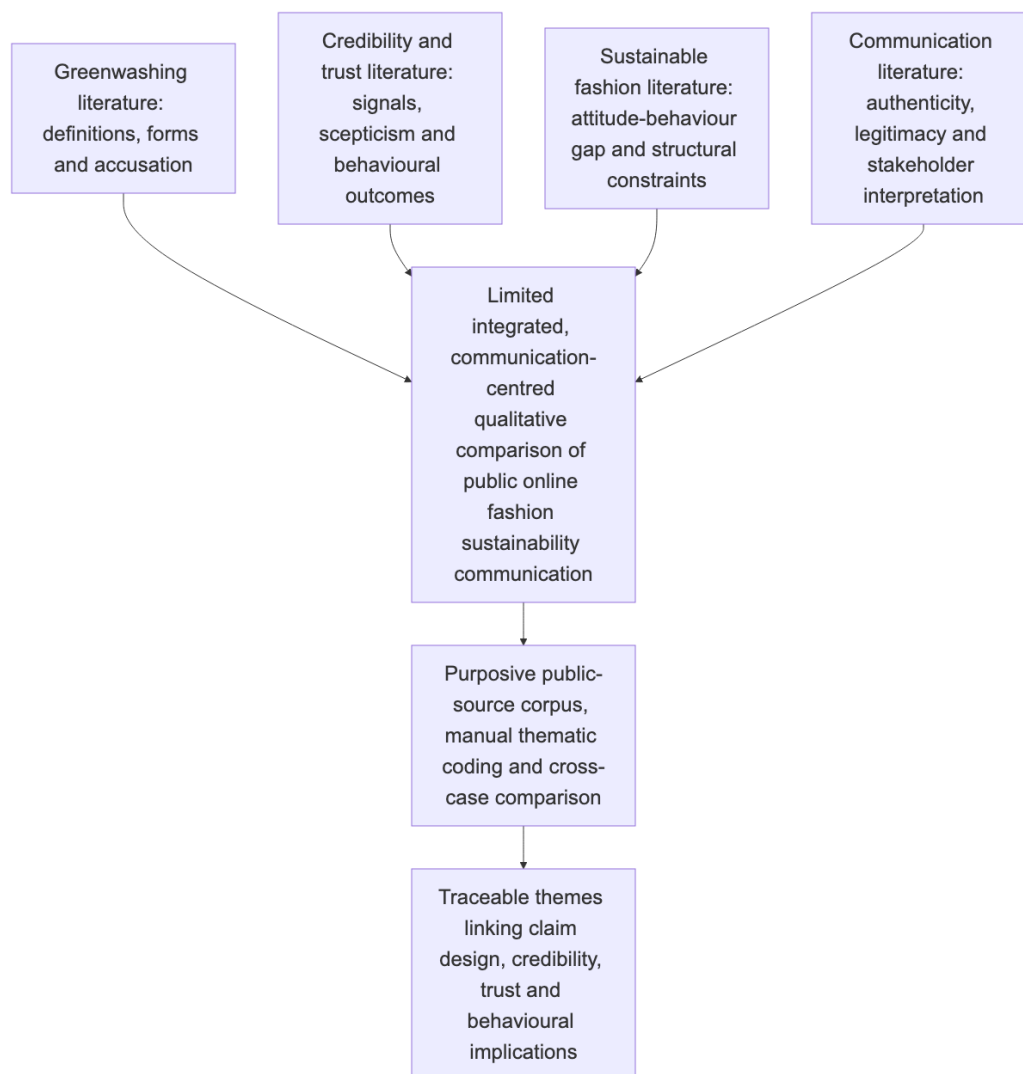


Figure 2.2 positions the contribution as integration and application. The study does not invent a new theory or measure the psychological states in Figure 2.1. It makes links among claim design, credibility, trust and behavioural implications traceable in a comparative body of public evidence. Meanwhile, it preserves negative and contradictory evidence.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that green marketing credibility is best understood as an interpreted relationship among claim, evidence, context and accountability. Greenwashing research explains why vague or selective communication creates risk. The trust, attribution and sustainable-fashion literatures on the other hand, show that credibility may support confidence without guaranteeing behaviour. Signalling theory, attribution theory and S-O-R provide a coherent sensitising framework for examining this

relationship utilizing public secondary evidence. The identified gap concerns fragmented theory and limited communication-centred qualitative comparison. The next chapter explains how the secondary qualitative thematic method will operationalise this framework and protect the distinction between communication evidence, interpretation and actual consumer behaviour.

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains in what manner the study evaluated green marketing credibility, consumer trust and behavioural implications through ASOS and Boohoo's public sustainability communications. The design was qualitative, comparative and documentary as the research questions concerned claim wording, scope, evidence, transparency and accountability as opposed to measurable consumer variables. Public documents provide stable records of communication when their provenance and context are retained (Bowen, 2009). They cannot prove environmental performance, private trust or actual purchasing behaviour. Consequently, the method separates what a source states, what credibility features are visible and what the literature supports as a cautious behavioural implication. This alignment between question, evidence and interpretation is central to qualitative design quality (Flick, 2022).

A survey or experiment would answer a different question by measuring consumer responses to selected stimuli. It would not show how the companies' existing communications organise claims, qualifications and evidence across channels. Quantitative content analysis could count terms or claim types, although it would lose the relationship between an assertion and its caveat, evidence link or visual context. The selected design proves to be proportionate to both the research aim and the available public evidence.

3.2 Research philosophy

The study adopted a critical-realist-informed position. Sustainability claims were observable communication events, although the practices and consumer responses they represented remained only partly accessible. This position permitted interpretation of language while preventing a corporate assertion from being treated as verified environmental reality (Easton, 2010). Positivist hypothesis testing was unsuitable due to the fact that there was no behavioural or performance dataset. An interpretivist alternative could explore meaning. Nevertheless, this study also evaluates the evidential boundaries of claims against explicit criteria.

3.3 Research approach

The inquiry was abductive. Analysis moved between Chapter 2's signalling, attribution, trust and S-O-R concepts and patterns found in the documents (Dubois and

Gadde, 2002). Sensitising concepts guided attention to specificity, evidence, motive cues and trust. On the other hand, inductive refinement captured case-specific patterns. This was preferable compared to fixed deduction, which could force the material into prior categories and unrestricted induction resulting in underuse of the established framework.

3.4 Research design and case boundaries

The strategy was a bounded comparative case study of ASOS and Boohoo in the UK online fashion context. Case study research was suitable for examining contemporary communication within its commercial and regulatory setting (Yin, 2018). Documents were treated as situated artefacts that both record and frame organisational responsibility (Prior, 2003). The comparison identified differences and similarities in communication practice.

The unit of analysis was a claim episode. This includes an environmental assertion, its immediate textual or visual context, any qualification or scope statement, and any linked evidence or accountability information. This unit retains meaning more effectively than an isolated sentence and is more precise than treating an entire report as one observation. Each episode retained a range of information, such as case, source role, date, channel, title, page or webpage location and access date. Boohoo brand evidence remained distinct from Debenhams Group-level reporting.

The principal evidence window was January 2020 to August 2026. It captured recent corporate communication and the development of UK fashion green-claims scrutiny. Earlier material was retained only when it was needed to interpret a continuing target, baseline or claim. A cross-sectional comparative reading was used instead of a full longitudinal performance evaluation. This is because historical documents and comparable environmental measures were not consistently available.

3.5 Sampling and source selection

Purposive criterion sampling selected information-rich public documents in lieu of implying probability sampling of an unstable web population (Palinkas et al. 2015). The 24-30-document plan produced a final set of 26 public sources covering both cases, UK regulatory material and traceable independent context. Selection criteria determined the count reported in Chapter 4.

Table 3.1: Source roles and selection criteria

Source role	Include	Exclude	Analytical use
ASOS and Boohoo or Debenhams Group	Public, attributable and claim-bearing reports, webpages, policies or product information	Duplicates, inaccessible material or unclear brand/group attribution	Primary communication evidence
Regulatory	Official UK green-claims guidance or relevant case material	Unofficial legal commentary or unrelated policy	Criteria and case context, not a legal verdict
Independent	Dateable industry, NGO or reputable media evidence linked to a claim	Anonymous allegations, repetition or untraceable claims	Context and counterevidence
Academic	Peer-reviewed theory, method or relevant empirical research	Unverified summaries or irrelevant opinion	Concepts, method and behavioural interpretation

3.6 Data collection and source access

The source documentation identifies titles, publishers, dates, URLs and access limitations. PDFs and their accessible text versions permit review. Several historical Boohoo records were accessible through indexed passages, which support only the passages actually available. They were not treated as complete archived documents. Regulatory context was derived from multiple sources, namely, the CMA Green Claims Code, fashion guidance and case material (Competition and Markets Authority, 2021; 2024e; 2024a). Any data extracted from personal social-media comments, consumer profiles, and identifiable employee information were not included for this analysis. Public availability does not indicate that privacy responsibilities can be overlooked (Information Commissioner's Office, n.d.).

Collection began with official sustainability, reporting, policy and product-related pages for both cases. Targeted searches combined each case name with terms including sustainability, recycled materials, circularity, carbon target, responsible sourcing, green claims and CMA. Independent sources were retained only when they added traceable context or counterevidence to a selected claim. The source set was not balanced by arbitrary equal numbers. Balance indicates that both cases, the principal claim families and all source roles were sufficiently represented.

3.7 Thematic data analysis

The study used hybrid thematic document analysis. Qualitative text analysis supported systematic category development and thematic analysis supported patterned meanings that answered the research questions (Kuckartz, 2019; Braun and Clarke, 2021; 2022). Coding and matrix displays remained manual and source-linked (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2020; Saldaña, 2021).

