2015

Exploring Consumers' Experiences with Corporate Greenwashing

Mark Emerson Wood
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Mark Wood

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. David Gould, Committee Chairperson, Management Faculty
Dr. Karla Phlypo, Committee Member, Management Faculty
Dr. Kenneth Sherman, University Reviewer, Management Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2015

Abstract

Exploring Consumers' Experiences with Corporate Greenwashing

by

Mark Emerson Wood, Jr.

MS, American Military University, 2010

BS, American Military University, 2007

AA, Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

May 2015

Abstract

Greenwashing means the advertisement of goods and services that are alleged to be of benefit to the environment, and is a phenomenon that persists as an advertising tactic in corporate marketing. Research has found that consumers are distrustful of greenwashing, as many claims of eco-friendly products have been shown to be false. This crisis of confidence recalls scandals of the past decade related to insider trading, price fixing, and lack of corporate social responsibility placing the brand equity of major corporations at risk. Given a limited understanding among corporate leaders of consumers' experiences with greenwashing, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe the essence of these experiences. Research questions explored the phenomenon of greenwashing, informed by stakeholder theory, social identity theory, consumer culture theory, and the theory of corporate social responsibility. Interview questions were distributed to a purposeful, convenience sample of 20 research participants at a U.S. Military base in Germany. Interview data were collected via e-mail, transcribed, coded using open techniques, and analyzed to identify themes or patterns. Key themes included feelings of distrust in green advertising, indifference (business as usual), betrayal, and concern for the environment. Consumers also expressed a conscious awareness that educating themselves and exercising prudence when purchasing such goods and services is the best defense against greenwashing. The findings underscored the need for theorists of consumer culture and social identity to make trust a central topic when discussing consumers' identification with brands and products. The findings of this study may contribute to positive social change by educating consumers about greenwashing, which could help empower them to demand better environmental conduct from corporations.

Exploring Consumers' Experiences with Corporate Greenwashing

by

Mark Emerson Wood Jr.

MS, American Military University, 2010

BS, American Military University, 2007

AA, Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

May 2015

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my family, who stuck by me during the entire process and never once complained about all of my time hidden in the office doing homework. I recognize that without their support and encouragement, this accomplishment would have not been possible. To my wife, Christina, I am appreciative of your critical thinking ability. You helped me talk through some of the issues, especially when I knew what I wanted to say but could not find the right words. This achievement is for us.

Acknowledgments

I would like to recognize Dr. Nirenberg for helping me realize this research project. Although he was required, due to his promotion, to remove himself as my dissertation chair shortly after assisting me in acquiring an approved prospectus, it is this foundation upon which the rest of the project was built.

Dr. David Gould- you are a God-send in that you were extremely gracious in your willingness to assume duties as my chair and content expert. I appreciate how you made the process fun, in spite of the many hours of toiling and the associated sweat and tears (thankfully, no blood).

Dr. Karla Phylpo- I cannot thank you enough for agreeing to be one of my committee members, after the project had already started and after my proposal had already been reviewed once by the URR. Your kindness and your methodological expertise were instrumental in my success—I hope to one day be able to either return the favor or pay it forward.

Dr. Kenneth Sherman- thank you for your efforts in 'keeping me honest,' as it were. I have no doubts that with your assistance, I created a quality product of which I can be, and am, proud of.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In an ever-changing, competitive market, corporations must stay abreast of the latest trends and technological advancements if they are to survive (Ericsson, 2011; Gaile-Sarkane, 2010; Stanciu, Daniasa, Tomita, & Stuparu, 2011). Not as much an issue of choice in regards to maintaining relevancy and competitiveness, corporations forced, within global market constructs, to continually revise their products and subsequent marketing strategies (Gaile-Sarkane, 2010). As advancements in technology make it easier for corporations to communicate their intentions on a larger, global scale, thanks in part to the Internet, more consumers can be reached (Stanciu et al., 2011). Advertising is a method of communicating relevancy within the market, especially on a global scale. Global marketing not only benefits the corporation, that is, advertising its goods and services, global marketing also benefits consumers who may not otherwise have known about these goods and services nor had the option to purchase them (Srivastava & Nandan, 2010). As trends shift—and as consumers desire, if not demand, new and improved products—especially those that are a part of the green market—corporations need to be able to reach all consumer bases in order to maximize both the supply of and demand for those products (Gaile-Sarkane, 2010; Stanciu et al., 2011).

There are corporations, which engage in advertising techniques that mislead consumers into believing that their goods and services are better for the environment than they truly are. This practice is known as *greenwashing*. The main reason corporations engage in greenwashing is a lack of governmental oversight (Alves, 2011) and because it

is faster and cheaper to advertise legitimacy within the green market than it is to actually produce the green goods and services (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Furlow, 2010). The reasons that corporations engage in greenwashing is explored in detail in Chapter 2. In this chapter, the following topics were covered: background of the study, problem statement, purpose statement, the research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, definitions, the significance of the study, and the implications for social change.

Background of the Study

The literature reflects a growing tendency of corporations to engage in greenwashing, or the misrepresentation of being engaged in environmentally friendly practices (Furlow, 2010; Mitchell & Ramsey, 2011; Parguel, Benoit-Moreau, & Larceneux, 2011). Unscrupulous corporate conduct gives rise to consumer cynicism (Dilling, 2011; Rizkallah, 2012). At the same time, consumer conscientiousness about greenwashing is growing; the fact that consumers are less susceptible to corporate deception is a step in the right direction. (Dilling, 2011; Rizkallah, 2012). There is a need to understand the extent to which corporations advertising legitimately green goods and services are being afflicted by the greenwashing practices of other corporations. If greenwashing corporations are allowed to damage the reputation of the green market, thereby impeding the ability of legitimate corporations to sell goods and services that are genuinely beneficial to the environment, multiple stakeholders will be harmed (Furlow, 2010). Whereas the literature on the nature of greenwashing is large, literature that provides a deep and rich understanding of consumers' lived experiences with

greenwashing is limited. Descriptions of consumers' perceptions of corporate greenwashing and changes in consumer behavior associated with greenwashing are almost exclusively limited to those acquired via quantitative research methodologies. The lack of a deeper understanding of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing, and the meanings subsequently ascribed to those experiences, may help explain why greenwashing persists (Walker & Wan, 2012).

Although there is of a large body of literature on management theory and methods, there are but two primary theories that seek to link ethics and morals with business conduct: corporate social responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder theory. Although it has been argued that corporations owe nothing but profit maximization to their shareholders (Bakan, 2004), supporters of CSR and stakeholder theory present arguments for the ethical and moral achievement of not only profits, but also of social and environmental objectives (which have been ignored historically by corporations). These arguments are presented in support of the notion that shareholders are not the only stakeholders to whom corporations have a responsibility. They are presented in advocacy of the other stakeholders, both primary and secondary, which are affected by the manner in which corporations conduct business. Although profit maximization is the primary focus of the corporation, researchers supporting arguments based on complex systems theory (Meadows, 2008) and achieving the triple-bottom-line (Mish & Scammon, 2010), supporters of CSR and stakeholder theory vehemently argue that profits should not be the *only* focus of the corporation. They, as well as other proponents of CSR and stakeholder

theory, contend that corporations should also work to attain social and environmental objectives, which is the basis of Mish and Scammon's (2010) triple-bottom-line concept.

Contemporary examples of greenwashing underscore the propensity for corporations to engage in advertising practices that mislead consumers. One of the largest corporations in the world is McDonalds®, and it recently attempted to communicate the green nature of its goods and services by changing the red color in their logo to green. Although McDonalds has made some changes to the way in which they conduct business, namely, finding a way to convert used oil to biodiesel and developing an environmentally friendly manner of refrigeration, they are still engaged in many more practices that are not environmentally friendly (Cowan & Matusitz, 2011). Unwitting consumers may misconstrue McDonalds' green advertising and the extent to which they engage in green practices, which could lead to an increase in sales (possibly reducing the sales of other corporations) that further contributes to environmental damage. While some instances of corporate greenwashing may not be entirely advertent, greenwashing as the result of corporate ignorance to what it means to be green results in environmental damage just the same. The conclusions and findings of this study may contribute to positive social change by educating individuals about greenwashing, which could help empower them to take some actions as consumers, such as demanding better environmental conduct from corporations.

Problem Statement

The general problem is that greenwashing is contributing to a loss of consumer confidence in green-labeled products, which harms well-meaning corporations as well as

causing consumers to use products that are bad for the environment (Parguel et al., 2011).

Greenwashing can have profound effects on a corporation, especially when

environmentally friendly claims are proven false (Furlow, 2010). Perhaps of more

significance to society are the effects that greenwashing has on consumer confidence in

green labeling, on consumers not already practicing environmentally responsible

measures, and on the propensity for consumers to engage in these practices at all. The

significance of this issue is the effect greenwashing could have on consumer cooperation

in the collaborative process of reducing environmental harm and pollution. Consumers'

perceptions could harm legitimately green corporations, their employees, and the number

and availability of environmentally sustainable products that are actually doing what they

are designed and advertised to do (Mitchell & Ramey, 2011).

The specific problem is the adversity consumers face due to limited research that

uncovers the deeper meanings associated with consumers' lived experiences of

greenwashing. By researching the extent to which consumers' lived experiences of

greenwashing and their resultant beliefs and actions, the results of the study may help

describe how consumers can eliminate corporate greenwashing practices. The implication

for positive social change is the reduction of such corporate behavior in the marketplace.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative empirical phenomenological study was to explore

and describe consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing. By developing

a deeper understanding of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing, the richness

of the individual experiences may help generate a socially constructed meaning of the

phenomenon. By describing the essence of consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing, I sought to discover new meanings related to the phenomenon. If new meanings can be derived by exploring consumers' experiences with the phenomenon, then significance of the study may lie in how consumers could influence corporate marketing strategies.

Research Questions

The following research questions for shaping and focusing this study were as follows.

RQ1: What does the concept of greenwashing mean to consumers?

RQ2: What is the essence of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing?

RQ3: How do consumers describe their purchasing behaviors with greenwashing?

The questionnaire (see Appendix B) included a set of interview questions that were derived from the three research questions. Interview Questions 9 and 12 derived from Research Question 1. Interview questions 4, 5, 8, and 10 derived from Research Question 2. Interview questions 6, 7, and 11 derived from Research Question 3.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was developed by combining the tenets and concepts of corporate social responsibility (DeWitt & Dahlin, 2009; Mish & Scammon, 2010), stakeholder theory (Boccia & Sarno, 2012; Mainardes, Alves, & Raposo, 2011; Mitchell & Ramey, 2011; Parmar et al., 2010), social identity theory (Bartels & Hoogendam, 2011; Dimitriadis & Papista, 2011; Hong & Yang, 2009; Korschun, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2009; Marin, Ruiz, & Rubio, 2009), consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson,

2005; Dominici, Basile, & Palumbo, 2013), and phenomenological research methodology

(Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). With respect to these theories, the

focus of this study related to the corporate marketing strategy known as greenwashing

and how this practice, at least in theory, appears to contradict the expected behaviors of a

corporation looking to establish relationships with its consumers. Westervelt (1986) first

coined the term green*washing*, referring to corporate misrepresentation of being engaged

in eco-and environmentally friendly practices (Furlow, 2010; Mitchell & Ramsey, 2011;

Parguel, Benoit-Moreau, & Larceneux, 2011).

Although the corporation primarily exists for the purpose of maximizing profits

for the benefit of its shareholders (Bakan, 2004), there are arguments presented in the

discussions of corporate social responsibility (CSR), stakeholder theory, and, to some

degree, social identity theory, that support a requirement of corporations to also focus on

the ethical and moral treatment of all of their stakeholders. The only stakeholders are the

consumers, but the overarching principles of these theories may be applicable to other

stakeholders as well.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen for this research because it

was determined that it is the most appropriate for exploring the essence of consumers'

lived experiences with corporate greenwashing (Creswell, 2009). In order to better

understand consumers' experiences, the phenomenological approach was originally

designed as empirical or strictly descriptive of participants' experiences rather than

hermeneutical or interpretive (Giorgi, 1985). By implementing an empirical research

design, I used participant responses alone to describe how the participants experienced

greenwashing (Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). By eliminating researcher intuition and

bias, as may have been the result of using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, I

was able to ensure richer, deeper, more accurate meanings in experiences, which may

have otherwise been hampered by the need for the data to make sense. I expected to be

able to acquire a deeper, richer description of the phenomenon by using a questionnaire

with open-ended questions, through which the research participants were able to present

their lived experiences (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

     In order to make sense out of participants' responses, I began the content analysis

process by using open coding to categorize data I collected (Janesick, 2011; Maxwell,

2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Open coding involved a process of

reviewing the collected data and allowing the themes to emerge naturally, without

predesignating a set of themes, and I was able to develop categories around the data that

were pertinent to this study (Maxwell, 2013). The development of the categories of

codes, or themes, began with the first reading of the data (Patton, 2002). Once the

categories of codes were determined, I reread the data with the specific purpose of coding

within the data itself, having highlighted or otherwise annotated the data. Because I hand-

coded all of the data I collected, I used highlighting and took notes within the margins of

my transcripts as part of my sense-making process. I engaged in a data reduction process

that helped me focus only on the data that was relevant to the research questions (Miles &

Huberman, 1994).

Definition of Terms

The following definitions pertained to terms used within this study.

Global marketing: commercial activities conducted on a worldwide scale (Stanciu, Daniasa, Tomita, & Stuparu, 2011).

Greenwashing: an advertising technique that misleads consumers into thinking that the products or services of a corporation are better for the environment than they actually are (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

Lived experience: accounts, experiences, and perceptions of an event acquired through having personally experienced a particular phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

Marketing strategy: the plan that a corporation executes when committing its resources for increasing sales and, subsequently, profits (Mish & Scammon, 2010).