Figure 3.1: Evidence-to-interpretation analytical model

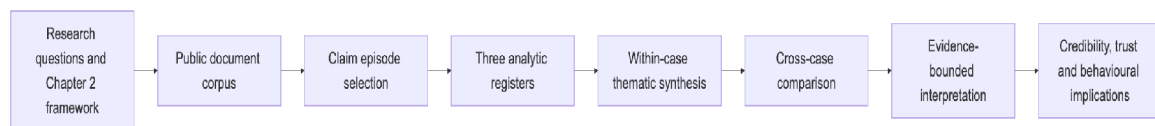


Table 3.2: Analytical themes and boundaries

Analytical area	Main dimensions	Output	Boundary
Description	Claim family, channel, scope, audience and timeframe	Communication patterns	What is stated, not environmental truth
Credibility	Specificity, evidence, qualification, baseline, validation and progress	Credibility-supporting or limiting features	Public assessability, not legal compliance
Interpretation	Authenticity, confusion, risk, trust, scepticism and behavioural tendency	Theory-supported implications	No private motive, direct trust score or actual behaviour

Analysis connected available source passages to descriptive codes, credibility assessments and interpretive themes. Claim episodes preserved the assertion and accessible qualifications. A separate contextual observation recorded the corporate Boohoo brand page. A source could carry multiple codes. Corporate statements, regulatory criteria, independent criticism and theoretical interpretation retained distinct evidential roles. The audit trail documents present coding judgements as opposed to claiming an independently verified history of repeated coding.

The coding categories cover a plethora of factors, such as products, circularity, climate, packaging, sourcing, certification, targets and future commitments. Credibility

coding then examined whether the benefit and boundary were defined and whether evidence or method was accessible. In addition to that, It also determined if limitations were prominent and if progress was reported. Additional categories are used for capturing disclosure limitations and changes in strategy. Themes are evaluated against available claim episodes, including counterexamples and restricted source access.

Within-case patterns are retained alongside comparison so that one company's reporting structure was not imposed on the other. The cross-case matrix recorded convergence, difference and non-comparability. A behavioural implication was reported only when it was supported by Chapter 2 literature and linked to an evidenced communication feature. Terms such as “may”, “could” and “is consistent with” were used where the documentary design could not establish direct influence.

The procedure was feasible within four months due to the fact that collection was limited and involved no recruitment, transcription or paid data. The study includes 26 public sources, although access depth may change. This is a limitation of the available evidence as opposed to a basis for claiming saturation. The same interpretive criteria were applied to both cases, with non-comparability recorded explicitly.

The relationship between codes and objectives determined the presentation. Message content and channels handled Objective 1. Then, substantiation, progress and certification addressed Objective 2. Objective 3 was tackled by trust and behavioural interpretation. Lastly, Objective 4 was reserved for recommendations which were derived from the discussion. For each theme, the analysis identifies the corporate passage and interprets its evidential value. It also considers a limitation or competing explanation. After that, literature supplies a possible mechanism instead of a substitute observation. A reported material percentage, for example, describes a corporate metric. It does not reveal whether a shopper understood the claim or changed a purchase. This distinction keeps the method aligned with the title while avoiding unsupported causal conclusions.

3.8 Research quality and reflexivity

Trustworthiness rests on coherent design, contextual reading, negative cases and clear links between sources and themes (Nowell et al. 2017; Tracy, 2010). No inter-coder reliability or saturation claim is made. The analysis considered rival explanations. Longer reports may expose more limitations merely by disclosing more. On the other hand, a strategy transition can explain missing comparators without establishing poor performance. Recording such alternatives reduces the risk of favouring the case with

more accessible documents. Confidence concerns documentary support. It does not indicate that an interpretation is true.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical risk was low due to the lack of participants, interviews, surveys, confidential records, behavioural tracking or special-category data. Corporate claims were attributed and reputationally sensitive conclusions qualified. Incomplete evidence was marked “not assessable”. Project files are retained in the research folder. Institutional storage and retention obligations remain applicable, consistent with ethics and research-integrity guidance (Economic and Social Research Council, 2025; UK Research Integrity Office, 2025).

Corporate, regulatory, independent and academic sources were not treated as interchangeable. Quotations are short and attributed, with access limitations recorded. Chapter 4 reports the source distribution and distinguishes environmental claim episodes from a contextual brand-page observation.

3.10 Methodological limitations

Limitations consist of selective corporate disclosure, changing webpages, incomplete access to substantiation, uneven independent evidence and the inability to observe actual consumer behaviour. The findings concern public communication and plausible trust-related implications. It does not represent total environmental performance, legal breach, causation or statistical generalisation.

3.11 Chapter summary

The study used an abductive comparative documentary design, purposive public evidence, claim episodes and hybrid thematic analysis. Its source roles, analytical themes and explicit boundaries provided a feasible basis for Chapter 4 without introducing primary data or unsupported behavioural claims.

Chapter 4 - Findings and Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the comparative thematic analysis of ASOS and Boohoo-related sustainability communications. In accordance with Chapter 3, the unit of analysis was the claim episode. It is an environmental assertion considered with its immediate scope, qualification, evidence and accountability information. The findings concern the public assessability of communication. They do not verify environmental performance, determine legal compliance, identify private organisational motives or measure consumer trust and purchasing behaviour.

The analysis proceeded within each case before cross-case comparison. Boohoo brand material was kept separate from disclosures published by boohoo group plc or its current trading identity, Debenhams Group. Corporate evidence was evaluated alongside the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) criteria and attributed independent counterevidence. Five connected themes were developed. These are as follows: bounded claim architecture, evidential visibility, accountable progress during strategic transition, the qualified role of third-party signals and trust-related behavioural implications.

4.2 Source profile and analytical transparency

The final source set contained 26 public sources dated between 2021 and August 2026. It comprised eight ASOS corporate sources, ten Boohoo or group corporate sources, six CMA sources and two independent advocacy sources. The corporate material included multiple materials, namely, annual and sustainability reports, strategy and governance pages, product-range guidance, responsible-sourcing pages and modern-slavery statements (ASOS plc, 2023; 2024; 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; 2026a; 2026b; 2026c; boohoo group plc, 2021; 2022a; 2022b; 2023; 2024a; 2024b; Debenhams Group, 2025; 2026a; 2026b; 2026c). Regulatory evidence included the Green Claims Code, fashion-sector guidance, the investigation page, both company undertakings and the CMA outcome statement (CMA, 2021; 2024a; 2024b; 2024c; 2024d; 2024e). Changing Markets Foundation material supplied dated counterevidence instead of a neutral performance rating.

The evidence cutoff remains August 2026. September verification concerns the interpretation and location of historical sources. Several Boohoo documents were available only as indexed passages. These support bounded extracts, not whole-

document judgements. Missing access was not coded as missing company practice. The two independent sources share one advocacy publisher. Consequently, they provide counterevidence without constituting two independent confirmations.

Table 4.1: Sources and evidence included in the study

Evidence category	ASOS	Boohoo / group	Both cases or sector	Total
Corporate sources	8	10	0	18
Regulatory sources	0	0	6	6
Independent advocacy sources	0	0	2	2
Total sources	8	10	8	26
Environmental claim episodes	15	14	0	29
Corporate brand-page contextual observation	0	1	0	1
Regulatory or independent contextual sources	0	0	8	8

The analysis includes 29 claim episodes and one contextual observation of the corporate Boohoo brand page. The evidence distinguishes between claim content, scope, evidence, qualifications and interpretation. Codes were organised into the five objective-linked themes below. The available evidence supports this thematic structure. However, it does not establish a separately documented second-coder review or saturation. The supporting sources, extracts, analytical decisions, comparisons and claim summary are presented in the accompanying supplementary material.

Source sufficiency was evaluated by coverage as opposed to volume alone. The selected material represented a range of information, such as climate targets, materials and ranges, packaging, circularity, sourcing, governance and customer information for both cases. On the other hand, the CMA documents supplied one common evaluative frame. Additional candidates were excluded when they duplicated a stronger primary source, lacked reproducible criteria or introduced unnecessary personal data. The final two independent sources were retained as they challenged corporate self-presentation with traceable methods or examples. Their advocacy role was recorded so that triangulation did not become false equivalence among sources with different purposes.

Table 4.2: Literature and evidence supporting the objective-linked themes

Themes	Key findings	Implications for the study	Sources
T1 Sustainability messages and channels (Objective 1)	ASOS connects corporate pillars with methods; Boohoo-related material spans historical product criteria and group strategy. Literature treats sustainability meanings and communication channels as context dependent.	Analyse claim scope and channel purpose together. A corporate brand page cannot represent the whole shopping journey.	Case: ASOS plc (2025a; 2025b); boohoo group plc (2022a). Literature: Henninger, Alevizou and Oates (2016); Morsing and Schultz (2006).
T2 Substantiation and transparency (Objective 2)	Definitions, baselines, certificates and qualifications improve assessability. Specific arguments supported trust in an experiment; brand credibility is associated with consideration and choice.	Distinguish an inspectable signal from verified environmental performance. Consumer-study results provide interpretation, not case-specific measured effects.	Case: ASOS plc (2025b); boohoo group plc (2022b). Literature: Atkinson and Rosenthal (2014); Erdem and Swait (2004).
T3 Progress and limitations (Objective 2)	ASOS reports N/A and delayed outcomes; group reporting acknowledges transition difficulties. Aspirational communication can support organisational change but also invites scrutiny of delivery.	Read candour alongside accountability. An admitted delay may improve openness while leaving the outcome incomplete.	Case: ASOS plc (2025a); boohoo group plc (2024a). Literature: Christensen, Morsing and Thyssen (2013); Lyon and Montgomery (2015).
T4 Certification and partnerships (Objective 2)	Standards, mass-balance systems and future partnerships have different evidential scope. Signalling literature distinguishes informative evidence from easily imitated claims.	Assess the activity covered, independence and timing. A planned partnership cannot validate completed performance.	Case: ASOS plc (2025b); Debenhams Group (2026a). Literature: Kirmani and Rao (2000); Parguel, Benoit-Moreau and Larceneux (2011).
T5 Trust and behaviour (Objective 3; informs Objective 4)	The documents provide possible credibility cues. Consumer studies link uncertainty and perceived inconsistency to trust, while fashion research identifies competing price and style priorities.	Discuss plausible trust and intention mechanisms, with actual behaviour unmeasured. Develop recommendations after considering competing explanations.	Case: ASOS plc (2025a); Debenhams Group (2026a). Literature: Chen and Chang (2013); Jung, Tian and Oh (2024); McNeill and Moore (2015).

Table 4.2 separates case findings from literature used to interpret them. The thematic sections answer the research questions through the objectives; the table does not treat published consumer samples as participants in this study.

4.3 Theme 1: Sustainability messages and communication channels

This theme contributes to tackling Objective 1 through the comparison between message content and the channels in which evidence is presented. ASOS's current Fashion with Integrity (FWI) architecture categorizes communication into Planet, Product and People. The 2024 revision is explicitly connected to regulatory development, business-model change and updated practice. Climate communication creates a distinction between the FY50 value-chain target, FY30 Scope 1,2 and selected Scope 3 targets. On the other hand, product communication handles several factors, such as materials, packaging, supplier circular-design training and circular business models (ASOS plc, 2025a; 2025b; 2026a). This structure had more impact on the visibility of benefit, organisational boundary and timeframe compared to a single broad sustainability statement.

Boohoo-related communication had a different temporal shape. The 2021-2022 READY FOR THE FUTURE record defined a minimum threshold of more than 20% stating better-material content and expected most qualifying garments to contain 50% or more. Importantly, the 2022 guidance restricted the strapline to garment composition in lieu of the whole product lifecycle and explained that Better Cotton operated through mass balance (boohoo group plc, 2021; 2022a). These were meaningful qualifications as they narrowed what the range could reasonably signal.

The available evidence is uneven across organisational levels. The corporate Boohoo brand page identifies the brand within a wider group and is not a sampled retail product page (Debenhams Group, 2026c). Its purpose cannot establish what information a shopper encounters at checkout. Within the available evidence, recent environmental communication is presented on Debenhams Group pages, which state that interim commitments apply while a new long-term ESG strategy is developed (Debenhams Group, 2025; 2026a). This is not evidence that Boohoo lacks sustainability activity. It is a finding that detailed historical product guidance, current group strategy and the consumer-facing brand page occupy separate locations and organisational levels.

Both cases use structured sustainability narratives, although a like-for-like comparison is not possible across every channel. ASOS currently offers a consolidated corporate reporting chain. At the same time, Boohoo evidence crosses historical range

guidance, boohoo group reporting and current Debenhams Group communication. This supports a comparison of reporting architecture. Uneven access to older Boohoo documents prevents a firm ranking of overall communication accessibility.

4.4 Theme 2: Substantiation and transparency of environmental claims

Addressing Objective 2, the strongest credibility-supporting pattern in the ASOS material proved to be the connection between quantified targets and their measurement boundaries. The FY50 net-zero target specifies a 90% absolute reduction from an FY22 baseline. The FY30 Scope 3 target states that it covers all Category 1a emissions. On the other hand, it covers only 12.9% of Category 4. The supplementary information defines accepted material standards, limits the materials target to ASOS own-brand clothing and excludes partner-brand and non-clothing products. It also discloses that product weight and composition depend on documented estimates and reports a sensitivity analysis (ASOS plc, 2025b). These details do not validate the environmental outcome. However, they increase diagnosticity by showing what is counted and what is excluded.

This pattern is complemented by progress reporting. ASOS reported 50% more sustainable materials in FY25 against a 45% target, following 34% in FY24 (ASOS plc, 2024; 2025a). SBTi validation, RE100 participation and named material standards provided external reference points. Sustainability Committee oversight supplied internal governance accountability (ASOS plc, 2026b). Their evidential value remained scope-specific. SBTi validation concerned stated emissions targets, and a material certification did not establish the impact of an entire garment or business.

Negative evidence within the same reporting chain prevented a simple high-credibility classification. The packaging target had a measurable threshold and named standards. Even though FY25 performance was not available as tracking and validation were under review. The materials result was numerically clear although its method included estimates and a separate mass-balance treatment for Better Cotton. Hence, credibility shifted according to claim episode. The source could be transparent about a limitation. The claimed outcome remained unassessable.

The Boohoo/group archive also contained specific substantiation features. The 2022 sustainability report described composition records, supply-chain maps, scope certificates and transaction certificates for selected recycled or organic fabrics. READY FOR THE FUTURE guidance made the 20% threshold and the mass-balance exception inspectable (boohoo group plc, 2022a; 2022b). The 2023 sustainability account extended

disclosure to emissions associated with consumers washing garments, acknowledging limited organisational control over this stage (boohoo group plc, 2023). Broader coverage can improve disclosure. However, it can make comparison with earlier figures more difficult.

Evidence visibility was dispersed across documents and reporting periods. The current Debenhams Group ESG page identifies Carbon Trust and Segura partnerships, but these describe work to develop a net-zero transition plan and extend supply-chain mapping rather than completed validation (Debenhams Group, 2026a). The responsible-sourcing page adds an operational accountability signal by committing to update the factory list at least every four months and linking to Open Supply Hub (Debenhams Group, 2026b). These signals improve traceability at group level but cannot be assigned automatically to an individual Boohoo product.

The CMA benchmark sharpened the cross-case interpretation. Its fashion guidance requires clear range thresholds, visible fibre percentages, accessible qualifications, substantiated comparisons and verifiable target strategies (CMA, 2024a). Both undertakings also establish processes for evidence, supplier checks, staff training and correction (CMA, 2024c; 2024d). These are evaluation criteria, not proof that either company's current communication complies with every requirement.

4.5 Theme 3: Accountability through progress and limitations

This theme develops Objective 2 through reported progress, adverse outcomes and changes to commitments. ASOS reported its packaging target as N/A due to the fact that tracking and validation of the 95% post-consumer recycled-content target were under review. Supplier circular-design training was reported on track, whereas the commitment covering resale, rental, takeback and repair was reported delayed. The supplementary target changelog also manifested revised wording and removal of a partner-brand target (ASOS plc, 2025a; 2025b). Recording these outcomes made the public record more accountable, although it also prevented an unqualified success narrative.

The Boohoo/group evidence disclosed a broader strategic transition. In 2024, the ESG Committee stated that decarbonisation progress was slower than desired. It also advised that transition efforts needed acceleration and that the 2021 targets would be refreshed where necessary. The report presented a revised Planet, People and Process framework and described a roadmap to reset SBTi targets and publish a transition plan (boohoo group plc, 2024a). The 2025 report and current ESG page then described

interim commitments while a renewed strategy was being developed (Debenhams Group, 2025; 2026a).

The transition did not remove all operational accountability. The group continued to publish responsible-sourcing information, connect its factory list to Open Supply Hub and describe further tier mapping. Earlier records also disclosed incomplete supplier environmental-module verification and expanded emissions coverage. These details supplied assessable evidence of reporting practice. However, they did not resolve whether historical product-range criteria remained prominent at a current Boohoo purchase point. As a consequence, the analysis coded operational group transparency and brand-level accessibility separately.

This candour is analytically important, although future plans cannot be coded as completed outcomes. The Carbon Trust relationship may become a stronger external credibility signal when the transition plan, targets, resources and progress are published. At the collection date, it indicated intended accountability. Similarly, a reported 34% reduction in the 2024 market-based carbon footprint was qualified by the report's attribution of much of that change to reduced material purchases and goods sold. The communication separated reported movement from a simple claim of operational decarbonisation.

Independent counterevidence reinforced the need for temporal caution. Changing Markets Foundation's 2021 product sweep assessed 4,028 products across 12 brands. According to its report, 59% of sampled green claims conflicted with the draft CMA guidance, including 89% of ASOS claims. Its 2022 campaign also criticised examples connected to ASOS and Boohoo (Changing Markets Foundation, 2021; 2022). These advocacy sources provide dated challenges to corporate self-presentation. However, they do not establish current practice, legal breach or a symmetrical case comparison. The CMA likewise states that the 2024 undertakings were voluntary and without admission, and that only a court can determine breach (CMA, 2024b).

4.6 Theme 4: The scope of certification and partnership claims

For Objective 2, both cases used third parties to make otherwise difficult-to-observe activity more assessable. ASOS referenced SBTi, RE100, textile standards and the Centre for Sustainable Fashion. Boohoo/group material referenced certification documents, Better Cotton, Carbon Trust, Segura and Open Supply Hub. These associations may function as credibility signals because they introduce criteria or expertise beyond self-description.

The analysis nevertheless found no basis for treating a logo, membership or partnership as blanket validation. Better Cotton's mass-balance model was explicitly not physically traceable to an individual product in the historical Boohoo guidance. ASOS similarly recorded Better Cotton separately from its tonnage method. Current Debenhams Group partnerships describe work still to be completed. The CMA guidance therefore provides an important boundary: the benefit and scope of an accreditation must be explained, including where a product's composition may not be affected (CMA, 2024a). Third-party signals were strongest when the validator, subject, scope and limitation appeared together.

4.7 Theme 5: Consumer trust and conditional behavioural implications

With regard to objective 3, the document findings failed to show if consumers trusted, purchased from or avoided either company. They identify communication conditions that Chapter 2 literature associates with those responses. A range of factors, such as specific thresholds, accessible methods, progress against baselines and candid exceptions can contribute to reducing information asymmetry and support source credibility (Erdem and Swait, 2004; Atkinson and Rosenthal, 2014). As a result, consistency between claim, evidence and disclosed progress may support trust, confidence and preference as possible approach tendencies.