Social identity: the manner in which one identifies oneself within a social construct (Bartels & Hoogendam, 2011).

Social responsibility: the obligation to act or conduct oneself in a manner that is of benefit to society (Boccia & Sarno, 2012).

Assumptions

There were three assumptions associated with this research project. First, I assumed that consumers would be familiar with greenwashing, which precipitated my use of purposive snowball sampling. Because I was able to assure that participant responses and identities remained confidential, my second assumption was that participants would be willing to communicate their honest understandings of the phenomenon. Because I used the purposive sampling technique to identify my research participants, the third

assumption was that I would be able to maximize the quality of the data I collected and the quality of the data analysis, leading to a greater sense of confidence in my conclusions and findings.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this qualitative research project was delimited to a relatively small sample of consumers, American citizens living in a small military community in Germany. Issues regarding the potential transferability of the results of this research project were the relatively small sample size and specificity of research participant qualifications. The ability to apply the results of this research project to other contexts, which seemed to be how transferability was determined (Patton, 2002), is better assessed by other researchers who will make the determination of whether the results of my project can be applied to the contexts of their own projects. However, the study was not delimited to a particular industry or type of good or service. Instead, I opted to generalize consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing, which I thought would counter the delimitation that the research participants were from a limited population of American citizens living in Germany. See Chapter 3 for additional discussion of the selection of the research method and design and issues of trustworthiness.

Limitations

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, which focused on only a small sample of consumers, a major limitation to this study was its lack of transferability to an entire population of stakeholders. I chose a nonrandom, purposive sampling technique as a result of the limited access to American research participants. Another limitation of this

study was the possibility that participant responses would not be accurately provided, which may have resulted from a lack of true understanding of the phenomenon known as greenwashing. To ensure accuracy in reporting, I was prepared to use the member checking technique to ensure my bias as a researcher did not negatively affect the credibility and confirmability of the results. I decided not to use member checking, however, because I determined that the participants' responses were not ambiguous. Not using member checking as a method of ensuring the credibility and dependability represents another limitation of this study.

Significance of the Study

Significance to Theory

Greenwashing, as a marketing strategy, is arguably unethical and immoral, yet it remains a corporate tactic in misleading consumers to buy and use goods and services (Furlow, 2010; Parguel et al., 2011; Srivastava & Nandan, 2010). In order to understand how greenwashing persists as a corporate marketing strategy, a deeper understanding regarding the essence of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing was needed, which would include any possible changes in consumers' purchasing behaviors. I explored and described (a) the essence of consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing, (b) what the concept of greenwashing meant to the participants, and (c) the potential changes in their behaviors that were associated with greenwashing. In doing so, I contributed to a limited body of knowledge regarding corporate greenwashing and the common experiences of people with it, especially as it pertains to informing theories such as social identity theory, consumer culture theory, and stakeholder theory. This

contribution may be used to inform business and management theory, especially as it pertains to the treatment of stakeholders, namely consumers.

Significance to Practice

Working under the assumption that theory predicates practice, I anticipated that the manners in which the conclusions and findings of this research could be of significance to theory and how they could be applicable to the significance to the practice. By describing consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing, I added to the existing, yet limited, body of knowledge, which could inform practitioners' decision-making processes. Corporations could tailor their messaging and logistics for green advertising by understanding the socially constructed meanings as ascribed by consumers.

Significance to Social Change

I foresaw documenting the conclusions and findings of this research being of significance to social change via the increase in awareness that consumers may experience, which may help them to make better-informed decisions. In order for there to be any type of consumer advocacy, which is another contribution to positive social change that might stem from the conclusions and findings of this research project, there needs to be a manner of holding corporations accountable for their actions. Without rules, regulations, or laws to govern corporate behavior, consumer grievances will not be appropriately addressed. Researchers suggested that if consumers are able to trust the green market, legitimately green corporations producing and providing legitimately green goods and services will be able to thrive (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014; Castaldo et al.,

2009; Chen, 2010; Greenwood & Buren III, 2010). The result of corporations' success means more green goods and services being used, which ultimately achieves a reduction, if not in some instances a cessation, in damage being done to the environment. These corporations are operating within the scope of their respective business constructs to achieve their economic bottom lines (profits) while simultaneously working to achieve the other two bottom lines, which are social and environmental objectives.

Summary

In this chapter, I explain how I plan to explore and describe consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing and subsequent purchasing behaviors. The results of this study may be sufficient to add to the existing, yet limited, body of knowledge, which could inform practitioners' decision-making processes. At the very least, I should be able to provide recommendations regarding how consumers may influence future marketing strategies.

Chapter 2, the literature review, highlights the phenomenon of greenwashing, consumer intentions and purchasing behaviors as they relate to social identity theory, and corporate social responsibility and stakeholder theory. Chapter 3 covers the research methodology, Chapter 4 consists of a discussion of the findings of this study, and Chapter 5 consists of a discussion of the interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, and implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this empirical phenomenological study was to explore and describe consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing. The purpose of this chapter, the literature review, was to analyze, interpret, and synthesize a body of published literature on the phenomenon of greenwashing and to determine a conceptual framework for my research topic. The work selected sought to explain how consumers' experiences are predicated on corporate conduct. Developing a clearer picture of how corporations regard consumers revealed the need for a deeper understanding of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing. The identification of the gap in literature helped focus this study and justify the selection of research questions. The extant qualitative research on consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing lacked depth and breadth.

This chapter starts with the conceptual framework, on which this research project was organized and through which the problem was described. The literature review follows and covers the following topics: why greenwashing persists, short-term profits, effects of greenwashing, morality of business, making value judgments, and trust relationships.

Search Strategy

The following databases were used to identify peer-reviewed articles: Business Source Complete/Premier, ABI/Inform Complete, and Emerald Management Journals. By searching all of these databases, I determined that I had found all of the articles I could use before the searches became redundant. The following keywords were used:

consumer culture theory, *consumer perception, consumer trust, corporate communication, corporate social responsibility, greenwashing*, *green labeling, green marketing, marketing communications, social identify theory, stakeholder, stakeholder theory,* and *triple bottom line.* Narrowing the results to the last 5 years yielded 90 relevant articles.

<div align="center">**Conceptual Framework**</div>

Socially Responsible Behavior

Social responsibility is a concept that increasingly resonates with consumer expectations (Wilson, Robinson, & Darke, 2010). Wilson et al. reported that as the result of a survey conducted in 2004, "86% of Americans surveyed indicated that they would switch brands, assuming equivalent quality and price, to one supporting a cause" (p. 931). With an increased interest in business ethics, consumers are becoming more concerned with corporate conduct than ever before (Nieto, 2009). Nieto reported that according to statistics compiled from monitoring key terms used when using the Google™ search engine, "on a monthly average, 2.24 million people search the term *ethics*, 165,000 search for *sweatshop*, 6.12 million search for *organic*, and 301,000 for *child labor*" (p. 29). Because these numbers represent monthly averages for rates that these terms were searched for, it seems relatively evident that ethical business conduct is at the forefront for many people. Singh, Iglesias, and Batista-Foguet (2012) reported the findings of a European study, conducted in 2001, which discovered that "70% of consumers surveyed mentioned that social responsibility was important to them when it comes to choosing a product or a service, with 37% of those surveyed indicating they had purchased an

ethically-labeled product within the past three years" (p. 541). The commitment to causes, fair treatment of employees, and, subsequently, to socially responsible behavior, seems to be what endears consumers to corporations.

Stanaland, Lwin, and Murphy (2011) posited that consumers feel more loyal to and trust corporations more when the corporations are committed to taking socially responsible actions. As consumers continue to become educated about corporate advertising practices and about the difference between communicating corporate social responsibility and actually practicing it, the less likely that marketing strategies such as greenwashing will persist (Chitakornkijsil, 2012b). Ultimately, corporations may attempt to communicate their commitment to social responsibility and advertise goods and services that are alleged to help them achieve those objectives, but consumers' experiences with the goods and services and their eventual assessment of a corporation's adherence to socially responsible practices is what will matter the most (Nieto, 2009). The research seems to support the notion that corporate social responsibility will no longer be solely a corporately professed brand—it will need to be validated by consumers and other stakeholders. With the requirement to engage in socially responsible behavior by changing, social norms, corporations may as well make social responsibility a mutually beneficial venture. Rivoli and Waddock (2011) posited that social responsibility is not just about what the actions that corporations take but that it is also, and more importantly, about the relationships the corporations establish with their multiple stakeholders.

Corporate social responsibility, or CSR, encapsulates a corporation's efforts in ensuring that while in the pursuit of profits (for shareholders), it is ensuring that it is not inflicting undue burden or harm unto the remaining stakeholders, such as consumers and the environment (DeWitt & Dahlin, 2009; Mish & Scammon, 2010). CSR, as a theory applied to business and management, is a concept introduced in 1953 (Castaldo et al., 2009). Castaldo et al. reported, "'businessmen' were responsible for their actions in a sphere wider than that covered by the mere profit-and-loss statement" (p. 2). Chitakornkijsil (2012a) described social responsibility as a corporation's concerns with and efforts in finding the balance between its organizational objectives and the environment. Chitakornkijsil (2012b) also added that social responsibility is a "duty of marketing" and that as a "managerial obligation," corporate leadership is required to all stakeholders, not just shareholders, and how conducting business as a member of society affects those stakeholders (p. 119).

Nieto (2009) provided a similar explanation of corporate social responsibility, but added that it is a "commitment," not just a brand or an image, that should always be honored (p. 28). Rake and Grayson (2009) supported this notion by positing that social responsibility transcends merely creating a brand or an image—it is about the "totality of business activity impacts on organization stakeholders" (p. 80). Polonsky, Carlson, Grove, and Kangun (1997) highlighted in their research the propensity of corporations, nearly 2 decades ago, to brand themselves as socially responsible and then, if possible, take action to justify the brand. Because consumers were trusting and largely ignorant of corporations and their advertising techniques, deceptive marketing practices were able to

persist. Atkinson and Rosenthal (2014) posited that consumers are taken advantage of by corporations and their advertising techniques because when it comes to determining which goods and services to use (let alone trust), consumers do not have enough information to make informed decisions. With no regulatory oversight and with consumers continuing to purchase deceptively advertised goods and services, corporations found that it was really only unnecessary to actually change the goods and services (Chitakornkijsil, 2012b).

The purpose of this discussion of CSR is not to repeat was has already been stated on multiple occasions over the past few decades but to reiterate a lesser discussed point, which is that CSR is not a system-changing paradigm, in so far as it would require actual physical changes within the corporation (at least not purposively, if so). Instead, Alves (2009) offered of CSR that socio-economic and environmental improvements do not need to consider the results of significant organizational change. These changes are possible and are more practical when they are the result of even minor changes and slight adjustments in business practices. Gibson (2000) stated several years earlier something similar when he stated that there does not need to be a divide between what it is a corporation is attempting to achieve and doing so ethically and morally. Although this concept has existed for over a decade's time, there is a growing belief among consumers (and other stakeholders) that corporations should be as equally as focused on achieving social and environmental goals as they are on profits (Alves, 2009). Seigel (2009), among others, continued to support the notion that the only responsibility that corporations have is a fiduciary one—to their shareholders. Siegel shared his insight, which basically states

that the only time a corporation has the responsibility to engage in "green management

practices" (p. 5) is when it would be of benefit to the firm and its shareholders—not some

moral obligation to be of benefit to any other stakeholder. Although Siegel (2009), for

one, seems to support this philosophy, it is juxtaposed to what the research indicates

consumers, and other stakeholders, consider is a corporation's obligations in their totality.

The point here is that if consumers truly expect that corporations will abide by a moral

code and align corporate interests with consumers', what are consumer perceptions of

greenwashing as a marketing strategy and how does greenwashing affect consumers'

purchasing behaviors?

Regardless of whether it is a priority of a corporation or not, there is stakeholder

anticipation that corporations will follow the basic tenets of CSR (Brown & Forster,

2013). CSR is (albeit broadly), as the ethical, legal, and moral responsibilities that

corporations have to society, in general, (Boccia & Sarno, 2012; Brown & Forster, 2013;

Devinney, 2009; Hyun Ju et al., 2012; Kim & Choi, 2009; Meghisan et al., 2010;

Rizkallah, 2012). As far as these responsibilities pertain to consumers, corporations owe

consumers much more respect than they pay them when they engage in greenwashing. As

opposed to avoiding CSR, corporations need to consider CSR as a primary component of

conducting business, because, as a business theory informing business practice, it

provides corporations with the best opportunity to achieve social and environmental goals

while pursuing their economic ones (Alves, 2009; Lii & Lee, 2012; Mish & Scammon,

2010). Although CSR is not legally a corporate requirement, there is a growing

expectation among consumers and other stakeholders that corporations will engage in more behaviors that help them to achieve more than just profits.

There was no literature that suggested support for corporations to stop earning profits, but there was literature, as presented above, that provided support for the notion of corporations earning their profits so long as they are not at the expense of others and the environment. Research conducted by Brusseau, Chiagouris, and Brusseau (2013) supported the notion of consumers' understanding of the reality of business, that they will strive to earn profits. What the authors found is support for the idea that consumers expect, while understanding a corporation's pursuit of profits, an equal amount of enthusiasm in protecting their interests. Mason and Simmons (2014) posited that a case is made for the need to implement a stakeholder framework into corporate decision-making process when decisions are being made without taking into consideration the issues considered salient by the corporation's stakeholders. Gazzola (2012) underscored the need to a corporation's social responsibility efforts to be genuine—it cannot be a superficial venture wherein the corporation communicates its intentions, even deciding to engage in a bit of charity.

Genuine, socially responsible efforts are predicated upon a corporations understand of who its stakeholders are and what constitutes socially responsible behavior. In what appears to be an attempt to demystify that concept of social responsibility, the European Commission provided a definition of CSR that is easier for corporations to understand, which is "the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society" (Gazzola, 2012, p. 115). Rivoli and Waddock (2011) aptly posited that to truly

understand CSR, what those activities are (or at least should be), one merely needs to identify the gap between what it corporations are doing and what society, at large, expects them to be doing.

Stakeholder Theory and the Triple Bottom Line

Equally as popular as corporate social responsibility, a theory associated with the conduct of business, is stakeholder theory. *Stakeholder* is a term coined by Freeman (Parmar et al., 2010), and it is a term to describe those who are affected by the way a corporation conducts its business (Stanaland, 2011). Although the term stakeholder is typically associated with living beings, it is equally attributable to the environment. Parmar et al. (2010) offered that the application of the term within discussion of contemporary business practices is a way of changing the corporate paradigm that the only entity to whom they are responsible is shareholders. Before the development of the term stakeholder, firms believed that their only concern was profit maximization and the appeasement of their shareholders, so they paid little or no attention to anything or anyone else (Bakan, 2004). Although corporations may insist that profit maximization is still their primary goal (arguably, it is), many of the other, marginalized stakeholders and their representatives (environmental activists) are demanding their due consideration. Mish and Scammon (2010) revealed the existing body of literature associated with stakeholder theory tends to contrast primary and secondary stakeholders, with primary stakeholders being associated more with those who directly interact with the corporation and with the secondary stakeholders being those who are affected by corporate conduct but do not necessarily affect a corporations operations and its successes. The point that

Scammon and Mish desired to make is that regardless of whether the stakeholder is essential to the survival of a corporation or not, if it is impacted by corporate conduct, it deserves to be treated well, or, at the very least, better. Gibson (2000) aptly posited that until such time secondary stakeholders are given as much respect as primary stakeholders, they will need to find ways to make themselves as important to the corporation as the primary stakeholders. If the stakeholder has the power to inflict harm upon the corporation (financially speaking), it stands to reason that the corporation would want to ensure the stakeholder's well being.

Stakeholder theory, as a management theory, suggests that moral concerns and business concerns should not be separated when corporations conduct business. Mason and Simmons (2014) posited that that way in which corporation can begin to align their business concerns with moral concerns is to change their management paradigm to one that expands its desired end-state from that is solely about profit maximization to one that is about achieving multiple end-states. Seemingly, the moral basis for stakeholder theory lies in the notion that corporations should not be allowed to be ignorant (whether intentionally or not) of their place in society, as a whole. Profit maximization should not justify or even supersede negative environmental effects or the exploitation of employees. Because the literature supports the notion that consumers make ethically-based value judgments when choosing which goods and services to use, it should not be entirely difficult to establish the salience of a management theory like stakeholder theory. The problem stems from something that Mainardes, Alves, and Raposo (2011) reported, which is that even after nearly 3 decades of research, stakeholder theory is still not fully

developed. The authors further communicated that part of the problem with the underdevelopment of the theory is that, within academic circles, there has yet to be developed an agreed upon definition for the term *stakeholder*. Orts and Strudler (2010) argued that the lack of a universally accepted definition for the term *stakeholder* means it is not possible to make any attributions of stakeholder theory to business discussions, especially business ethics. A main point that Mainardes et al. (2011) expressed is that although stakeholder theory may not be considered a leading management theory, it does provide a way of posing necessary, ethical questions and it provides for their consideration within the framework of corporate operating environments.

An ideal situation for the employment of a theory such as stakeholder theory is that it could lead to the consistent consideration and achievement of not just the corporation's economic interests (profit margins) but also their social and environmental ones. Some researchers argued that corporations need to find the balance that exists between living up to their fiduciary responsibilities to their shareholders and to addressing the issues considered salient by the other stakeholders (Law, 2011; Mason & Simmons, 2014). The concept, of considering the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of society is known as achieving the triple bottom line (TBL): economic, social, and environmental (Boccia & Sarno, 2012; Mish & Scammon, 2010; Mitchell & Ramey, 2011). As the term indicates, there are three bottom lines, and the implications of a corporation's conduct can be described by each of those lines. Corporate insistence to achieve solely their economic goal of profit maximization appears to be an acceptance of their marginalization of every other stakeholder, especially when there are management

theories and literature that support the concept of achieving the TBL. As stakeholder

theory continues to be developed, and, as consumers continue to feel empowered to

demand of corporations morally and ethically derived good and services, which includes

the advertisement thereof, it remains to be seen, if greenwashing, as a marketing strategy,

will continue.

Psychology of Corporate Greenwashing

When considering the phenomenon of greenwashing, there must be something

more to it than simply using buzzwords to get consumers to purchase green-labeled

products. What is it, then, that enables corporations to take advantage of consumers in

this way? Research regarding consumers' purchasing behaviors are dependent upon how

they identify with corporations and whether there are any emotional bonds that may have

developed between consumers, the corporations, and their goods and services (Iftekhar,

Ayub, Razzaq, & Aslam, 2013). Devinney (2009) asserted that corporations are routinely

engaged in researching marketplace demands, gauging what consumers are indicating

they desire. Castaldo (2009) proclaimed that consumers establish trust with a corporation

when they believe the corporation is engaged in fair trade practices. When corporations

communicate that they are able to provide consumers with what they desire, consumers

feel that these corporations are satisfying their basic, personal needs and a sense of trust

is established (Alcañiz, Cáceres, & Pérez, 2010). Considering the aforementioned

research, it seems logical to assert that once a corporation has established a favorable

perception among consumers, what Dilling (2011) referred to as the *halo effect*, it stands

a much better chance of taking advantage of consumer loyalty and trust. To better

understand how consumers develop loyalty and trust in a corporation, based largely upon the corporations' communiqué, it is necessary to examine the tenets of social identity theory.

Researchers have worked to learn the essence of how it is that people interact and develop relationships within their respective environments, and the theory that was developed to provide understanding to this particular phenomenon is known as social identify theory (Bartels & Hoogendam, 2010). Although Tajfel's and Turner's (1978) seminal works regarding social identity theory were initially written to explain how individuals define and subsequently commit themselves to particular groups, contemporary research has only just begun to explain how these identities are not "temporally exclusive" (Crane & Ruebottom, 2012, p. 78). This research may help explain while corporations may have been able to appeal to their consumers in one manner; they are alienating them in another. Jahdi and Acikdilli (2009) explained how consumers reserve the right to use purchasing power to reward good corporations and to punish the bad ones. With regards to green marketing, which creates a sort of *ethos* (Alves, 2009), by which corporations and their consumers live, those consumers that identify themselves as stewards of the environment will be inclined to align themselves with corporations that communicate congruity between consumer values and interests and their own (Jong-Weon, Eun-Jung, Seung-Min, & Han-Gook, 2011). The overlap between one's identity (beliefs, values, and objectives), with that of a corporation's identity, appears to be enough to generate the psychological and emotional attachment necessary to develop consumer loyalty and trust (Bartels & Hoogendam, 2011; Currás-Pérez &

Bigné-Alcañiz, 2009; Dimitriadis & Papista, 2011; Kreng & May-Yao, 2011; Lii & Lee, 2012; Marin, Ruiz, & Rubio, 2009; Mitchell & Ramey, 2011). Gupta and Sen (2010) posited that above all else (price and quality being equal), consumers are more willing to show loyalty to corporations that are associated with good causes. Bodger and Monks (2009) stated consumer purchasing behaviors indicate that they are more willing to spend money on environmentally-friendly products when making purchasing decisions, especially as their knowledge regarding environmental issues increases. These consumer behaviors seem to indicate, then, that there is an unwritten expectation that corporations will do the right thing by its stakeholders, especially the environment.

For as long as consumers to continue to maintain expectations of corporations and the ways in which they operate, it stands to reason that consumers could change their allegiance to corporations if corporations failed to perform as expected. An additional consideration in determining the degree to which consumers align themselves with corporations is the manner in which the corporation presents itself to consumers (Dimitriadis & Papista, 2011). If a corporation is able to appeal to a consumer by appearing to share the same desired goals and identity, the consumer is more likely to feel loyal to that particular corporation. In support of Dimitriadis' and Papista's (2011) assertion, there is evidence to suggest that consumer loyalty may shift from one corporation to another if the corporation to which the consumer has identified himself is discovered to be operating unscrupulously (Iftekhar et al., 2013). This assertion seems to support the previously discussed notion, which is that the identities that consumers establish for themselves are not temporally exclusive (Crane & Ruebottom, 2012).

Because there is limited information in the literature regarding greenwashing and the common experiences of people with it, it remains unclear how consumers view the practice and whether it would be enough to constitute a breach of trust. Boccia and Sarno (2012) surmised that the consumer is increasingly becoming concerned with corporate behaviors that are in stark contradiction of the tents of going green, so there seem to be implications, regardless of superficial they may be, that consumers may prefer to align themselves with corporations that are concerned with the protecting the environment. Following a hypothetical choice experiment, which consisted of a quantitatively designed survey with closed-ended questions, Boccia and Sarno (2012) determined that labeling remains an essential part of the process wherein which consumers choose their products. This may help explain how green labeling, as part of the greenwashing phenomenon, remains an effective marketing tactic. Boccia and Sarno (2012) also found, in their survey, data that suggests that regardless of the level of education attained, younger consumers remain uniformed of issues pertaining to social responsibility, which may help explain how corporations are able to successfully engage in greenwashing practices.

Consumer Culture Theory

Just as social identity theory is used by researchers to explain how consumers come to identify themselves with certain corporations and their products, so too is *consumer culture theory*, or CCT. CCT is a term that was first introduced by Arnould and Thompson (2005) to try to better explain, or at least supplement discussions of, consumer behaviors associated with consumption and purchasing behaviors. CCT is specifically consumer-centric, with its focus on the "relationships among consumers'

personal and collective identities" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 870). CCT is a theory

that is phenomenological in nature in that it, just as with phenomenological research

methodology, seeks to better understand consumer culture in terms of lived experiences.

The authors stated; however, that CCT is not intended to be solely attributable or

preferable to qualitative methodology—they consider CCT to "embrace methodological

pluralism" (p. 870). CCT, as proposed by Arnould and Thompson (2005), is focused on

the aspects of consumerism that are not immediately capable of being measured or

quantified. With a specific emphasis on that which is *experiential* (Arnould & Thompson,

2005), CCT may serve as yet another lens through which to focus the current study.

In spite of over 20 years of epistemology associated with consumer research,

especially that which is associated with the experiential and sociocultural aspects of

consumerism, Arnould and Thompson (2005) contended that there exists much more

"obfuscation than clarification" (p. 868) when it comes to the numerous classifications of

philosophies that researchers attempt to ascribe to it. The authors posited that CCT refers

to the "exploration of how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings

encoded in advertisements, brands, retail settings, or material goods to manifest…their

identity and lifestyle goals" (p. 871). Elucidating this notion even further, Dominici,

Basile, and Palumbo (2013) posited, using Arnould and Thompson's (2005) CCT as a

basis for their own research, that consumption has become much more than the "act of

purchasing items to satisfy needs—it has become the act of possession of social,

semiotic, and psychological relevance" (p. 263). Whereas social identity theory attempts

to explain, in generalized terms, how people come to identify themselves with particular

groups, CCT can be used to centralize the focus on consumer behavior, experience, and identification as it pertains to consumption. Although the focus may lack breadth, with respect to only pertaining to consumption, Dominici et al. (2013) offered that CTT encompasses "a wide variety of consumption topics and research methods" (p. 266), giving it a considerable amount of depth. Although there has undoubtedly exists phenomenological research regarding consumer behaviors with CCT as a part of its conceptual framework, there is no indication of published research regarding greenwashing, specifically, as viewed through the lens of CCT. It is anticipated that some, or part, of the significance of this study will stem from its ability to contribute to the growing body of literature, especially as it pertains to social identity theory, stakeholder theory, and consumer culture theory.

Phenomenological Research Methodology

A phenomenological research methodology will be used because it is better suited for developing understanding the phenomenon of greenwashing as it relates to the essence of consumers' lived experiences (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). Exploring the essence of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing, in order to develop deeper meanings, requires eliciting from research participants their personal perceptions and detailed, real-life accounts. Phenomenological research can be considered as a sort of philosophy upon which the current study is situated (Husserl, 1970), with the primary focus of the philosophy being, that meaning is derived through detailed accounts of lived experiences of particular phenomena. Moustakas (1994) asserted "the understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience in the

context of a particular situation is the primary target of phenomenological knowledge" (p. 14). Moustakas' (1994) description should make it relatively obvious, then, that a phenomenological research methodology would be better suited for developing a deeper understanding, and discovery of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing.

Lived experiences need to be conveyed in the form of first-person accountings, from which all meaning is to be derived (Dahlberg et al., 2008). The subjective nature of data acquired through the means of a phenomenological research design is what is thought to be the source of the data's richness (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). The preservation of the data's richness and the assurance that the meanings derived from the data are directly and unilaterally attributable to the research participants is acquired through measures such as, but are not limited to, epoche or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) and member checking (Maxwell, 2013).