Contrary to that, several factors such as dispersed evidence, changing targets, unexplained scheme scope or unresolved future commitments may increase interpretive effort. Greenwashing research manifest a connection between perceived inconsistency and confusion, risk, scepticism and weaker trust (Chen and Chang, 2013; Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla and Paladino, 2014). In the evidence reviewed, the principal risk was the distance between the communication encountered and the information needed to evaluate it. That distance was visible where a brand page, group strategy, historical range rule and current target were not connected in one assessable chain.

These implications remain conditional. Consumers may interpret the same candid delay as evidence of integrity or as evidence of inadequate progress. Price, style, availability, habit and perceived control may interrupt any movement from trust to purchase (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2010; McNeill and Moore, 2015). The findings therefore support a tentative credibility pathway. Objective 4 will be developed in Chapter 5 by evaluating how retailers could improve evidence proximity, progress reporting and qualification without assuming that these changes guarantee purchases.

4.8 Chapter summary

The findings show that green marketing credibility is constructed through the relationship between a claim and its boundary, evidence, method, progress and accessibility. Both cases contained credibility-supporting and credibility-limiting features. The retained ASOS material offered a consolidated evidence chain. Boohoo-related material crossed historical and group boundaries, while incomplete archival access limits the strength of this comparison. This is a communication finding, not an environmental ranking. Chapter 5 will interpret these patterns through signalling, attribution, trust and S-O-R theory and develop the implications for the research objectives.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter interprets the findings presented in Chapter 4 through the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 and addresses the research objectives along with their associated questions. Chapter 2 argued that green marketing credibility is not a property of a message alone. It represents an interpreted relationship among claim, evidence, context and accountability. For this reason, the discussion is organised around the integrated signalling, attribution and stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) framework. The three analytical propositions derived from that framework are evaluated against the comparative evidence. First, claims function as credible signals when benefit, boundary, evidence and accountability are visible. Second, interpretation depends on perceived motive as well as informational detail. Third, credible communication may support trust and approach-oriented behavioural tendencies. On the other hand, vague or weakly supported communication may support confusion, risk and scepticism, subject to the interruptions identified in the intention-behaviour literature. Throughout, the discussion preserves the boundary established in Chapters 1 and Chapter 3. The evidence deals with communication.

5.2 Sustainability messages and communication channels

The first research question asked how ASOS and Boohoo communicate sustainability messages and green marketing claims by using publicly available corporate and digital sources. According to the findings, both cases use structured sustainability narratives. However, the architecture of those narratives differs in ways that may prove to be important for credibility. ASOS organises communication through the Fashion with Integrity framework, linking a strategy page to annual reports and supplementary definitions. It categorizes climate targets, materials, packaging and circularity into distinct claim streams with visible boundaries. Boohoo-related communication crosses organisational levels and time periods. Historical READY FOR THE FUTURE range guidance and boohoo group plc sustainability reports. Current Debenhams Group ESG pages occupy separate locations with interim commitments stated. Meanwhile, a renewed strategy is developed.

Read against Chapter 2, this contrast illustrates the CSR communication literature's distinction between one-way information provision and the conditions for stakeholder dialogue (Morsing and Schultz, 2006). ASOS's consolidated reporting chain

approximates an assessable communication structure. A reader can move from claim to definition to progress figure within one organisational voice. The Boohoo record more closely resembles what Castello, Morsing and Schultz (2013) describe as polyphonic CSR communication, in which meaning is distributed across a network of organisational voices and historical documents. This offers a limited analogy: changes in group identity can separate current strategy from historical product guidance. However, fragmented corporate disclosure is not equivalent to stakeholder polyphony. Apart from that, the corporate Boohoo profile cannot establish what information a shopper encountered.

The findings also qualify the aspirational-talk perspective of Christensen, Morsing and Thyssen (2013), who argue that statements of future commitment can themselves be a form of responsible practice. The Debenhams Group material states interim commitments and partnerships whose validation work is incomplete. Chapter 4 coded these as intended as opposed to completed accountability. The discussion position is more symmetrical compared to either uncritical acceptance or greenwashing accusation. Aspirational statements can support credibility when their status as intentions is explicit, exactly like it was in the evidence reviewed. Although they cannot carry the same evidential weight as reported progress against a baseline. This directly refines Proposition 1, due to the fact that the visibility of a claim's boundary includes the temporal boundary between what has been done and what is merely planned.

The channel findings also answer the first question's concern with digital sources specifically. Chapter 1 noted that online fashion claims travel through product descriptions, filters, collection names and brand webpages as well as formal reports. The available evidence primarily supports assessment of corporate reporting. The Boohoo profile identifies a brand within a wider group. ASOS's reporting chain, on the other hand, requires movement from strategy to supplementary definitions. These records do not establish that consumer-facing channels were the least informative. The Green Claims Code and fashion guidance emphasise accessible qualifications (CMA, 2021; 2024a). Evidence proximity is a relevant improvement principle, although the weakest point in either retailer's customer journey was not tested.

5.3 Credibility, transparency, substantiation and accountability

The second research question asked how the two cases present credibility, transparency, substantiation and accountability. The findings provide the clearest support in the study for signalling theory. Spence (1973) argues that signals reduce information asymmetry when they are costly or difficult to fake. Kirmani and Rao (2000) add that signal strength

depends on the consequences of signal failure. The ASOS material supplied signal features of exactly this kind. For example, it provided quantified targets with stated baselines and scope boundaries and progress figures reported year on year. Additionally, it provided external validation named for specific targets and supplementary definitions disclosing estimation methods and exclusions. Critically, the signal value lay not in the positivity of the message but in its falsifiability. A target covering all Category 1a emissions but only 12.9% of Category 4 is narrower than an unqualified net-zero statement and more assessable as its coverage is specified (ASOS plc, 2025b).

This pattern evaluates Chapter 2's literature in two directions. It is consistent with Atkinson and Rosenthal's (2014) finding that argument specificity supports credibility. However, it complicates any simple equation between specificity and trustworthiness. The same ASOS record that disclosed estimation methods also reported a packaging target as not assessable due to the fact that tracking and validation were under review. It also recorded a materials result calculated using documented estimates and mass-balance treatment. As a result, specificity operated as transparency about limitation instead of as proof of performance. This supports the greenwashing literature's central caution (Delmas and Burbano, 2011; Lyon and Montgomery, 2015). It demonstrates that selective disclosure is not the only credibility issue. In the evidence reviewed, disclosure was often extensive, and the credibility challenge was actually the assessability of what was disclosed. That distinction is a contribution of the documentary approach, as experimental studies of single claims (for example, Schmuck, Matthes and Naderer, 2018) cannot observe how candour and weakness coexist within one reporting chain.

The accountability theme extends this argument. Both of the cases disclosed adverse or incomplete outcomes. These are as follows: delayed circular business-model commitments, a revised target changelog at ASOS, a stated need to accelerate decarbonisation and refresh 2021 targets for Boohoo. Attribution theory predicts that such candour is interpretively ambiguous (Forehand and Grier, 2003). A disclosed delay can be read as integrity or as inadequate progress. The findings explicitly preserved both readings. The accountability evidence makes Proposition 2 analytically useful. The same record permits competing interpretations of candour and shortfall. These are theoretical possibilities. The Changing Markets Foundation (2021; 2022) counterevidence sharpened this point, due to the fact that its dated product-sweep criticisms of both brands coexist in the public record with the companies' subsequent CMA undertakings and revised communication. This limited historical comparison places criticism beside

later reporting, complementing the survey perspective of Chen and Chang (2013). It does not establish a longitudinal causal account.

The certification findings can be utilized to answer a further part of RQ2. Utilization of third parties can be encountered in both cases. The analysis found no basis in order to describe membership or partnership to be blanket validation. This outcome is consistent with Parguel, Benoit-Moreau and Larceneux's (2011) finding, which shows independent sustainability ratings can affect corporate evaluations through motive attributions. The strongest third-party signals in the evidence reviewed named validator, subject, scope and limitation together. This is due to the fact that Better Cotton's mass-balance model was explicitly described to be not physically traceable to an individual product. This refines the signalling framework. An external reference is more assessable when its boundary is disclosed, which is precisely the requirement the CMA (2024a) fashion guidance codifies. The convergence of the academic signalling literature and the regulatory benchmark on this point is one of the study's clearest integrative findings.

The cross-case comparison must be made with the caution Chapter 4 recorded. Archival access to older Boohoo documents was incomplete and group-level evidence cannot be reassigned to the Boohoo brand. Within that limit, the comparison is still instructive as it separates two credibility strategies. ASOS's strategy was consolidation. It utilized one framework, one reporting chain and targets with changelogs. The group strategy around Boohoo was transition. Such as candid acknowledgement of slow decarbonisation, a refreshed framework, interim commitments and named partnerships whose work is unfinished. Neither strategy is inherently more credible in the terms of Chapter 2. Consolidation reduces interpretive effort although can conceal weakness behind orderliness. On the other hand, transition discloses weakness and still asks the reader to trust future intentions. Chapter 4 reported a group-level carbon reduction partly attributed to reduced material purchases and goods sold (boohoo group plc, 2024a), which illustrates why the critical-realist position of Chapter 3 is pertinent. The observable communication event and the underlying environmental reality are related although not identical. A credible account of the first does not verify the second.

Negative evidence played a constitutive role in these judgements instead of being treated as an exception. Multiple factors such as the packaging target reported as not assessable, the delayed circular business-model commitment, the removed partner-brand target and the incomplete supplier verification records each prevented an unqualified success narrative. In methodological terms this follows the trustworthiness requirement of attending to negative cases (Nowell et al. 2017). In theoretical terms it

demonstrates that credibility, as Chapter 2 defined it, is a property of the whole claim-evidence relationship as opposed to the strongest claim in the set. A single weakly substantiated episode does not destroy a credible record. However, it changes what the record can honestly claim. The analysis coded credibility episode by episode for exactly this reason.