Literature Review

In order to communicate information regarding their products, corporations use advertising. In an era of increased methodologies for communicating these advertisements, thanks, in part, to technological advancements, corporations are able to reach more people in more ways. With corporations participating in competing advertisement campaigns, marketers must find innovative, dynamic, and aggressive ways to advertise their products, if they are to appeal to consumers to purchase their products over others' products. Not only must changes occur in the ways that these corporations advertise their products, changes must also occur within the ways that they manufacture their products, because corporations must be able to provide the products they

advertise—or do they? With a corporation's primary concern being profit maximization, in order to serve the best interests of its shareholders (Bakan, 2004), there may be times when manufacturing costs may supersede what a corporation is willing, or able, to pay in order to legitimize their product lines. In order to achieve perceived legitimacy within the market, corporations may advertise their products as being something that they are not, because to not advertise could also result in loss of profits. When these unsubstantiated and intentionally deceptive claims pertain to their benefits to the environment, the phenomenon known as greenwashing occurs. Greenwashing is a phenomenon that describes the intentionally deceptive practice of advertising products as being better for the environment than they truly are (Alves, 2009; Delmas & Burbano, 2011; DeWitt & Dahlin, 2009; Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011; Furlow, 2010; Mitchell & Ramey, 2011). Although there are laws that prohibit false advertising (Tushnet, 2011), greenwashing, a form of false advertising, is not federally controlled, prohibited, or punished (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Mitchell & Ramey, 2011). Greenwashing is a marketing tactic that first emerged in the 1990s (Mitchell & Ramey, 2011), and despite its negative connotation, it has managed to persist 2 decades later. Contributing to the longevity of greenwashing is a lack of governmental oversight; both in establishing law and in forcing corporations to adhere to whatever rules actually exist (Alves, 2011). To fully understand how such a marketing tactic is able to persist, despite its negative associations and potential detriment to the environment (among other stakeholders), one must understand the drivers of greenwashing.

Why Greenwashing Persists

To fully understand the phenomenon of greenwashing, it is important to understand how and why greenwashing persists. Parmar et al. (2010) posited that the primary driver for greenwashing is a "disconnect between ethics and capitalism" (p. 3). With no laws that empower the federal government to regulate corporate greenwashing, corporations are not only able to engage in greenwashing, they are also able to affix green labels upon themselves and their products without much oversight, further misleading consumers about the benefits of their goods and services (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Given this explanation about what greenwashing is and how corporations are empowered to practice it, the question becomes, how do they do it. DeWitt and Dahlin (2009) posited that greenwashing begins, or facilitated as soon as a corporation communicates its "environmental stewardship" (p. 71). DeVinney (2009) argued that a corporation's claims of being committed to the environment might stem more from their recognition of such a consumer demand in the marketplace than from their actual commitment to the environment. Because consumer demands often compel marketing trends, greenwashing, as a trend, as all but compelled corporations to enter the market, ready or not (Chen, 2010). For a corporation to expect to fare well in such a niche market, its advertising needs to convince consumers that there is congruity between its intent and its strategy, or plan, to achieve its intent (Chen, 2010).

Boccia and Sarno (2012) offered that corporations actively manipulate *passive consumers* and their choices by motivating them via misleading advertising. Active manipulation stems from the use of terms and statements used by corporate leadership

and marketing strategists to communicate an environmentally friendly disposition of products during advertising (Bodger & Monks, 2010; Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011). *Organic*, *energy efficient*, *sustainable*, *gentle*, and *fair* are other terms that Bodger and Monks (2010) and Ekstrand and Nilsson (2011) identified as terms that corporations use within advertising to appeal to consumers. The more abstract the term the more it seems that corporate advertisers are able to mislead consumers, thereby misleading consumers into buying their products. Alves (2009) posited that with respect to green marketing, the terms that are used are more about "evoking an aspirational lifestyle" than they are about sustainability or the environment, so by selling the "desirable ideas, emotions, and/or experiences behind" the products, corporations are easily able to engage in greenwashing (p. 5). Atkinson and Rosenthal (2014) highlighted that is easy for corporations to betray consumer trust in advertising by using *credence claims*. According to the authors, credence claims are claims that "must be accepted at face value as truthful, because they cannot be verified by consumers" (p. 34). Ultimately, greenwashing stems from a lack of an informed decision-making process, which seems to be further exacerbated by a lack of industry standard with respect to how a definition of terms.

Short-Term Profits

With consumers wishing to identify and align themselves with corporations that share similar values, as they pertain to protecting the environment, why would corporations engage in green marketing practices and risk breaking their trust? In 2010, the green market was "valued at over $500 billion (globally), with a projected annual growth of 20 percent" (Bodger & Monks, 2009, p. 285). Delmas and Burbano (2011)

offered a more contemporary view of the value of the green market by assessing that the

"consumer market for green products and services is predicted to grow to $845 billion by

2015" (p. 64). There is little doubt that corporations desire to share in piece of such a

lucrative market, and there are corporations that have recognized its value and entered

into the green market despite not having the goods or services to do so (Mitchell &

Ramey, 2011). Mitchell and Ramey further pronounced that the mere prospect of being

able to profit from making false claims regarding the environmental friendliness of their

products and services might be enough to compel corporations to engage in

greenwashing. Boccia and Sarno (2012) found that corporations tend to view social

responsibility and the necessary measures that they must take in order to deliver

legitimate products and services as a cost constraint versus a real investment, which is

why they greenwash. Gazzola (2012) argued that corporations need to stop viewing

socially responsible conduct as a cost but rather as an investment—failing to recognize

the provision of legitimately green goods and services, especially to consumers who are

genuinely dedicated to purchasing them, as a strategy for long-term financial growth is

dangerously short-sighted. Rivoli (2011) added that corporate leadership would be better

served if they were to recognize that socially responsible behavior is not something that

results in a loss of shareholder value, because the advocacy for socially responsible

behavior, as they describe it, is not equated to "give-aways or philanthropy" (p. 113).

Rather, socially responsible behavior is manifested through the incorporation of practices

and procedures that result in long-term benefit to not only the corporation but also to (and

arguably most importantly) consumers and other stakeholders, regardless of whether there is an initial investment required up front or not.

There is now research that suggests that with respect to greenwashing, corporations have all but given up on ever intending to deliver the green products and services they claim to be able to provide—their efforts are strictly about greenwashing their products and services so that they do not defer their portion of the profits to the competition (Iftekhar, 2013). Delmas and Burbano (2011) further offered that part of what compels corporations to engage in greenwashing is their fear to losing their competitive edge. The authors further communicated that because it is easier (and much faster) to communicate about their environmental performance than it is to actually change corporate processes to legitimately produce products and services, corporations greenwash to maintain their respective footholds in their respective markets. When corporations are able to realize the necessity of implementing measures and procedures that result in legitimacy, they will also serve to validate the issues that stakeholders deem salient, which is necessary for alleviating the burdens and risks associated with short-term profit earning practices like greenwashing (Kelly, 2009).

Backlash and Negative Effects

Greenwashing may represent what is referred to as a *high risk*, *high reward* behavior, but there are serious consequences to greenwashing that impact not only the consumers (among all other stakeholders) but also to corporations, and this is regardless of whether they engage in greenwashing practices or not. Youssef and Abderrazak (2009) presented the argument that greenwashing practices cause consumers to become confused

about what is legitimately green labeled and what is not. The overarching issue seems to be that consumers are not able to differentiate between corporations that genuinely engaged in delivering goods and services designed to protect the environment and corporations that are not (Parguel et al., 2011). Liu, Wang, and Wu (2010) found that consumers tend to pay more attention to negative corporate behavior than they do to positive behavior. Jahdi and Acikdilli (2009) noted increased consumer confusion and an increase in the number of corporations making green claims have resulted in increased skepticism when it comes to green-labeled products. Alves (2009) posited that increased skepticism and increased marketing of green-labeled products has generated a "backlash against the term *green*" (p. 2). Research conducted by Furlow (2010) uncovered that consumers are starting to question corporate intentions and doubt that green-labeled products are truly green. There is a growing concern that should corporations continue to be allowed to engage in greenwashing, which is the direct result of a lack of oversight and subsequent punishment, consumers will lose confidence in the green-market in its entirety, causing the market to collapse (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Montague and Mukherjee (2010) asserted that research already exists that connects a corporation's poor, economic performance to its greenwashing practices. Worthy of further discussion is how increased consumer skepticism of corporate greenwashing harms corporations that are legitimately committed to environmental stewardship and subsequently produce legitimately green-labeled products.

Mitchell and Ramey (2011) discussed a current phenomenon wherein which corporations with legitimate, green concerns and with legitimately green-labeled products

are choosing not to engage in green-labeling and green advertising. Because these

corporations understand the propensity for skeptical consumers to blanket-label all green

advertising as greenwashing, they would rather not advertise their products as green and

avoid risking their reputations and loss of profits. Dilling (2011) underscored the *catch-*

22 nature of this issue by discussing the need of corporations to advertise their socially

responsible behavior if they are to inform consumers of it. The practice of not advertising

legitimately green-labeled products gives way to the multiple order effects that some

problems create, which, in this case, are socioeconomic and environmental in nature.

Chitakornkijsil (2012a) referred to marketing philosophies and strategies that result in the

depletion of valuable resources and the generation of harmful goods and services as

"maladaptive" (p. 123). Regarding the socio-economic effect of not advertising

legitimately green-labeled products, Furlow (2010) discussed the propensity of

legitimately green corporations to lose any competitive edge they may have gained in the

market. As corporations lose their competitive edge, they could also lose their motivation

to produce legitimately green products that skeptical consumers will not purchase. As an

additional consequence, the less legitimately green-labeled products that are sold, the

more conventional (harmful to the environment) products are sold, which perpetuates

what legitimate, green corporations were trying to prevent all along. To prevent (or at

least significantly reduce) negative effects to not only corporate performance but also to

the environment and other, socio-economic interests, corporate leaders and their

marketing strategies must become consumer-centric, with special consideration paid to

the second and third-order effects across the full spectrum of affected stakeholders

(Chitakornkijsil, 2012a).

The Morality of Business

There is a large body of data, both historical and contemporary, centered upon

how business should be conducted. Friedman (1970), a Nobel Prize winner in economics,

was quoted as saying "the business of business is business." Friedman also stated, in

uncertain terms, that business is amoral—that those who try to put social and

environmental goals over profits are the ones who are acting immorally (Bakan, 2004).

Can this really be the way that society views corporate conduct? Or is this, more

accurately, how corporations prefer to think of the way that they conduct business? With

regard to the morality of conducting business and whether businesses are operating

morally, it has been suggested the one merely needs to explore a how a corporate

interacts with its stakeholders (Mish & Scammon, 2010). Others have argued in support

of the morality of business, referring to a business' obligation to protect all stakeholders,

not just shareholders, from harm, which stems from the application of a set of ethical and

moral codes that influence corporate decisions and conduct (Parmar et al., 2010). Gibson

(2000) offered that there is no rational justification for needing to separate organizational

self-interests from morality. If one were to adhere to Friedman's position regarding the

immorality of anything other than profit maximization within business, it would seem

that the answer to Mish and Scammon's question would reveal an immoral philosophy on

the part of the firm. However, what does this suggest about the stakeholders, in particular,

the consumers, and why do they seem to garner so little respect? If, as was stated earlier,

consumers have established a set of expectations, per se, and, if consumers are looking

for corporations (products and services) with which they can identify, corporations

cannot afford to operate amorally.

Making Value Judgments

Regardless of whether corporations are committed to operating amorally or not,

research suggests that consumers make ethically based value judgments when choosing

which goods and services to use, and this information should be of concern to

corporations desiring to maintain an *amoral* business philosophy. As a matter of ensuring

common understanding with respect to what an ethical judgment is, Alcañiz et al., (2010)

defined *ethical judgment* as "an individual's personal evaluation of the degree to which

some behavior or course of action is ethical or unethical" (p. 173). DeWitt and Dahlin

(2009) asserted that ethical expectations regarding a corporation's conduct, ranging from

how it treats its employees to how it advertises its products and services, has increased

over the years. However, what is it specifically consumers expect from corporations?

Atkinson and Rosenthal (2014) posited that consumers expect congruity between their

purchasing intentions and corporate advertising practices and subsequent provision of

goods and services. With fairness representing a factor that influences consumer

perception and behavior the most (Castaldo et al., 2009), there is an expectation that

corporations will not treat consumers as a means to their ends, which are profits (Alcañiz

et al., 2010).

These ethical expectations appear to be part of the framework upon which value

judgments are made. Srivastava and Nandan (2010) conducted a research study with the

purpose of determining the perceptions of 100 research participants regarding unethical practices in advertising. In general, the authors determined that a moderate to high-level of concern exists amongst consumers, with the majority of the participants desiring to see either the removal of the advertisement or the punishing of the offending corporation (pp. 64-66). Dilling (2011) asserted that there is a growing sense of empowerment among consumers that is compelling them to question "the true intentions of corporations" (p. 29). Rather than continue to assume a passive role, consumers are increasingly demanding of corporations to receive the goods and services that the corporations advertise are available (Castaldo et al., 2009).

Through increased information and awareness, as the result of the Internet, consumers have become empowered through a higher level of awareness of social and environmental issues, which bred a subsequent expectation that corporations will work to resolve them (Rizkallah, 2012). A national survey conducted by CAPSTRAT, in 2010, found that of all the consumers who were polled, "59% consider environmental sustainability an important factor when buying products" (Dilling, 2011, p. 24). With over 50% of those polled having indicated that they deem sustainability an important factor when considering which goods and services to purchase, it seems that corporate leadership might want to start considering producing legitimate goods and services, if they are not already. Montague and Mukherjee (2010) reported on the findings of a survey conducted during the 2009 recession "4 out of 5 consumers said that they were still buying green products, despite the recession and higher costs" (p. 433). These findings seemingly elucidate the degree to which consumers find green products not only

appealing but also important. Dilling (2011) further surmised that issues pertaining to the environment are getting to be such an important consideration for consumers when purchasing goods and services that any instances of a corporation failing to comply with consumer expectations would almost immediately have negative consequences for the corporation. It is an interesting relational concept considering that the firm, with the ability to control its advertising and the goods and services that it ultimately provides (either in congruence with its advertising or in contrast with), seems to be in relative control of the type(s) of relationships it has with its consumers and other stakeholders (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan 2012).

The fact that corporations engage in greenwashing and fail to deliver the goods and services they advertise is interesting, because consumers do exercise purchasing intentions. The results of a survey conducted in 2005 by Fleishman-Hillard Research, in partnership with the National Consumers League, revealed that, from among five choices, "consumers most frequently selected 'being socially responsible' as the factor most likely to make them loyal followers to a particular brand or company" (Marin et al., 2009, p. 65). *Social responsibility* is an overly generic term around which much has been written. The term holds different meaning for different groups of people, and, not surprisingly, there exists a divergence in meaning amongst consumers and corporations. Dewitt and Dahlin (2009) asserted, "It is critical that a businesses' strategic marketing be consistent with the value systems of its target markets" (p. 70). A significant factor for consumers within the discussion of business ethics is the establishment of trust (Greenwood & Van Buren III, 2010). Srivastava and Nandan (2010) asserted that advertising is a corporate

practice that "exercises a significant influence on….society in large" (p. 62). As

consumers continue to make value judgments based on ethics and morals, it remains to be

seen whether greenwashing, as a corporate marketing strategy, will continue to be used.

Trust Relationship

Within the consumer-corporation relationship, the corporation has the

responsibility of being forthright with its consumers. "Trust has been generally defined as

the trustor's expectation that the trustee is willing to keep promises and to fulfill

obligations" (Castaldo et al., 2009, p. 6). With respect to the notion of going green is the

concept of *green trust*, which Chen (2009) discussed and defined as the "willingness to

depend on a product service, or brand based on the belief or expectation resulting from its

credibility, benevolence, and ability about its environmental performance" (p. 309).

Boccia and Sarno (2012) found that while consumers understand the necessity of

corporations to pursue profits, they maintain an expectation that corporations will also

work to improve social and environmental issues. Corporations should focus on more

than just profits if they are to avoid betraying their consumers' trust, as Gazzola (2012)

asserted that the establishment of trust exists as one of the more basic of actions that a

corporation can take in order for consumers to realize their "social value" (p. 115). If

consumers do not realize the benefits of products and services, as advertised, little to no

value, or trust, exists within the consumer-firm relationship (DeWitt & Dahlin, 2009).

Referring back to the discussion of corporate social responsibility (CSR), Castaldo et al.

(2009) offered that consumers tend to trust corporations that engage in CSR activities

more so than they trust corporations that do not, but this means that corporations will

actually have to produce and provide what it is they advertise. Currás-Pérez et al. (2009) offered that trust is what motivates consumers to maintain their respective relationships with corporations over extended periods of time. Hong and Yang (2009) found that from among the "six relationship indexes that influence the perception of relational satisfaction" (p. 385), trust not only had the "strongest impact on supportive behaviors toward the organization, it also impacted whether consumers would recommend the organization to others" (p. 385). Of all of the factors affecting the consumer-corporate relationship, trust is a factor that is largely dependent upon the congruity between what the corporation communicates that it stands for and its actions.

There is research that suggests that there is a relationship between how consumers view the branding of green goods and services and how the amount of trust they subsequently develop for them. In a quantitatively designed research project, designed to elicit consumer responses with respect to their levels of trust in green products, Chen (2009) found that support for his hypothesis that "green brand image is positively associated with green trust" (p. 310). Chen's data collection tool was a questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, and he administered the questionnaire to 254 research participants. By using Cronbach's x coefficient to measure the reliability of his research results, and after achieving a value of 0.768 Cronbach's x value for this particular hypothesis, Chen was able to ascertain reliability of his results. The results of this study, and others like it, lend support for an argument made in favor of ensuring that consumer trust is not violated in the consumer-corporate relationship. And, as long as results of studies like Chen's (2009) indicated a strong relationship between green brand imaging

and trust, corporations may do well to cease marketing strategies such as greenwashing in order to avoid betraying their consumers' trust.

There is also research that suggests that the issue of trust is not as black-and-white when it comes to down to whether consumers believe corporations or not. Yi and Siqing (2011) presented research in support of three different types of trust: "competence-based, benevolence-based, and identify-based" (p. 443). The authors found, as the result of a quantitatively designed survey administered to 239 research participants, that of the three types of trust, identity-based trust is that one that has the most significance in establishing strong consumer-corporation relationships. Identity-based trust, which they define as trust that results from "shared characteristics, values, and common goals existing between a corporation and a consumer" (p. 445), is similar in concept to the tenets of social identity theory, which was previously discussed. It is not to suggest that competence-based trust, which is a "customer's confidence in a company's ability to realize its promise" (p. 445) or that benevolence-based trust, a "customer's confidence that a corporation has a since concern about the consumers' interests and motivation to do good to its customers' (p. 445) are no important. Trust, as has been discussed throughout this chapter, appears to be a deep and far-reaching aspect of consumer-corporate relationships, which corporations cannot afford to trivialize.

Although the relatively small body of literature that exists seems to suggest that greenwashing would be a marketing technique that would betray the trust and confidence of consumers, qualitatively conducted research does not exist to support this assertion. The literature that exists and presented in this paper seems to support the notion that

consumers would find corporate greenwashing as a violation of their trust. It will be interesting to explore the essence of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing, how greenwashing has influenced consumer behavior, if trust emerges as a theme and proves to be as important as the literature suggests, and whether the trust consumers have in corporations, that greenwashing is violated.

Summary and Transition

The intent of this study was to address the specific problem of greenwashing, which is that there is limited information in the literature regarding corporate greenwashing and the common experiences of people with it. By conducting research to answer the questions associated with exploring the essence of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing, what it is that the concept of greenwashing means to consumers, and the changes in consumer behavior that are associated with greenwashing, I began to close the gap in associated literature. The concepts comprising the conceptual framework, including social identity theory, stakeholder theory, corporate social responsibility, and the issue of trust provide insight into how greenwashing, as a marketing strategy, is incongruent with consumer expectations (at least in theory).

In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design and rationale, the research methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and I provide an explanation of my role as the researcher and the purposive sample of participants from whom I collected data.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this empirical phenomenological study was to explore and describe consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing. This chapter covered a description of the research method and design used within this study, an explanation of the role of the researcher, a description of the target population and sample size, the instrumentation (data collection) and analysis, and measures taken to ensure participant confidentiality are included within this section. The research method and design is in the first subsection.

Research Method and Design and Rationale

The research questions that shaped this study were as follows.

RQ1: What does the concept of greenwashing mean to consumers?

RQ2: What is the essence of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing?

RQ3: How do consumers describe their purchasing behavior with greenwashing?

The questionnaire (see Appendix B) includes a set of interview questions that derive from the three research questions. Interview Questions 9 and 12 derive from Research Question 1. Interview questions 4, 5, 8, and 10 derive from Research Question 2. Interview questions 6, 7, and 11 derive from Research Question 3.

Because the purpose of phenomenological research was to explore and describe the experiences of those who have actually experienced the phenomenon studied, I surmised that with the help of the interview questions I generated, I would able to derive rich meanings and experiences rather than explanations (Moustakas, 1994). The interview questions, which nested naturally with the research questions, helped me acquire "first-

person accounts" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21) of the participants' experiences with corporate greenwashing.

Creswell (2009) discussed three types of research methods: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. I did not choose to use a mixed methods research method, because I wanted to focus on exploring the topic using a qualitative approach rather than combining data from a quantitative approach. It was more appropriate to conduct the research qualitatively and facilitate the emergence of themes in the data, which derive only from the meanings ascribed by the participants themselves (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). I did not think it was necessary, or appropriate at that point, to combine broad and measurable data from quantitative research with the details I acquired from my qualitative research (Patton, 2002). And, unlike some previously conducted studies, where consumers were administered quantitative, closed-ended surveys that "assumed homogenous consumer preference" (Boccia, 2012, p. 1120) and subsequently failed to capture the heterogeneous nature of consumer perceptions, I chose to use a qualitative approach to discover deeper meanings associated with consumer's lived experiences with corporate greenwashing. Using a quantitative methodology, which would have likely resulted in the implementation of some type of survey and wherein which I would have limited the participants' answers by using either a five or seven-point Likert scale, and would not have facilitated a deeper exploration and level of discovery that is warranted for the derivation of meanings associated with consumers' lived experiences. The use of a quantitative methodology would have been be more appropriate if I had been interested in testing theories or pre-established hypotheses about what I expected to learn from of

my study (Neuman, 2006). By using a qualitative research methodology, I facilitated the natural emergence of themes within the collected data and provided an interpretative explanation from the meanings ascribed by the participants (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Moustakas, 2004).

Of the five qualitative strategies at my disposal (ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenological study, and narrative research), as identified by Creswell (2009), the phenomenological study was my best, if not only, option for exploring and discovering the meanings associated with consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing (Husserl, 1970). Because I intended to describe the common lived experiences of consumers with greenwashing and thereby discover subsequent, deeper meanings, I used an empirical or transcendental phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Phenomenological research designs are appropriate for attempting to describe meaning regarding the lived experiences of small samples of a population (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). I determined that grounded theory would not be suitable for my research design, because I did not desire to identify any new, emerging theories from the results of my survey data (Patton, 2002). There were no different groups from which I explored the similarities or differences of information (Creswell, 2009). I excluded an ethnography as my research strategy, because even though I used a small group of participants, I did not intend for all of the participants to belong to the same, or a particular, culture group, from which I would have observed and collected data over a prolonged period of time (Creswell, 2009;

Patton, 2002, Miles & Huberman, 1994). My group of participants belonged to disparate culture groups, and I collected data from them via electronic interviews, not observation.

I determined that narrative research, as a research strategy was also inappropriate, because I did not desire to learn the stories of the participants' lives, in general, into which I could have collaboratively combined the views of my own life. My personal experiences with the phenomenon were not disclosed or considered, because they could influence participants' responses. Through a process known as epoche (Moustakas, 1994), I actively and intentionally set aside my own biases, in order to create a *receptive presence*. Through epoche and my receptive presence (Moustakas, 1994), I was able to *bracket the question* (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994), which involved the suspension of all assumptions, biases, and knowledge in order to derive meaning from participant responses alone. With respect to employing a case study as my research strategy, I determined that this strategy required me to explore greenwashing as if it were an isolated incident and not something experienced by consumers worldwide (Patton, 2002). Enough was known about greenwashing that I did not need to focus as much about what it is, which could have been accomplished using case study as my research strategy. So, after carefully considering which research design and methodology would be the best for answering my research question, as based upon the immediately preceding rationale, I concluded that a qualitative phenomenological study was the most appropriate.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role needs to conducted with the utmost prudence. Patton (2002) stated "the quality of qualitative data depends to a great extent on the methodological

skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher" (p. 5). The role of the researcher within a

qualitative research project is that of "key research instrument" (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). I

used an interview protocol, distributed interview questions via email to the research

participants, obtained participants' responses, and conducted the subsequent organization

and analysis of the data. I did not use a previously constructed interview protocol or set

of interview questions developed by other researchers. Because I used interview

questions, which I sent to the participants via e-mail, I did not receive the research

participants' responses directly, in a face-to-face setting. I was still required to be

involved in all aspects of the research project, starting with the development of the

research topic, selecting the research methodology and strategy necessary to answer the

primary research question, and implementing the data analysis tools. I was also

responsible for securing informed consent from each the participants before surveying

them, for which I was prepared. I took measures to mitigate the risks associated with

inadvertently exposing the identities of the participants, and I was aware of my

requirement to limit researcher bias by confirming with the participants any vague or

unclear responses. A technique that I used to help me set aside my biases and

expectations was epoche (Moustakas, 1994). By using epoche, or bracketing, I was able

to review the participants' responses more attentively and gained a better understanding

of the phenomenon from their lived experiences, while avoiding the provision of theory-

based explanations for the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1931; Moustakas,

1994).

Another role that I had as researcher was to ensure as much objectivity as possible within my study. Although I recognized that I would not be able to guarantee absolute objectivity, I took measures to significantly reduce it and its effects on the results of my study (Patton, 2002). One such measure was creating a pilot study, which I administered before the primary study.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

To ensure that I captured a fuller range of lived experiences regarding greenwashing, I selected a purposive sampling strategy for my research project. There was a small, American population of about 2,000 people, from which my selection of research participants took place. My sample, selected purposely from this population, was 20 participants. I intended to recruit research participants from among people in the community, with whom I was acquainted. Once I acquired a couple of research participants, I employed Babbie's (2004) snowball sampling strategy, which consisted of asking the participants if they were able to recommend potential participants, which included providing me with email addresses. Within the context of this study, the criteria used to determine qualifying participants was the following: consumers over the age of 18, no convicts, and no residents of any type of facility (prison, treatment facility, nursing home, assisted living, or group home for minors). As a manner of acquiring participant responses that were relevant to my research questions, and as a manner of deriving deeper meaning from participant responses, I preferred that the research participants were familiar with the concept of green and with buying green-labeled products. The criteria

used to establish knowledge of the concept green and green-labeled products are provided within the consent form, which research participants read and signed. I assessed that asking participants to identify other, potential participants would help combat the perception that, as the researcher, I incorporated my bias by choosing participants that I thought would help generate the results that I hoped to achieve. An added benefit to employing Babbie's (2004) snowball sampling strategy is it helped me achieve finding 20 research participants, who already aware of greenwashing. I remained open to all possibilities, because I planned to implement a sampling strategy that would generate as collaborative a perspective as possible.

Because I used a qualitative research approach, I intended to limit my purposive sample to 20 participants or until data saturation occurred. The intent of this research was to "develop an adequate description, interpretation, and explanation of the results as they pertained to a particular group of people in a particular context" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 79). I determined that 20 research participants, or until data saturation occurred, would allow me to develop a rich and thick description of the phenomenon. Although the emerging themes were attributable to this purposive sample of participants, Chapter 5 includes how these results might be compared to the results of a larger population of consumers using the same research methodology, instrumentation, and interview questions.

Instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument used in this research project was a semistructured open-ended set of interview questions, which I administered via e-mail. I derived the interview questions from the research questions in order to ensure relevancy

of participants' responses to the study. I anticipated that the responses to the open-ended questions would provide enough data to reveal emerging themes regarding the consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed for elaboration and completeness of answering and prompted a fuller description of the phenomenon and the participants' experiences with it (Moustakas, 1994). I asked a semistructured set of interview questions, which provided some structure to the interview process while allowing for the inclusion of new ideas to be explored during the interview process. I recognized that it was possible that there were lines of questioning that I had not considered but that are important to a comprehensive data collection and analysis process.

Procedures for Pilot Study

Before emailing the interview questions to the participants, I conducted a pilot study to ensure that my instructions and subsequent set of interview questions were clear and as free from bias as possible (Maxwell, 2013). I sent the interview questions, via e-mail, to two participants, who did not participate in the primary study. Based upon their responses, I determined that changes to the interview questions and to the coordinating instructions were not required.

Data Collection

In order to be able to execute my data collection process, I first needed to acquire approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board. Walden University's approval number for this study was 10-10-14-0257779 and it expires on October 9, 2015. Upon receiving my approval, I began contacting participants, as outlined within the

portion of my research project, wherein I discussed the purposive sample interviewed.

Once I received the informed consent forms from the participants, I began my research

process.

Receiving responses via email ensured that I had accurate transcripts of

participants' responses. If I had employed a face-to-face interview protocol, I would have

been required to record the participants' responses, either electronically or digitally.

Because I already had a complete record of the participants' responses, I did not need to

engage in a lengthy, transcription process, which would have been necessary to acquire a

verbatim accounting of their responses. A set of responses received via e-mail precluded

any inadvertent inaccurate summaries or paraphrasing. I recognized that by acquiring

research participant responses via email, I would not benefit from being able to read their

respective facial expressions and body language, but I also recognized that there was the

potential to receive fuller, more robust responses as the result of providing the research

participants with unlimited time to generate responses to the questions. In a face-to-face

setting, research participants may have felt precluded from providing in depth responses.

With respect to addressing the reliability of the findings, follow-up conversations with

the participants were not be required. Follow-up would have ordinarily occurred as part

of the process wherein the researcher confirms with the participant that what the

researcher has gleaned from the data collection process is a true and accurate accounting

of what the participant desired to convey (Patton, 2002). To ensure the confirmability and

affirm the rigor of my study (Patton, 2002), I used an audit trail (see Appendix C). As

noted, sending the interview questions and subsequently receiving the participants'

responses, all via e-mail, saved considerable time throughout the data collection process, while ensuring the reliability of the data. Collected data were secured and will be deleted after 5 years.

Data Organization

Organizing the data I collected was a crucial consideration that I, the primary researcher, had to make. Because I ensured all participants of their respective rights to anonymity and confidentiality, as indicated within Appendix A (Assent to Participate in Research) of this research project, I was required to ensure the integrity of the data I collected. Once I received e-mails from participants, I maintained an electronic, working copy, from which I hand-coded the data into themes. I also saved responses in a document, which, instead of having the participants' personal information associated with their responses; I assigned a randomly generated integer to each set of responses. In this manner, I was able to ensure that only I knew the identities of the participants. I was then able to archive participants respective emails in a folder to which only I had, and continue to have, access, as no one else had access to my password protected account. The printed versions of the participants' responses were maintained in a lockbox, to which only I know the combination. Only I had access to the lockbox, so the risk of exposing the identities of the research participants was mitigated. The document into which I compiled the participants' responses was saved in a folder on my computer's desktop, and I password protected the folder.

Data Analysis

In order to make sense out of all of the data I received, in the form of the participants' responses, I began the content analysis process by coding the data (Janesick, 2011; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). I used open coding to categorize data I collected. Open coding involved a process of reviewing the collected data and allowing the themes to emerge naturally, without predesignating a set of themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By allowing the themes to emerge out of the data, I was able to develop categories around the data that was pertinent to my study (Maxwell, 2013). The development of the categories of codes, or themes, began with the first reading of the data (Patton, 2002). Recognizing that all data was of equal importance, I implemented a technique known as horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). This process consisted of analyzing all of the collected data, with a specific emphasis on valuing it equally. I bracketed my biases in order to ensure that I did not undervalue particular data sets. Once the categories of codes were determined, I reread the data with the specific purpose of coding within the data itself, either by highlighting or otherwise annotating the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because I intended to hand-code all of the data I collected, I highlighted and took notes within the margins of my transcripts as part of my sense-making process.

The process of analyzing the data was not as simple as jotting a few notes or matching the highlighted material (the different highlights were representative of the different themes that emerged within the data). I engaged in a data reduction process, which, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), is the process of focusing only on the

data that is relevant to the research questions. I read each of the participants' responses and coded or otherwise annotated all verbiage that directly related to their lived experiences. Because participant responses were not ambiguous and provided to me in verbatim form, I did not use member checking to confirm my understanding of the responses. By focusing only on the data that was relevant to the research questions, I was able to effectively develop conclusions and findings, which were congruent with the meanings derived from the participants', lived experiences.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In order to derive unbiased meaning from participant responses, I was prepared to use member checking as a method of clarifying ambiguous responses. The use of member checking promotes collaborative and participatory inquiry, which is recognized as part of the rigor necessary in the process of ensuring the credibility of the data (Patton, 2002). Further contributing to the internal validity of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was my physical absence during the administration of the questionnaire and during the participants' answering the interview questions. Warner (1991) noted that when researcher actions are unobtrusive or absent, a sort of *nature validity* occurs. I assess that use of this process enhanced the credibility of my findings.

Transferability

I assessed that this area represented the greatest weakness within my research project. Because I used a purposive sampling strategy, which resulted in the conclusions and findings of the study being limited to those who it is expected already had insight

into the phenomenon of greenwashing (Maxwell, 2013). This study involved a purposive

sample of 20 participants, which made it imprudent to make claims regarding the ability

to transferability of the findings from this small sample of individuals to a larger

population. Although it is worth noting that the results of phenomenological studies are

typically not be replicable (Delmar, 2010), I am confident that the theoretical inferences

of the acquired data are able to be applied to studies involving larger samples of a

particular population. An additional purpose of this research project was to determine

emergent themes, which may be used in other studies, perhaps quantitative, to lend

further support to the results contained herein. By using thick description to elucidate

both the phenomenon and participants' responses to the interview questions (Patton,

2002), it will be better possible for other researchers to make the determination regarding

the transferability of my conclusions and findings to their respective research projects.

Dependability

Ensuring the dependability of the data is a critical aspect of conducting research,

whether using a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods design. Within the context of

this study, dependability refers to "whether the process of the study is consistent" (Miles

& Huberman, 1994, p. 278). I incorporated an audit trail (see Appendix C) into my study

as a method of ensuring that a systematic approach was taken when executing the data

collection and analysis processes. I received unadulterated participant responses via e-

mail, which means there was no chance of my making mistakes during a transcribing

process, which would have been necessary had I conducted face-to-face interviews and

recorded participant responses. Although I did not use member checking to confirm my

understanding of participant responses, thereby making it possible that the lack of rigor associated with this method negatively impacted the dependability of the results, I experienced no ambiguity within the participants' responses, which resulted in my decision to not use member checking. It is inevitable to completely remove bias from a research project, so, by ensuring that I made no inferences or conclusions of my own when reviewing participant responses, I was explicit about the existence of bias, and, through awareness of its existence, I remained vigilant. The data coding process began as soon as I started receiving participant responses. Identifying consistency between my conclusions and findings and the data collected was my best method of ensuring and enhancing the dependability of my findings.

Confirmability

Miles and Huberman (1994) offered that assuring the confirmability of one's data equates to assuring one's objectivity, or neutrality. One of the ways in which I was able to help assure the confirmability of my data was to implement a pilot study, as I mentioned in the data collection section of this paper. Because I was able to test my interview questions ahead of time, I was able to ensure that my questions did not contain biases that I had not previously recognized. I expected my questions to be as free of researcher bias as possible, so that when the participants read the questions, they were encouraged to submit responses that were in line with their own experiences and perceptions. I used a technique known as *epoche* as another method of ensuring the confirmability of my data analysis and conclusions. By using *epoche* or *bracketing*, I was able to review the participants' responses more attentively and gain a better

understanding of the phenomenon from their perspectives, because I set aside my own biases and expectations (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994).

Participant Confidentiality

I understood the importance of ensuring that issues of ethics were considered throughout the entire process of the research project in order to ensure the safety of all participants. One of the most important ethical considerations before the start of the research project was acquiring informed consent. I provided all of the appropriate information to the potential participants so that they were able to provide consent based upon knowing all of the facts surrounding the project. This was especially important in ensuring that the participants knew of any associated risks (physical or otherwise) before agreeing (or disagreeing) to participate in the study.

A good approach to ensuring that the project was conducted ethically was to ensure the participants were aware of the following: purpose of the project, any procedures to be undertaken during the conduct of the project, associated risks (as stated), any benefits to the participants (real, not embellished). The assurance, in writing, that participation was strictly voluntary, a confidentiality statement that assured the participants that the data would be coded to preclude its relation to the participants, and points of contact should the participants have had any questions. Of course, all of this information was contained within a document designed to establish consent to participant in the research project via the participant's signature. As an additional measure of ensuring participant confidentiality, I assigned a random integer to each of the participants. The random integer was the only identification assigned to each of the

transcripts that I coded, which precluded any inadvertent disclosure of participant information.

Because communications with participants were conducted via email, I ensured that all participants' respective contact information was protected from inadvertent exposure to other participants. This means that I did not email two or more participants at the same time. All emails were submitted individually, and, once emails were received, I immediately stored them in a folder, separate from all of my other correspondence, and removed them from my inbox. The limited and restricted access to this information and to my email account, in general, became my best assurance of protecting participants' confidentiality.

Summary

I described and justified why I selected a qualitative research methodology and why this study used an empirical phenomenological approach. Other considered designs were ethnography, grounded theory, case study, and narrative research. By using a qualitative phenomenological research approach, I was able to collect information as it pertained to the participants' lived experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon greenwashing. By sending the questionnaire via email, I was only be able to ask open-ended questions, to which I was able to receive responses, but I was also able to receive their responses in verbatim transcript form. I used these verbatim transcripts to hand-code the data, which aided me in the data analysis process. Methods of ensuring the integrity of the data covered in this chapter, ensured that while working with printed versions of participants' responses, that none of the participants' personally identifiable information

was available. Chapter 4 consists of a detailed description of the findings of the study,

which also included an analysis of the research data.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the qualitative empirical phenomenological study was to explore and describe consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing. In this chapter, I provided the results of the data collection and analysis, including the themes that emerged. This chapter consists of a description of the pilot study, study participants, data collection process, data analysis process, findings, the emergent themes, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Pilot Study

The purpose of the pilot study was to enhance the confirmability of the results of my data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As needed, the interview questions were revised for clarity; any biases were removed. I facilitated the pilot study in the same manner that I facilitated the primary study. I administered the pilot study to two participants, who were not a part of the original study. I sent the pilot study participants an invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix D), the informed consent form (see Appendix A), and the questions (see Appendix B) on 11 October 2014. I received responses from one of the pilot study participants on 11 October 2014 and responses from the other participant on 13 October 2014. The participant who sent responses on 13 October 2014 apologized for not getting the responses back to me sooner, citing issues with children as the reason for the delay. As I considered a 2-day turnaround for responses reasonable, neither did I consider it necessary to inquire about the length of time needed to complete the survey nor did I determine the length of time for participation to be an impediment to my study.

The pilot study participants responded to 12 questions, 9 of which focused on exploring and describing the essence of their experiences with greenwashing. Participants provided feedback regarding the clarity of the instructions within Appendices A and D, as well as the clarity and understandability of the questions within Appendix B. Because of receiving clear and understandable responses from the two pilot study participants, I determined that no changes to the instructions or to the interview questions were necessary. Pilot study participants neither offered input nor recommended changes to the verbiage within the instructions, and neither of the pilot study participants asked for clarification of the meaning of any of the interview questions. The responses I received from the two pilot study participants were relevant to the research questions guiding my study, so I felt confident about beginning my primary study.

Research Setting

Realizing the effect that personal conditions may have on participants, especially at the time of the participation in the study, I remained vigilant when analyzing participant responses for any signs of extreme emotions or other variances. I remained cognizant of the potential effect that personal conditions could have on research participants, their responses to the interview questions, and, subsequently, my interpretation of the results. Although I was prepared to use member checking as a means of ensuring my understanding of participants' responses, I chose not to do so as all of the participants' responses were clear and unambiguous.

Study Participants

Using Babbie's (1994) snowball sampling technique, I was able to acquire the names and e-mail addresses for 20 prospective research participants. I received recommendations for research participants from the two participants who participated in the pilot study and from two of the first three participants, who participated in the primary study. I received these recommendations starting on 11 October 2014, and I had names and email addresses for all prospective participants by 13 October 2014. All four of the participants who recommended other prospective participants were women. I surmised that the close-knit nature of the American community is what contributed to my acquiring names and points of contact as quickly as occurred. Each of the participants that recommended other participants sent me the data via email, which I archived in a folder that is accessible only by me.

Questionnaires were sent via electronic mail (e-mail) to the 20 participants on 13 October 2014. Following the same procedure that I implemented within the pilot study, each participant received the invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix D), the informed consent form (see Appendix A), and the questionnaire (see Appendix B). The participants were informed, via the e-mails containing these documents, which they were encouraged to answer as fully as they desired, with no time constraint assigned to responding to the questionnaires, respectively. The data collection process consisted of sending the questionnaire to each of the participants via e-mail and then receiving the responses in the same manner. Immediately after sending the invitations to the prospective participants via email, I received only one notification that one of the email

addresses I had was invalid. I contacted the participant, who provided that information,

on 13 October 2014, and, later that same day, I received a name and email address for a

different, prospective participant. The email address was valid, and that prospective

participant became a participating member in my study. I received my first set of

participant responses on 14 October 2014, and I received my final set of responses on 29

October 2014. Because I received the responses over the course of a 2-week period, I was

able to begin reading and coding the data as the set of responses was returned. I did not

send reminders to the prospective participants, because I did not get to a point where I

anticipated there were problems. I received responses from 100% of the participants.