5.4 Credibility, trust and behavioural implications

The third research question asked how green marketing credibility and consumer trust influence consumer behaviour in UK online retail fashion, based on secondary evidence. The honest answer depends on certain conditions which can be derived from the finding itself. Within the S-O-R logic of Chapter 2, the documents identify communication stimuli with credibility-supporting or credibility-limiting features. The literature supplies the organism-level mechanisms. These mechanisms are as follows: trust is built on perceived ability, benevolence and integrity (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995), green trust eroded by confusion and perceived risk (Chen and Chang, 2013), and scepticism triggered by perceived inconsistency (Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla and Paladino, 2014). What the documentary record adds is the identification of communication distance which could engage these mechanisms. Where a brand page, group strategy, historical range rule and current target are not connected in one assessable chain, the interpretive effort required of a reader may rise. This may increase the plausibility of confusion and scepticism instead of trust.

This is a more precise formulation than the general claim that greenwashing damages trust. The principal risk found in the evidence reviewed was not exaggerated positivity rather fragmentation. Evidence existed, although it was dispersed across documents, organisational levels and reporting periods. Applied to behaviour, the findings support a tentative credibility pathway in which evidence proximity, visible progress and disclosed qualification support the trust, confidence and preference which Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) link to loyalty outcomes. On the other hand, dispersed or unresolved communication may be consistent with scepticism and avoidance discussed in green trust research. The pathway remains interrupted by the factors the sustainable-fashion literature has established, such as price, style, availability, habit and perceived behavioural control (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2010; McNeill and Moore, 2015; Ajzen, 1991). The study's contribution is to locate the communication-dependent segment of that pathway without claiming that communication determines behaviour.

This restraint is required by White et al.'s (2019) SHIFT framework given the role of habit and social influence in sustainable consumption.

The trust findings can also be stated in terms of Chapter 2's definition of trust as confidence in reliable and integrity-based conduct (Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol, 2002). Cues relevant to perceived integrity are visible in a documentary record through consistency between what a company says, what it measures and what it reports when progress falls short. Ability and benevolence are harder to observe from public documents, which is why the study's trust claims are framed as conditions instead of outcomes. The consumer-trust literature reviewed in Chapter 2 (Mohr, Eroglu and Ellen, 1998; Li, Sun and Hu, 2022) identifies scepticism as a relevant disposition and response, without establishing that all environmentally aware consumers are persistently sceptical. The implication for this study is that communication must be designed for a sceptical reader. It also implies that the features that serve that reader, such as thresholds, methods, baselines, named limitations are the same features the signalling analysis identified as supportive of credibility.

5.5 Evaluation of the theoretical framework

Evaluated as an interpretive framework, the three perspectives were useful in different ways. Proposition 1 was consistent with the documented value of visible benefit, boundary, evidence and accountability, with interpretability qualifying their presence. Meanwhile, Proposition 2 helped explain why candour and shortfall permit competing motive attributions, as Forehand and Grier (2003) and Perez (2019) suggest. Proposition 3 remained a conditional pathway supported by the literature as opposed to a demonstrated relationship in these cases. None of the propositions was tested as a behavioural hypothesis. The framework's main limitation is that a simple S-O-R sequence underplays possible feedback between regulatory scrutiny, advocacy and corporate communication. The chronology is compatible with such feedback. However, this cannot establish that a particular criticism caused a subsequent change.

5.6 Implications for practice

For Objective 4, the findings imply that improving green marketing credibility is primarily a matter of evidence architecture instead of message volume. Retailers could improve public assessability from connecting a product-level claim to its criteria, method and progress in one accessible chain than from adding further commitments. Candid reporting of delays and revised targets should be retained as the analysis shows it

functions as an accountability signal even when it complicates the success narrative. Third-party schemes should be presented with their scope and limits attached. These implications are developed as recommendations in Chapter 6, with the caveat that none is claimed to guarantee behavioural change.

5.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has answered the three research questions by interpreting the findings through the framework of Chapter 2. It found that signalling theory explains the credibility value of falsifiable, bounded claims. It also encountered that attribution theory explains why candour remains interpretively open. In addition to that, it found that the behavioural implications of credibility are plausible but conditional and partly beyond the reach of communication. The next chapter draws the conclusions, states the contributions and limitations, and presents the recommendations.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the dissertation. It summarises the key findings against the research aim and objectives and states the academic, practical and methodological contributions. It presents recommendations for online fashion retailers, acknowledges the limitations of the study and identifies directions for future research. The aim was to evaluate how green marketing credibility and consumer trust influence consumer behaviour in the UK online retail fashion industry, using a secondary qualitative thematic comparison of ASOS and Boohoo's sustainability communications.

6.2 Summary of key findings

Objective 1: To analyse the main sustainability messages and green marketing claims communicated by ASOS and Boohoo through publicly available corporate and digital sources. This objective was addressed through the analysis of message content and channels. Both companies communicate through structured sustainability narratives as opposed to isolated claims, although their architectures differ. ASOS operates a consolidated Fashion with Integrity reporting chain linking strategy, targets, definitions and progress. On the other hand, Boohoo-related communication is distributed across historical range guidance, group sustainability reports and current Debenhams Group ESG pages. The retained evidence supports corporate-reporting assessment. It does not establish the quality of the full consumer-facing shopping journey.

Objective 2: To evaluate how credibility, transparency, substantiation and accountability are presented in ASOS and Boohoo's sustainability communications. This objective was addressed through the evaluation of credibility, transparency, substantiation and accountability. Credibility-supporting features were found in both cases. Quantified targets with stated baselines and scope boundaries, reported progress and named external validation. It also disclosed estimation methods and candid reporting of delays and unmet targets. Credibility-limiting features were also found in both. These limitations are as follows: evidence dispersed across documents and periods, targets not currently assessable, estimation-dependent results and partnerships whose validation work is incomplete. Credibility shifted according to claim episode rather than by company. The study deliberately does not produce an environmental ranking of the two retailers.

Objective 3: To analyse the influence of green marketing credibility and consumer trust on consumer behaviour in the UK online retail fashion industry. This objective was

addressed by interpreting the behavioural implications of these credibility patterns through the literature. The findings are consistent with a conditional credibility pathway. Bounded, evidenced and candidly qualified claims create conditions which the trust literature associates with confidence, preference and loyalty. Meanwhile, dispersed or unresolved communication creates conditions associated with confusion, perceived risk and scepticism. The pathway is interrupted by price, style, habit and perceived control. The documentary design cannot observe whether any consumer actually trusted, purchased or avoided. Objective 4 is fulfilled through the recommendations in Section 6.4.

Across the three questions, the chapter-level argument of the dissertation can be stated in one sentence, that is, green marketing credibility in UK online fashion is an assessability problem before it is a sincerity problem. The evidence did not show two companies making empty claims. Rather, it showed two companies whose claims varied in how completely a reader could trace them to boundaries, methods, progress and accountability. Where that trace was short and visible, as in ASOS's target definitions and progress reporting, the communication met the criteria that Chapter 2's literature and the CMA guidance associate with credibility. Where the trace crossed organisational levels and historical documents, as in much of the Boohoo-related record, the selected communication was harder to compare due to the uneven nature of archive access. Confusion, scepticism and behavioural responses emerge as possible implications instead of observed outcomes.

6.3 Contribution of the study

From an academic perspective, the study makes contribution by integrating application of signalling theory, attribution theory and the S-O-R model to a comparative body of public evidence, in response to the fragmentation gap identified in Chapter 2. The main conceptual finding it provides indicates that, green marketing credibility depends on the assessability of the claim-evidence relationship. It does not rely on the volume or positivity of sustainability language. Along with that, it stays candid about limitation functions as an accountability signal whose interpretation remains open. From a methodological point of view, the study demonstrates that a consumer-behaviour question can be investigated rigorously without primary data, if the distinction between communication evidence, interpretation and actual behaviour is preserved through clear links between sources and themes. The study determines in which case credibility is won and in which case it is lost.

The study also contributes by providing a worked example which demonstrates integration between regulatory and academic dimensions. From a regulatory context, the Green Claims Code and the CMA fashion guidance were used as evaluative criteria alongside signaling and attribution theory. The two frames converged. For instance, the academic prediction that bounded, falsifiable claims function as stronger signals matched the regulatory requirement that claims should be specific, qualified and substantiated. This convergence gives academic credibility concepts practical relevance for evaluating communication, without establishing legal compliance or the historical basis of the regulatory benchmark.

6.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are derived from the findings. They are directed at online fashion retailers seeking to strengthen green marketing credibility and consumer trust. They are communication recommendations. Not one of them is claimed to guarantee changes in purchasing behaviour.

1. **Retailers should build a single assessable evidence chain for every environmental claim.** A product or range claim should connect directly to its qualifying criteria, threshold, measurement method and latest progress figure where applicable. As a result, a consumer does not have to reconstruct the claim's basis across separate reports, pages and reporting periods.
2. **Targets should be published with their boundaries attached, such as baseline, scope inclusions, estimation methods and a visible changelog when wording or coverage changes.** Defined targets are more assessable in comparison with broad unqualified commitments.
3. **Adverse outcomes should be reported in the same chain as successes.** Delayed or unassessable targets disclosed with reasons functioned in this study as accountability signals. On the other hand, unexplained omission would reduce assessability.
4. **Third-party schemes, certifications and partnerships should always be presented with the validator, subject, scope and limitation stated together, including explicit explanation where mass-balance sourcing does not establish an individual product's physical composition.**

5. **Consumer-facing channels should be brought up to the standard of corporate reporting.** Filters, range names and product pages should present relevant qualifications prominently, with supporting links where appropriate under CMA guidance. Retailers should review these channels as this study did not test their full shopping journeys.
6. **Communication should be designed for a sceptical reader, as the literature identifies scepticism as a relevant influence on interpretation.**

When implementing these recommendations, retailers should treat credibility as a reporting-infrastructure investment. The analysis supports making claims capable of withstanding scrutiny by a motivated sceptic. For example, a regulator, an advocacy organisation or an informed customer.