Participant responses to the interview questions ranged from two to six lines of text.

Although some participants' responses were less verbose than others,' my overall

impression was that each of the participants responded as thoughtfully as they felt was

necessary.

     The questions were designed to help bridge the gap in the literature, which, for the

purpose of this study, was an improved and richer description of consumers' lived

experiences with greenwashing. Because the questionnaire was conducted via e-mail and

I was unable to benefit from observing and recording participants' body language and

other nonverbal communication, I ensured my own biases did not cause me to

misinterpret the data. There were also no indications of environmental conditions that

impacted participants' responses.

Demographics

This qualitative empirical phenomenological study consisted of 20 research participants, who were selected using a purposive sampling strategy and Babbie's (1994) snowballing technique. Demographic information for the research participants, which consisted of gender, age range, and highest level of education, are found within Table 1. The participants in this study were predominantly educated, female Gen Xers. The number of men was four; representing 20% of the total participant population, while the number of women was 16, which presented the remaining 80%. The age range of the 20 research participants was 25 to 54 years of age. Participants in age range of 35 to 44 represented the majority of the research participants at 60%. Thirty-five percent of the participants were in the 25 to 34-age range, with the remaining 5% of participants falling into the 45 to 54-age range. The majority of participants (7, or 35%) indicated a Bachelors degree as their highest level of education, with 6 (30%) participants indicating a Masters degree, 5 (25%) indicating some college, and 2 (10%) participants indicating an Associates degree as their highest level of education. All research participants were native English speaking Americans, living in a small community in Germany. The survey was administered in English, so there were no translation requirements or issues.

Table 1

Demographic Breakdown

Category	N	%
Gender		
Men	4	20
Women	16	80
Age		
18-24	0	0
25-34	7	35
35-44	12	60
45-54	1	5
55-64	0	0
Highest Level of Education		
Less than high school	0	0
High school/GED	0	0
Some college	5	25
2-year college degree	2	10
4-year college degree	7	35
Master's degree	6	30
Doctoral degree	0	0
Professional degree (MD, JD)	0	0

Data Collection

The purpose of the data collection process was to collect relevant, participant responses in an effort to answer the research questions, which were (a) What does the concept of greenwashing mean to consumers? (b) What is the essence of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing? and (c) How do consumers describe their purchasing behavior with greenwashing? I used the research questions as a guide in developing the questionnaire, and I determined that the interview questions were the most appropriate for acquiring participant responses that were relevant to the research

questions. Specifically, the questions were used to explore and describe consumers'

perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences with greenwashing.

The purpose the qualitative empirical phenomenological study was to explore and

describe consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing. The questions used

within this study are the questions located in Appendix B. As previously explained, I did

not engage in a traditional face-to-face interview process. Instead, I sent the questions in

the form of a questionnaire to the participants via their personal e-mail. The two

participants, who were involved with the pilot study, also received their invitations,

consent forms, and questionnaires via personal e-mail. In addition to using the pilot study

to assure or enhance the confirmability of the data, I used this process to evaluate the

effectiveness of communication via e-mail for this type of activity and to establish

rapport with each of the participants. I ensured that my e-mails were written with

salutations and with expressions of gratitude for their time and assistance in the study.

All e-mails from the research participants were coded and data analyzed using my

personal computer located within my home office. There was no other computer or

location used throughout my study.

The questionnaires consisted of 12 semistructured, open-ended questions. I

determined that participants understood the research questions based upon the responses I

received from them, which helped confirm the pilot study. As I received e-mails from

participants with their respective responses, I assigned an integer to each participant,

which was then used to identify each participant. I assigned the integer to ensure the

confidentiality of each of the research participants. Integers were assigned from a list of

randomly generated integers, and they were assigned in the order that emails were received. I used Microsoft Excel to track the participants and I maintained the participants' e-mail addresses in case there were instances during the data analysis process that required me to use member checking to confirm responses. After assigning integers to each the participants, I printed their responses to the interview questions, I saved the Microsoft Word documents containing their responses in a password-protected folder on my computer's desktop, and I saved the participants' e-mails within a designated folder. The last step in this process involved removing participants' e-mails from my inbox and emptying the trash bin on my computer. There were no unusual circumstances or variations to the data collection process described in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

In order to make sense out of the data I received from the participants, I began the content analysis process by coding the data (Janesick, 2011; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). I used open coding to categorize the data I collected. Using the open coding strategy, I reviewed the collected data and allowed the themes to emerge naturally, without predesignating a set of themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The frequency of certain terms in participants' responses, such as *ploy*, *scam*, *manipulation*, *spin*, and *façade* were coded with the letter 'DIST', which later justified my generating the 'distrust in green advertising' theme. Although relatively straightforward in this instance, not all themes were identified with such ease. The *prudence* and *education* themes, for example, were derived from the meanings of the participants' responses and not from a list of words meaning the same thing as the titles of the themes. For a more

detailed discussion and explanation of the themes that emerged from the participants'

responses, please see the Study Results section in this chapter.

By allowing the themes to emerge out of the data, I was able to develop categories

around the data that was pertinent to my study (Maxwell, 2013). The development of the

categories of codes, or themes, began with my first reading of the data (Patton, 2002).

Recognizing that all data is of equal importance, I implemented a technique known as

horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). This process consisted of analyzing all of the

collected data, with a specific emphasis on valuing it equally. I bracketed my biases in

order to ensure that I did not undervalue particular data sets. Once the categories of codes

were determined, I reread the data with the specific purpose of coding within the data

itself, both by highlighting and annotating the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because I

decided to hand-code all of the data I collected, I used highlighting and note taking within

the margins of my transcripts as part of my sense-making process.

The process of analyzing the data was not as simple as jotting a few notes or

matching the highlighted material (the different highlights were representative of the

different themes that emerged within the data). I engaged in a data reduction process,

which, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), is the process of focusing only on the

data that is relevant to the research questions. I read each of the participants' responses

and coded or otherwise annotated all verbiage that directly related to their lived

experiences. Comparisons in each of the participants' responses to each of the questions

were made in order to identify similarities in verbiage, which subsequently allowed me to

derive meanings from the responses. By focusing only on the data that was relevant to the

research questions, I was able to effectively develop conclusions and findings, which were congruent with the meanings derived from the participants', lived experiences.

Although I was prepared to discontinue the data analysis process had I achieved saturation prior to reviewing and analyzing all 20-research participants' responses, I did not; I used all 20-research participants' answers to the interview questions, even though I noticed that no new themes were emerging after analyzing the sixteenth set of responses. Because I only had four additional sets of data to analyze, I used all 20 data sets. I wanted to be sure that the remaining four sets did not contain any new or discrepant themes, and, as part of my effort to develop a rich and thick description of the phenomenon, I chose to use all 20 sets of collected data.

I was able to narrow and extract discrepant cases that were no relevant to the phenomenon being studied, as each of the discrepant cases involved answers that were not relevant to the research questions or involved answers that did not directly address the corresponding question within the questionnaire. Answers pertaining to *eating healthily*, for example, were disregarded, because the focus of this study is greenwashing, which pertains to goods and services that are advertised as being good for the environment (or at least better than other products), not one's eating habits.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The issues of trustworthiness within this qualitative empirical phenomenological study pertained to making assurances of the credibility (Janesick, 2011; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Warner, 1991), transferability (Delmar, 2010; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002), dependability (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and confirmability (Husserl, 1931;

Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moustakas, 1994) of my findings. Presented within this

section is an explanation of the steps that I took to ensure each issue of trustworthiness.

Credibility

In order to derive unbiased meaning from participant responses, I was prepared to

use member checking as a method of clarifying ambiguous responses. I did not use

member checking as a manner of enhancing the credibility of my findings, because all of

the participants' responses were received verbatim, and I did not encounter any

ambiguous responses. The use of member checking would have promoted collaborative

and participatory inquiry, which is recognized as part of the rigor necessary in the process

of ensuring the credibility of the data (Patton, 2002), but I determined I did not need to

confirm with each of the members that I understood the meanings of their responses.

Further contributing to the credibility of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was my

physical absence during the administration of the questionnaire and during the

participants' answering the interview questions. I assess that use of this process enhanced

the credibility of my findings. No other approach was used as an independent check for

credibility.

Transferability

I assessed that this area represented the greatest weakness within my research

project, because I used a purposive sampling strategy, which resulted in the conclusions

and findings of the study being limited to those who it is expected already had insight

into the phenomenon of greenwashing (Maxwell, 2013). This study involved a purposive

sample of 20 individuals, which made it imprudent to make claims regarding the ability

to transferability of the findings from this small sample of individuals to a larger

population. Although it is worth noting that the results of phenomenological studies are

typically not be replicable (Delmar, 2010), I am confident that the theoretical inferences

of the acquired data are able to be applied to studies involving larger samples of a

particular population. An additional purpose of this research project was to determine

emergent themes, which may be used in other studies, perhaps quantitative, to lend

further support to the results contained herein. By using thick description to elucidate

both the phenomenon and participants' responses to the interview questions (Patton,

2002), it will be more possible for other researchers to make the determination regarding

the transferability of my conclusions and findings to their respective research projects.

Dependability

Ensuring the dependability of the data is a critical aspect of conducting research,

whether using a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods design. Within the context of

this study, dependability refers to "whether the process of the study is consistent" (Miles

& Huberman, 1994, p. 278). I incorporated an audit trail (see Appendix C) as a method of

ensuring that a systematic approach was taken when executing the data collection and

analysis processes. I received unadulterated participant responses via e-mail, which

means there was no chance of my making mistakes during a transcribing process; a

process that would have been necessary had I conducted face-to-face interviews and

recorded participant responses. It is inevitable to completely remove bias from a research

project, so, by ensuring that I made no inferences or conclusions of my own when

reviewing participant responses, I was explicit about the existence of bias, and, through

awareness of its existence, I remained vigilant. The data coding process began as soon as I started receiving participant responses. Identifying consistency between my conclusions and findings and the data collected was my best method of ensuring and enhancing the dependability of my findings.

Confirmability

Miles and Huberman (1994) offered that assuring the confirmability of one's data equates to assuring one's objectivity, or neutrality. One of the ways in which I was able to help assure the confirmability of my data was to implement a pilot study, as I mentioned in the data collection section of this paper. Because I was be able to test my interview questions prior to executing the primary study, I was able to ensure that my questions did not contain biases that I had not previously recognized. I expected my questions to be as free of researcher bias as possible, so that when the participants read the questions, they were encouraged to submit responses that were in line with their own experiences and perceptions. I used a technique known as *epoche* as another method of ensuring the confirmability of my data analysis and conclusions. By using *epoche* or *bracketing*, I was able to review the participants' responses more attentively and gain a better understanding of the phenomenon from their perspectives, because I set aside my own biases and expectations (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994).

<div align="center">**Study Results**</div>

This section contains the results of the data collection and analysis process. Using an open coding procedure, I was able to capture all of the information from the data collection process that is relevant to the research questions.

Table 2

Themes and Definitions for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3

Theme	Definition
Distrust in Green Advertising	Participants' responses indicated a lack of trust in green-labeled goods and services.
Business as Usual (Indifference)	Participants attributed greenwashing as business as usual for corporations; anything to get the consumers' money.
Betrayal	Participants expressed a myriad of emotions stemming from the feelings of being betrayed.
Education	Participants maintained that educating one's self is the best way to avoid becoming a victim of greenwashing.
Prudence	Participants communicated the need for consumers to read labels and make better decisions when choosing green-labeled products over others.
Personal Health	Participants expressed their personal health and the health of their families as a motivation for purchasing the green versions of products.
Environmental Concern	Participants maintained a degree of personal responsibility for protecting the environment.
Expense	Participants indicated the expensive nature of green-labeled products as a limiting factor for purchasing them.
Purchasing Power	Participants suggested using their purchasing power as a method of communicating their dissatisfaction with greenwashing.

Table 3

Frequency of Themes for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3

Theme	Number of participants mentioning the theme	Total quotes theme associated
Distrust in Green Advertising	11	22
Business as Usual (Indifference)	12	27
Betrayal	10	15
Education	9	16
Prudence	12	19
Personal Health	9	25
Environmental Concern	10	23
Expense	8	13
Purchasing Power	12	22

Research Question 1

What does the concept of greenwashing mean to consumers? Interview Questions 9 and 12 addressed this initial research question. Two themes emerged, based on the responses to these questions, regarding consumers' thoughts and perceptions of a corporation's relationship with its consumers and the practice of greenwashing. These two themes are as follows.

Theme 1: Distrust in Green Advertising.

According to the responses to Interview Questions 9 and 12, there was a negative reaction to corporate marketing practices related to green advertising by the majority of participants (55%) that included distrust in corporations and the reasons for advertising green goods and services. Mostly, the participants expressed being unaware of which green-labeled products they can trust, in order to make the best decisions regarding which

products are the best for the environment. The participants expressed a lack of confidence that corporations are genuinely creating the green products that they desire to purchase. Corporate greenwashing seems to have created such uncertainty among consumers regarding the veracity of green advertising that consumers, in general, experience distrust for it. As shared by one participant,

> Green is simply a buzzword in advertising to boost profits. While there are a few companies that truly care and have done their part to always take care of their environmental impact into account. They never had to come out with green products, because their original products were already earth friendly…before it was in.

Another participant shared similar sentiments: "I think that a corporation will only concern itself with how it is perceived by a large majority, so I only expect them to do/say anything that they either *must* legally or that benefits them financially." Those who expressed a serious distrust for green-labeling and advertising expressed concern for not being able to know whether corporations were being truthful in their advertising, or not.