Consistency over time should accompany implementation. As a result, an assessable evidence chain supports scrutiny beyond periodic relaunches of commitments.

6.5 Limitations

The study's limitations stem from its design. The source selection was purposive and limited to 26 public sources. As a result, it failed to represent the full communication output of either company. Archival access to some historical Boohoo documents was incomplete, resulting in limited symmetry of the comparison. It was handled by separating group-level and brand-level coding. Corporate sources indicate self-presentation. Aside from that, the two independent sources share one advocacy publisher. As a consequence, triangulation supplied challenge in lieu of neutral verification. Most importantly, the study did not measure consumer trust or behaviour. The behavioural claims it produces are conditional inferences from communication patterns interpreted through existing literature. The findings are also time-bound to the August 2026 evidence cutoff. In this timeline not only companies' strategies but also the regulatory environment manifested change.

Attention should be given to two different limitations. First, the coding was conducted by a single researcher. Dependability can be improved by several factors such as documented analysis, negative-case attention and clear links between sources and themes. In addition to that, an independently reviewed subset would have strengthened reliability claims. Second, the comparative design involved two purposively selected cases in one national market and one sector. Therefore, findings may emerge as

analytically generalisable. They transfer as a framework for evaluating claim-evidence relationships.

6.6 Future research

Future research should focus on testing the conditional credibility pathway directly through surveys or experiments. It will expose consumers to claim episodes which may fluctuate according to evidence, proximity, qualification and disclosed progress. Longitudinal documentary work could track how the CMA undertakings and the Debenhams Group transition plan reshape communication over time. It will deal with the recursive relationship between regulation, advocacy criticism and corporate claims. Comparative work could extend the framework beyond UK online fashion to other sectors and markets. For example, genuinely independent product-level evidence where it becomes available.

6.7 Conclusion

This dissertation set out to evaluate how green marketing credibility and consumer trust influence consumer behaviour in UK online retail fashion through the cases of ASOS and Boohoo. Its conclusion is that credibility is constructed, claim by claim, in the relationship between what is asserted and what a reader is enabled to check. Both corporate records contained documented substantiation and limitations. The difference between credible and fragile communication lay less in the positivity of the message compared to in the visibility of its boundaries, evidence, progress and accountability. For consumers, the literature suggests a possible trust-related pathway, constrained by the practical realities of fashion purchasing. This study did not measure that pathway. In the case of the retailers, the implication emerges as demanding and clear. The study implies that, in a regulated and sceptical market, the strongest green claim is the one that shows its workings.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Source Selection

candidate	case	source_role	title	publisher	date	decision	inclusion or exclusion reason
ASOS-01	ASOS	Corporate	Fashion with Integrity	ASOS plc	2026 webpage	include	Current strategy, definitions, targets and links to supporting information.
ASOS-02	ASOS	Corporate	Annual Report and Accounts 2025	ASOS plc	2025	include	Latest complete progress report with target status and quantified performance.
ASOS-03	ASOS	Corporate	FWI Supplementary Information	ASOS plc	2025	include	Definitions, target changelog, scope, methodology and sensitivity analysis.
ASOS-04	ASOS	Corporate	Annual Report and Accounts 2024	ASOS plc	2024	include	Strategy revision, materiality process and prior-year performance.
ASOS-05	ASOS	Corporate	Annual Report and Accounts 2023	ASOS plc	2023	include	Historical baseline and transition context for the revised strategy.
ASOS-06	ASOS	Corporate	Modern Slavery Statement 2025	ASOS plc	2025	include	Supply-chain accountability context; not treated as an environmental performance audit.
ASOS-07	ASOS	Corporate	Sustainability landing page	ASOS plc	2026 webpage	include	Customer-facing architecture linking Planet, Product and People.

ASOS-08	ASOS	Corporate	Our governance	ASOS plc	2026 webpage	include	Board and Sustainability Committee accountability structure.
BOO-01	Boohoo	Corporate	Boohoo brand page	Debenhams Group	2026 webpage	include	Corporate brand-profile page retained for organisational context; not evidence of missing product-page disclosure.
DG-01	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Annual Report 2026	Debenhams Group	2026	exclude_untraceable	The official file route was identified, but website verification prevented a reproducible full-text record during collection.
DG-02	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Annual Report 2025	Debenhams Group	2025	include	Explains the move from UP.FRONT to interim commitments and a renewed ESG strategy.
DG-03	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Annual Report and Financial Statements 2024	boohoo group plc	2024	include	ESG framework refresh, progress constraints, governance and target-reset context.
DG-04	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Sustainability Report 2023	boohoo group plc	2023	include	Materials, energy, supplier and disclosure progress before the reporting-framework refresh.
DG-05	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	READY FOR THE FUTURE Guidelines	boohoo group plc	2022	include	Product-range threshold, composition boundary and mass-balance qualification.
DG-06	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Sustainability Report 2022	boohoo group plc	2022	include	Product compliance process, sustainability hub and claim-communication principles.
DG-07	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Sustainability Report 2021	boohoo group plc	2021	include	Original UP.FRONT goals and product-range criteria within the evidence window.
DG-08	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	ESG Partnerships	Debenhams Group	2026 webpage	include	Current interim commitments and planned Carbon Trust and Segura work.

DG-09	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Responsible Sourcing	Debenhams Group	2026 webpage	include	Factory-list update commitment and Open Supply Hub link.
DG-10	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Modern Slavery Statement 2024	boohoo group plc	2024	include	Group supply-chain scale and due-diligence context; attribution retained at group level.
REG-01	Both cases	Regulatory	Green Claims Code	Competition and Markets Authority	2021	include	General UK criteria for truthful, clear, complete and substantiated environmental claims.
REG-02	Both cases	Regulatory	Fashion greenwashing investigation case page	Competition and Markets Authority	2022-2024	include	Case chronology and the exact regulatory concerns and outcomes.
REG-03	Both cases	Regulatory	Fashion retail green-claims guidance	Competition and Markets Authority	2024	include	Operational criteria for wording, qualifications, ranges, fabrics, targets and evidence.
REG-04	ASOS	Regulatory	ASOS Undertaking	Competition and Markets Authority	2024	include	Company-specific commitments; voluntary and without admission.
REG-05	Boohoo	Regulatory	Boohoo Undertaking	Competition and Markets Authority	2024	include	Company-specific commitments; voluntary and without admission.
REG-06	Both cases	Regulatory	Green claims: CMA secures changes from ASOS, Boohoo and Asda	Competition and Markets Authority	2024	include	Concise statement of the commitments and explicit no-admission boundary.
IND-01	Both cases	Independent advocacy	Synthetics Anonymous	Changing Markets Foundation	2021	include	Dated product-sweep counterevidence with disclosed sample and method; advocacy role retained.
IND-02	Both cases	Independent advocacy	Greenwash.com launch press release	Changing Markets Foundation	2022	include	Identifies case-linked examples and polling; used as contextual criticism, not adjudication.

EX-01	Both cases	Independent legal commentary	Green Claims Outlook 2025	TLT LLP	2025	exclude_duplicate	CMA primary guidance provides the applicable criteria more directly.
EX-02	Both cases	Independent index	Fashion Transparency Index 2023 data page	Fashion Revolution	2023	exclude_untraceable	Case scores could not be reproduced from an accessible stable table during collection.
EX-03	Both cases	Independent self-summary	Changing Markets Annual Report 2022	Changing Markets Foundation	2022	exclude_duplicate	Repeats the foundation's campaign claims without adding case-level evidence.
EX-04	Boohoo	Parliamentary context	Fixing Fashion follow-up correspondence	UK Parliament	2019-2022	exclude_irrelevant	Predominantly labour-governance context and partly outside the principal claim focus.
EX-05	Both cases	Public commentary	Personal social-media comments	Various	2020-2026	exclude_personal_data	Not needed to answer the research questions and outside the approved personal-data boundary.
EX-06	Both cases	Secondary ratings	Unverified commercial sustainability scores	Various	2020-2026	exclude_untraceable	Criteria or underlying case evidence were not sufficiently reproducible.

Appendix B: Source Matrix

source_id	case	role	title	date	URL	stable record	analytical use	limitation
ASOS-01	ASOS	Corporate	Fashion with Integrity	2026	https://www.asosplc.com/sustainability/fashion-with-integrity/	URL and access record	Current strategy, targets and definitions	Live page can change.
ASOS-02	ASOS	Corporate	Annual Report and Accounts 2025	2025	https://www.asosplc.com/media/buijobcn/49775_asos_ar25_text_int_031225-final.pdf	Local PDF and extracted text	Target status, quantified progress and exceptions	Organisational self-report; no external assurance over all ESG data.

ASOS-03	ASOS	Corporate	FWI Supplementary Information	2025	https://www.asosplc.com/media/yilhpiyk/fwi-supplementary-information.pdf	Local PDF and extracted text	Scope, methods, assumptions, target changes	Supporting methodology does not independently validate outcomes.
ASOS-04	ASOS	Corporate	Annual Report and Accounts 2024	2024	https://www.asosplc.com/media/xvajuhhu/asos_annual_report_2024.pdf	Local PDF and extracted text	Strategy revision and prior-year performance	Corporate reporting purpose.
ASOS-05	ASOS	Corporate	Annual Report and Accounts 2023	2023	https://www.asosplc.com/media/rzzoy3ys/asos_annual_report_2023.pdf	Local PDF and extracted text	Historical strategy context	Targets later revised.
ASOS-06	ASOS	Corporate	Modern Slavery Statement 2025	2025	https://www.asosplc.com/media/im2f3hik/modern-slavery-statement_oct-25_v6_rgb.pdf	Local PDF and extracted text	Supply-chain accountability context	Social due diligence is not environmental substantiation.
ASOS-07	ASOS	Corporate	Sustainability	2026	https://www.asosplc.com/sustainability/	URL and access record	Public-facing information architecture	Summary page contains limited evidence itself.
ASOS-08	ASOS	Corporate	Our governance	2026	https://www.asosplc.com/about-us/our-governance/	URL and access record	Oversight and accountability structure	Governance description does not establish implementation quality.
BOO-01	Boohoo	Corporate	Boohoo brand page	2026	https://www.debenhamsgroup.com/brands/boohoo/	URL and access record	Brand-level negative case	Absence on one page is not proof of absence elsewhere.
DG-02	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Annual Report 2025	2025	https://www.debenhamsgroup.com/files/results-centre/2025/debenhams-group-annual-report-2025.pdf	Indexed passages; complete local copy unavailable	Strategy renewal and interim commitments	Group-level; not a Boohoo product claim.
DG-03	Group including	Corporate	Annual Report and Financial	2024	https://www.boohooplc.com/sites/boohoo-corp/files/2024-05/boohoo-group-plc-annual-report-and-financial-statements-2024-v3.pdf	Indexed passages; complete local copy unavailable	ESG framework refresh, governance and decarbonisation constraints	Historical URL now redirects through website verification.

	Boohoo		Statements 2024					
DG-04	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Sustainability Report 2023	2023	https://www.boohooplc.com/sites/boohoo-corp/files/2023-06/boohoo-sustainability-report-jun-2023.pdf	Indexed passages; complete local copy unavailable	Progress and disclosed measurement limits	Corporate self-report; targets subsequently refreshed.
DG-05	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	READY FOR THE FUTURE Guidelines	2022	https://www.boohooplc.com/sites/boohoo-corp/files/all-documents/ready-for-the-future-guidelines-2022-v1.pdf	Indexed passages; complete local copy unavailable	Product threshold and lifecycle boundary	Historical guidance; later CMA undertaking changes the context.
DG-06	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Sustainability Report 2022	2022	https://www.boohooplc.com/sites/boohoo-corp/files/boohoo-sustainability-report-2022.pdf	Indexed passages; complete local copy unavailable	Compliance process and communication principles	Historical group-level evidence.
DG-07	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Sustainability Report 2021	2021	https://www.boohooplc.com/sites/boohoo-corp/files/boohoo-sustainability-report-2021.pdf	Indexed passages; complete local copy unavailable	Original strategy and range criteria	Historical; not current performance.
DG-08	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	ESG Partnerships	2026	https://www.debenhamsgroup.com/sustainability/esg-partnerships/	URL and access record	Current interim commitments and planned partnerships	Mostly forward-looking; outcomes not yet assessable.
DG-09	Group including Boohoo	Corporate	Responsible Sourcing	2026	https://www.debenhamsgroup.com/sustainability/responsible-sourcing/	URL and access record	Factory-list and Open Supply Hub accountability	Group supply chain, not Boohoo-only.
DG-10	Group including	Corporate	Modern Slavery Statement 2024	2024	https://www.debenhamsgroup.com/files/sustainability/downloads/boohoo-modern-slavery-statement-2024.pdf	Indexed passages; complete local copy unavailable	Supply-chain scale and due-diligence context	Primarily social rather than environmental disclosure.

	Boohoo							
REG-01	Both	Regulatory	Green Claims Code	2021	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-claims-code-making-environmental-claims-on-goods-and-services	URL and access record	General evaluation criteria	Guidance, not a case verdict.
REG-02	Both	Regulatory	Fashion greenwashing investigation	2022-2024	https://www.gov.uk/cma-cases/asos-boohoo-and-asda-greenwashing-investigation	URL and access record	Case chronology and concerns	Undertakings do not establish legal breach.
REG-03	Both	Regulatory	Fashion retail green-claims guidance	2024	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complying-with-consumer-law-when-making-environmental-claims-in-the-fashion-retail-sector/complying-with-consumer-law-when-making-environmental-claims-in-the-fashion-retail-sector	URL and access record	Wording, range, target and evidence criteria	Sector benchmark, not performance verification.
REG-04	ASOS	Regulatory	ASOS Undertaking	2024	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66016d3565ca2fc1fa7da7b6/ASOS_Undertaking_.pdf	Local PDF and extracted text	Case-specific commitments	Voluntary and without admission.
REG-05	Boohoo	Regulatory	Boohoo Undertaking	2024	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66016d47f1d3a065f132ad11/Boohoo_Undertaking_.pdf	Local PDF and extracted text	Case-specific commitments	Voluntary and without admission.
REG-06	Both	Regulatory	CMA secures changes from ASOS, Boohoo and Asda	2024	https://www.gov.uk/government/news/green-claims-cma-secures-landmark-changes-from-asos-boohoo-and-asda	URL and access record	Commitment summary and legal boundary	Press release summarises the undertakings.
IND-01	Both	Independent advocacy	Synthetics Anonymous	2021	https://changingmarkets.org/report/synthetics-anonymous-fashion-brands-addiction-to-fossil-fuels/	Web snapshot and access record	Dated counterevidence on products and claim quality	Advocacy source; 2021 sample cannot establish current practice.

IND-02	Both	Independent advocacy	Greenwash.com launch	2022	https://changingmarkets.org/press-releases/disrupting-london-fashion-week-changing-markets-foundation-launches-greenwash-com/	URL and access record	Case-linked criticism and survey context	Campaign press release; allegations are not treated as adjudicated facts.
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Appendix C: Claim Episodes

episode_id	source_id	case	claim family	bounded extract	page or location	qualification or scope	linked evidence	initial codes	RQ
ASOS-CE01	ASOS-01	ASOS	Strategy	FWI was revised in 2024 to reflect regulation, business change and current practice.	Our approach to sustainability	Strategy-level, not product performance.	Linked targets and supplementary information.	strategy_transition; accessibility	RQ1
ASOS-CE02	ASOS-01; ASOS-02	ASOS	Climate target	Net zero across the value chain by FY50 with a 90% absolute reduction from FY22.	FWI Planet; AR 2025, p.19	Long-term target; residual emissions below 10% addressed at FY50.	SBTi validation and baseline.	climate_or_target; specificity; external_validation	RQ1; RQ2
ASOS-CE03	ASOS-01; ASOS-02	ASOS	Operational emissions	Scope 1 and 2 emissions to fall 45% by FY30 and estate electricity to be 100% renewable by FY27.	FWI Planet; AR 2025, pp.19-20	Scope 1 and 2 are less than 1% of total emissions.	RE100 and annual performance.	scope_boundary; baseline_and_progress; external_validation	RQ2
ASOS-CE04	ASOS-03	ASOS	Value-chain emissions	Scope 3 purchased-goods and selected upstream transport emissions to fall 42% by FY30.	FWI Supplement, pp.4-5	Covers all Category 1a and 12.9% of Category 4; calculations use estimates.	Baseline values, target tonnage and method.	specificity; methodology_visibility; qualification	RQ2
ASOS-CE05	ASOS-02	ASOS	Climate progress	The report provides FY25 performance against FY22 for the	AR 2025, pp.27-29	Reported corporate data, not	Category table and year-on-year changes.	baseline_and_progress; quantified_progress	RQ2

				stated emissions categories.		independently verified here.			
ASOS-CE06	ASOS-03	ASOS	Materials	More sustainable materials are defined by relative raw-material impact, recognised standards and traceability.	FWI Supplement, pp.5-6	Applies to ASOS own-brand clothing; partner brands and non-clothing products excluded.	Accepted standards list and tonnage method.	material_or_product; definition; scope_boundary	RQ1; RQ2
ASOS-CE07	ASOS-02	ASOS	Materials progress	FY25 more-sustainable-materials performance was 50% against a 45% target.	AR 2025, p.30	Corporate tonnage measure with Better Cotton treated separately.	FWI Supplement methodology.	quantified_progress; substantiation	RQ2
ASOS-CE08	ASOS-03	ASOS	Measurement	Product weights and composition include documented estimates and assumptions tested through sensitivity analysis.	FWI Supplement, pp.5 and 9-10	Sensitivity analysis addresses measurement risk but is not external assurance.	Method definitions and sensitivity table.	methodology_visibility; limitation_disclosure	RQ2
ASOS-CE09	ASOS-02; ASOS-03	ASOS	Packaging	Plastic mailing and garment bags are targeted to contain at least 95% post-consumer recycled material by FY26.	AR 2025, p.31; FWI Supplement, p.6	FY25 status was N/A while tracking and validation were reviewed.	RCS, GRS or ISO 14021 criteria specified.	packaging; not_assessable; transparent_exception	RQ1; RQ2
ASOS-CE10	ASOS-02	ASOS	Circular design	Manufacturer training on ASOS Circular Design Strategies was reported on track.	AR 2025, p.31	Progress described through programme development and initial delivery.	Centre for Sustainable Fashion collaboration.	circularity_or_reuse; progress_reporting	RQ1; RQ2

ASOS-CE11	ASOS-02	ASOS	Circular models	Resale, rental, takeback and repair commitment was reported delayed.	AR 2025, p.31	Vintage and rental activity progressed more visibly than repair and takeback.	Named business-model categories.	circularity_or_reuse; negative_case; limitation_disclosure	RQ2
ASOS-CE12	ASOS-03	ASOS	Target governance	The target changelog records revised wording and removal of a partner-brand target.	FWI Supplement, p.3	Change is explained as part of SBTi validation; continued engagement is stated.	Previous and current versions shown together.	target_change_log; accountability	RQ2
ASOS-CE13	ASOS-04	ASOS	Strategy	The 2024 report describes a revised FWI strategy informed by impact materiality.	AR 2024, pp.18-19	Materiality identifies reporting priorities rather than proving outcomes.	Strategic priorities and revised targets.	strategy_transition; materiality	RQ1; RQ2
ASOS-CE14	ASOS-04	ASOS	Materials progress	FY24 more-sustainable-material use was reported at 34%, followed by a 45% FY25 target.	AR 2024, Product section	Historical comparator; definitions evolved with the strategy.	Subsequent FY25 result in ASOS-CE07.	baseline_and_progress; longitudinal_consistency	RQ2
ASOS-CE15	ASOS-08; ASOS-02	ASOS	Governance	Board oversight is supported by a Sustainability Committee and reporting responsibilities.	Governance webpage; AR 2025, governance section	Governance design does not by itself establish claim accuracy.	Committee responsibilities and annual reporting.	governance; accountability	RQ2
BOO-CE01	BOO-01	Boohoo	Brand communication	The corporate Boohoo page identifies brand positioning within the group; it is not a retail product page.	Boohoo brand webpage	Contextual observation, not an environmental assertion or a test of retail disclosure.	Compared with DG-08 and DG-09.	brand_group_separation; corporate_context	RQ1; RQ2

DG-CE01	DG-07	Group including Boohoo	Product range	READY FOR THE FUTURE initially applied at more than 20% stated better-material content; most garments were expected at 50% or more.	Sustainability Report 2021, p.12	Historical group-wide criterion, not current compliance evidence.	Published guideline link.	material_or_product; threshold	RQ1; RQ2
DG-CE02	DG-05	Group including Boohoo	Product range boundary	The strapline was explicitly limited to garment composition and not the product's full lifecycle.	RFTF Guidelines 2022, p.1	This qualification narrows the environmental meaning.	Product composition intended on product pages.	qualification; lifecycle_boundary	RQ2
DG-CE03	DG-05	Group including Boohoo	Accreditation	Better Cotton was excluded from physical product traceability because it used mass balance; a 50% cotton-content minimum was stated.	RFTF Guidelines 2022, pp.1-2	Scheme support does not prove that individual fibres came from the programme.	Guideline criteria.	mass_balance; qualification; external_validation	RQ2
DG-CE04	DG-06	Group including Boohoo	Product substantiation	The group reported weekly range tracking and certificates, composition data and supply-chain maps for selected recycled or organic fabrics.	Sustainability Report 2022, p.11	Process description is not a product-level audit in this study.	Scope and transaction certificates.	substantiation; internal_process	RQ2
DG-CE05	DG-06	Group including Boohoo	Customer information	The sustainability hub was presented as a place to explain terminology and	Sustainability Report 2022, p.34	Historical communication; accessibility at the point of sale	Reference to CMA Green Claims principles.	accessibility; customer_education	RQ1; RQ2

				garment-care information.		was not established.			
DG-CE06	DG-04	Group including Boohoo	Disclosure progress	The 2023 report disclosed renewable-electricity and supplier environmental-module activity, including that supplier module verification was 0% at that stage.	Sustainability Report 2023, opening progress summary	Group-level and historical; verification coverage limits interpretation.	Reported progress indicators.	quantified_progress; negative_case; verification_gap	RQ2
DG-CE07	DG-04	Group including Boohoo	Carbon methodology	The sustainability report introduces emissions from consumers washing garments and acknowledges limited control over this stage.	Sustainability Report 2023, concluding progress commentary	Expanded reporting coverage limits like-for-like comparisons with earlier disclosures.	Use-phase emissions disclosure; original carbon-modelling attribution withdrawn.	scope_boundary; reporting_coverage	RQ2
DG-CE08	DG-03	Group including Boohoo	ESG strategy	UP.FRONT was refreshed into Planet, People and Process pillars, with transparent reporting promised.	Annual Report 2024, p.64	First report under the new framework; 2021 targets were to be refreshed where necessary.	ESG governance chart and committee account.	strategy_transition; accountability	RQ1; RQ2
DG-CE09	DG-03	Group including Boohoo	Climate progress	The ESG Committee stated that decarbonisation was slower than desired and transition efforts needed acceleration.	Annual Report 2024, p.64	Candid limitation; no case-level consumer response follows from it.	Roadmap to reset SBTi targets and publish a transition plan.	limitation_disclosure; negative_case	RQ2

DG-CE10	DG-03	Group including Boohoo	Carbon progress	A 34% reduction in the market-based footprint was reported, largely reflecting fewer material purchases and goods sold.	Annual Report 2024, ESG report	Activity decline complicates interpretation as operational decarbonisation.	Scope 1-3 reporting.	quantified_progress; attribution_limit	RQ2
DG-CE11	DG-02; DG-08	Group including Boohoo	Strategy transition	Interim commitments were introduced while a new long-term ESG strategy was developed.	Annual Report 2025, p.65; ESG Partnerships webpage	Current long-term targets and completed outcomes remain partly pending.	Full strategy announced for later publication.	strategy_transition; future_commitment; not_assessable	RQ1; RQ2
DG-CE12	DG-08	Group including Boohoo	Net-zero planning	The Carbon Trust partnership is intended to develop a net-zero transition plan to 2050.	ESG Partnerships, Environment section	Future plan; collaboration does not yet validate a completed pathway.	Named external partner.	external_validation; future_commitment	RQ2
DG-CE13	DG-08; DG-09	Group including Boohoo	Supply-chain mapping	Segura is intended to extend mapping across tiers 1-3; the factory list is stated to update at least every four months.	ESG Partnerships; Responsible Sourcing	Group-wide mapping, not evidence of every Boohoo product.	Open Supply Hub link.	traceability; accountability; scope_boundary	RQ2
DG-CE14	DG-10	Group including Boohoo	Supply-chain disclosure	The 2024 statement reports a group manufacturing network of 921 factories across 18 countries.	Modern Slavery Statement 2024, supply-chain section	Social-risk disclosure; environmental conditions are not inferred.	Periodic factory-list publication.	supply_chain_scale; brand_group_separation	RQ1; RQ2

Appendix D: Findings

finding_id	theme	case	episode IDs	descriptive finding	credibility assessment	behavioural implication	counterevidence or limit	confidence
F4-01	T1 Bounded claim architecture	ASOS	ASOS-CE01-04; ASOS-CE06	Current FWI separates Planet, Product and People and links dated targets to scope and method information.	Defined boundaries improve public assessability.	May reduce information uncertainty.	Corporate architecture does not prove performance.	supported within available passages
F4-02	T1 Bounded claim architecture	Boohoo/group	DG-CE01-05; DG-CE11	Historical product guidance contains thresholds and lifecycle limits; current communication is organised around interim group commitments.	Specificity exists, but its location and date reduce current brand-level accessibility.	May create uneven confidence across channels.	BOO-CE01 is a page-level negative case only.	supported
F4-03	T2 Evidential visibility	ASOS	ASOS-CE02-08	Current targets include baselines, scope, progress, standards, estimates and sensitivity notes.	Multiple linked evidence types strengthen diagnosticity.	May support reassurance where consumers can access the chain.	Most ESG data are not externally assured in full.	supported within available passages
F4-04	T2 Evidential visibility	Boohoo/group	DG-CE01-07	Thresholds, certificates and measurement assumptions are visible across historical reports.	Evidence is inspectable but dispersed and affected by methodological revision.	Search cost and comparability limits may sustain uncertainty.	Historical records cannot establish current product compliance.	supported
F4-05	T3 Progress candour	ASOS	ASOS-CE09-12	N/A, delayed, on-track and changed-target outcomes are reported.	Adverse-status disclosure strengthens accountability while limiting positive inference.	Candour may support integrity perceptions.	Delivery remains incomplete for packaging tracking and circular models.	supported within available passages

F4-06	T3 Progress candour	Boohoo/group	DG-CE08-12	Slower decarbonisation, target reset, interim commitments and planned transition work are acknowledged.	Candour is visible, but current long-term substantiation is partly prospective.	Transition language may produce reassurance or scepticism depending on perceived congruence.	Future plans are not completed outcomes.	supported within available passages
F4-07	T4 Third-party signals	Both	ASOS-CE02-03; ASOS-CE06; DG-CE03-04; DG-CE12-13	Both records reference external standards, initiatives or specialist partners.	Named scope improves credibility; unbounded association does not.	May act as a trust cue when meaning is explained.	Mass balance and planned partnerships limit product-level inference.	supported within available passages
F4-08	T4 Regulatory alignment	Both	CTX-01-06 and all corporate episodes	Post-2024 CMA criteria emphasise prominent thresholds, evidence, target strategy and claim controls.	The criteria make evaluation more systematic.	Clearer information may support more confident choice.	Undertakings were voluntary and without admission; no legal breach is inferred.	supported within available passages
F4-09	T5 Accessibility and congruence	ASOS	ASOS-CE01; ASOS-CE06-12	Linked methods and mixed-status reporting create a more continuous evidence chain.	Consistency between claim, method and progress can support credibility.	May support trust, preference or loyalty as tendencies.	No consumer response or sales data.	supported
F4-10	T5 Accessibility and congruence	Boohoo/group	BOO-CE01; DG-CE08-13	Corporate brand and group records have different purposes; retail product-page adjacency was not tested.	Retail assessability is not established by a corporate profile.	Consumer responses to this page are not assessable.	Group pages remain publicly accessible; absence on one page is not total absence.	qualified
F4-11	T5 External counter-context	Both	CTX-07-08	Independent advocacy sources identify dated criticisms and a	Counterevidence prevents corporate self-report from standing alone.	Prior criticism may shape attribution and scepticism.	Advocacy purpose, 2021-2022 date and incomplete case symmetry restrict current inference.	qualified

				product-sweep pattern.				
F4-12	Cross-case conclusion	Both	CC-01-05	Retained ASOS evidence is consolidated; uneven access and historical/group boundaries qualify the comparative interpretation.	Difference concerns public assessability, not total sustainability performance.	Credibility conditions differ, but actual behaviour remains unmeasured.	Different reporting stages prohibit a league-table ranking.	supported within available passages