In expressing their distrust for green advertising, many participants used particular terms in their responses to express their leeriness. Three participants independently conveyed green advertising as a *ploy*, whereas several other participants used the terms *spin*, *outright lies*, *brain-washing*, *manipulation*, *façade*, *scam*, *trendy* (twice stated), and *rhetoric* in their respective expressions of distrust. The majority of the research participants expressed feeling that corporations are out to achieve their one and

only bottom line—profits. As addressed in Chapter 2, the concept of consumer trust, especially green trust, is advanced based upon the participants' responses. Within the consumer-corporation relationship, there exists an expectation on the part of the consumers the corporations will value their relationships enough to do what it is they advertise they will do (Castaldo, 2009), which, in this case, is provide legitimately green goods and services. However, as many corporations have undertaken greenwashing as a marketing strategy, greenwashing seems to have significantly affected the trust and confidence that consumers may have once had in green-labeled products and green advertising, in general.

Based on the nature of the participants' responses to the two questions, consumer confidence in green-labeled goods and services and green advertising, in general, has significantly diminished. As declared by the research participants, the distrust for advertising green-labeled products has negatively affected their respective desires to purchase green-labeled products. As was also discussed within Chapter 2, the result of this distrust has the ability to harm well-meaning corporations that are producing and providing legitimate green goods and services. Additionally, and arguably most significantly, the continued or increased use of products that are not green, as legitimately advertised, may lead to increased harm to the environment, which is what green-labeled products are advertised to prevent in the first place.

Table 4

Distrust in Green *Advertising*

Theme	Participant #	Participant Count	Percentage
Distrust in Green Advertising	P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P8, P9, P12, P14, P16, P20	11	55%

Theme 2: Business as Usual (Indifference)

Another theme to emerge from participant responses was indifference, which stemmed from an acceptance that corporate greenwashing is *business as usual*. According to the responses received for Interview Questions 9 and 12, 60% of the participants articulated the belief that corporate greenwashing is simply a matter of doing business. This is not to suggest that the participants were accepting of the practice of greenwashing; however, as several of the participants expressed feelings of resigned indifference, as though it mattered not whether they accepted it is as a practice—they recognized it as a matter of conducting business, with nothing they could really do about it. One participant expressed the belief that:

> Corporations exist to make money for their shareholders. Unfortunately, for the vast majority, I think their only relationship with the customer is to ensure that they keep making whatever it is they make and that they ensure the customer keeps buying it.

Several other participants divulged similar responses, with one participant, in particular, expressing, "I feel greenwashing by companies is used only to get more of your business," and with one other participant stating, "They want me to buy their stuff— nothing more, nothing less." The participants who expressed a *business as usual* response expressed a resigned indifference that was devoid of emotion. Nothing was noted in the verbiage of their responses to indicate anger, disappointment, or any other negative emotion. Those types of responses were provided when answering other interview questions, so I am confident that the responses provided that highlighted *business as usual* as a theme were provided in a matter of fact manner.

Table 5

Business as Usual (Indifference)

Theme	Participant #	Participant Count	Percentage
Business as Usual (Indifference)	P3, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P13, P14, P15, P18, P19	12	60%

Research Question 2

What is the essence of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing? Interview Questions 4, 5, 8, and 10 were designed to address this second research question. Based on the answers to these questions, regarding awareness of purchasing greenwashed products, experiences with greenwashing, negative perceptions of

greenwashing and recommendations for handling the issue of greenwashing, and changes in purchasing behaviors as a result of experiencing greenwashing, participant responses revealed three major themes upon which to further focus the study.

Theme 3: Betrayal

According to responses to Interview Questions 4 and 5, which focused on participants' experiences with and feelings about greenwashing, the most common theme to emerge was betrayal (50%). Some participants used words like *patronized*, *bullied*, *duped*, *angry*, *cheated*, and *disturbed* to describe their feelings associated with their experiences with greenwashing, but, as stated, the majority of participants expressed feeling betrayed. According to one participant,

> Gardening supplies tend to be greenwashed. I've definitely felt betrayed when I found out that they were greenwashed and not nearly as safe as they proclaimed. Same with cleaning products.

Another participant shared similar sentiments by stating,

> Yes, I've been *duped* by the verbiage around greenwashing. At the time of my purchase, I felt like I was doing something good. When I found out, after the fact, that the words were meant to trick me, I felt betrayed by the company and have since boycotted all of their products.

These participants' responses seem to support the ideas presented by Bartels and Hoogendam (2011) with respect to the role that social identity plays in shaping consumers' purchasing behaviors. Greenwood and Buren III (2010) underscored the necessity of trust in the consumer-corporation relationship. It stands to reason that a

consumer, such as the consumers who participated in this study, could share feeling

betrayed by corporations with whom they identified themselves. Once consumer trust is

violated and once corporate identity is found to be dissimilar to that of its consumers,

boycotting (as mentioned above) and negative associations seem to be a natural

consequence. The reactions to instances of greenwashing are emotional, as indicated by

one participant, who expressed the following,

> I felt lied to and ripped off. I was angry and very disturbed by the idea that I had
>
> been a willing consumer and in fact supporter of a product that flat out deceived
>
> me and all other customers who had purchased the product with specific intent
>
> about supporting green practices.

Based on the answers to the two questions, it may be concluded that greenwashing has

resulted in a violation of consumer trust, leaving consumers to feel betrayed by the very

corporations with which they once identified. As expressed by the research participants,

corporate betrayal of consumer trust has eroded their respective desires to purchase

green-labeled products.

Table 6

Betrayal

Theme	Participant #	Participant Count	Percentage
Betrayal	P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, P11, P12, P16, P18, P19	10	50%

Theme 4: Education

According to responses to Question 8, which elicited responses regarding participants' recommendations for handling the issue of greenwashing, provided they harbored negative perception of greenwashing, the majority of participants were self-aware of the need to educate themselves in order to avoid becoming victims of greenwashing practices. Whereas a small percentage of participants suggested the implementation of stringent regulations and guidelines, to include standardizing the definitions of terms like *natural* or green, the majority of similar responses (45%) expressed feelings about the need for consumer education. One participant stated,

> I would recommend that a public campaign that makes people aware of the fact that they are being manipulated and the only thing they can do to fight it is to do product research.

Another participant offered a similar suggestion by stating,

> I think that the lack of knowledge of consumers of just what greenwashing is needs to be addressed. Sure, they are many documentaries out there to watch and I know that is where I started, but by nature, consumers see green leafy backgrounds on their favorite products and assume they are better.

There were two participants; however, who, while agreeing with the need for consumer education, expressed feelings that such education is a personal responsibility. Rather than expect some sort of government program or campaign to provide the education consumers need, consumers have the responsibility to ensure they are educating themselves. A participant in support of self-education stated,

I think it is up to the consumer to be aware of greenwashing and to make their

own informed decisions. Consumers have to want to know the truth and be

proactive enough to research products before falling victim to advertising

schemes.

Another participant responded that consumers should blame themselves for becoming

victims of greenwashing. This participant offered,

People tend to want to be blissfully ignorant of greenwashing, and actually take

the greenwashing messages at face value. We should know better than to trust the

information given to us by the guy trying to get our money.

Based on the answers to the question, consumers expressed how the experience of

greenwashing led to feelings that the best way to combat greenwashing is by educating

oneself. As indicated by the research participants' responses, education is a consumer's

best defense against being the victim of greenwashing, especially when it is exceedingly

difficult, if not impossible, to know for sure which green-labeled goods and services are

genuinely green, or at least better for the environment than other goods and services.

Table 7

Education

Theme	Participant #	Participant Count	Percentage
Education	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P10, P19	9	45%

Theme 5: Prudence

According to responses to Interview Question 10, which was created to determine changes in participants' purchasing behaviors, as the result of having experienced greenwashing, the biggest theme to emerge from the participants' responses was participant feelings of prudence. The majority of the participants' responses indicated that they, as the result of experiencing greenwashing, now approach purchasing green-labeled products with much more caution than they used to. Forty percent of the participants indicated that they have not changed their purchasing behaviors, with the majority of those participants underscoring the belief that a change in purchasing behaviors would be of no benefit in combating the experience of greenwashing or from becoming a victim of it. The remaining 60% of participants stated that they feel much more cautious when purchasing green-labeled goods and services.

Lending support for the idea of self-educating oneself, as discussed in Theme 4, one participant offered,

> Yes, I have changed my purchasing behaviors. I now know how to identify truly green products and feel less likely to be fooled by the imitations. I am continually trying to learn, because each time I shop, I feel like I'm fighting a battle not to get scammed.

There was one participant, who indicated an emotional response to being a victim of greenwashing and how the situation resulted in an immediate change in purchasing behavior. This participant responded,

Yes, pissed off, and I stopped buying the products, which was tough since I'd

grown to enjoy them.

In spite of a feeling of greater distrust for green-labeled goods and services, not all

consumers are ready to abandon the quest to purchase them. As indicated by one of the

research participants,

I will always try to buy the green product, but I trust the labels less than I do the

research of a company's practices. If a company has green products, I will take

the time to see if its claims are legit. I don't have time to research all of them,

though. Sometimes I take a chance, and research later. Otherwise I stick with

what I know.

Based on participant responses to the question, it can be further concluded that the

corporate marketing strategy known as greenwashing has significantly diminished

consumer feelings of confidence in green-labeled goods and services and green

advertising. As indicated by the research participants' responses, experiencing the

advertisement of green-labeled goods and services has resulted in feelings of increased

distrust in the legitimacy of the products. As the result of assuming a cautionary posture

when considering purchasing green-labeled goods and services, consumers are self-aware

of the need to educate themselves in order to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim

of greenwashing.

Table 8

Prudence

Theme	Participant #	Participant Count	Percentage
Prudence	P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P17, P18, P19	12	60%

Research Question 3

How do consumers describe their purchasing behavior with greenwashing? Interview Questions 6, 7, and 11 were designed to address this third research question. Three themes emerged based on the responses to these questions, regarding the participants' experiences when they started going green and factors influencing them to do so, whether they purchase green-labeled products, and whether the participants feel as though they have the power, as consumers, to affect the ways within which corporations conduct their business. These three themes are as follows.

Theme 6: Personal Health

According to the participants' responses to Interview Question 6, there was almost an equal distribution of responses between personal health and the environment, which were the only two themes to emerge from all responses. Feelings of concern for personal health represented 45% of the participants' influence for *going* green, while feelings of concern for the environment represented the other 50% of the participants'

influences, respectively. One participant shared they felt no influence for going green, which represented only 5% of participant responses. Slightly less than the majority of the participants expressed feelings and concern for personal health as their primary influence for purchasing green goods or services. Participants credited their experiences of increased self-awareness of products and their effects on them and their families for *going* green. One participant shared,

> I just slowly started being more aware of things and started making changes little by little. Part of the motivation was I wanted to do better by my kids' sake. I want them to be protected from various toxins that could hard them and I want them to inherit a better world.

Another participant, who provided a similar response, with regards to self-awareness through research, communicated,

> Personal research about the chemicals we expose ourselves to almost unknowingly due to our use of certain materials/products is what ultimately pushed me to start *going* green to some extent.

Furthering the discussion regarding consumer awareness of the negative effects that the experience with products was having on them and their families, another participant shared,

> I started to go green after I realized the impact that pesticides were having on my health, as well as that of my children.

Based on participant responses to the question, there is evidence that supports the argument that many consumers feel the need to *go* green out of concerns for their health

and the health of their families. As indicated by the research participants' responses, it seems reasonable to suggest that these consumers are dependent upon the experience of green-labeling recognition in order to identify goods and services that are better for them. As consumers further self-educate themselves and experience the ability to discern legitimately green-labeled products and those that are not legitimate, greenwashing as a marketing strategy may cause more harm to a corporation than do it good.

Table 9

Personal Health

Theme	Participant #	Participant Count	Percentage
Personal Health	P3, P4, P7, P9, P10, P11, P15, P17, P19	9	45%

Theme 7: Environmental Concern

According to the participants' responses to Question 6, 50% of the participants expressed feelings and concern for the environment as their primary influence for *going* green. The participants who expressed feelings and concern for the environment also intimated a high degree of personal responsibility in ensuring the protection of the environment. One of the participants made known,

> I started *going* green in my first year of college, when I began to become more
>
> aware of the consequences of my consumption and my own contribution to waste
>
> and the carbon footprint. It became clear that every choice I made had

consequences for my environment and I needed to take more responsibility. I

started first making changes in my consumer habits, as this seemed like the area I

had the most control.

In support of the notion that each person is responsible for ensuring the protection of the

environment, another participant shared,

I believe it is our responsibility to protect the planet and if we use products, which

are environmentally safe, this is a step in the right direction.

Acknowledging that protection of the environment is an issue of making choices between

environmentally-safe products and harmful ones, a participant stated, "Learning more

about how much damage certain things are to the environment when there are less

impactful options available led me to look into those options when I could." It was

interesting to note, as well, that one of the participants shared that working to protect the

environment became easier as the result of living within a culture where environmental

protection via recycling is a way of life. This particular participant disclosed,

I would say that I actually started *going* green approximately 5 years ago, in

Korea. The availability of and social support for recycling made it very easy to

incorporate a high level of recycling into our daily lives.

Based on participant responses to the question, there is evidence with supports the

argument that many consumers decide to *go* green out of concern for the environment. As

indicated by the research participants' responses, it seems reasonable to suggest that these

consumers are dependent upon green-labeling in order to identify goods and services that

are better for the environment than the non-green counterparts.

Table 10

Environmental Concern

Theme	Participant #	Participant Count	Percentage
Environmental Concern	P1, P2, P5, P6, P8, P12, P14, P16, P18, P20	10	50%

Theme 8: Expense

According to the participants' responses to Interview Question 7, which was designed to determine whether they purchase the green version of goods and services, provided they are available, 40% of the participants shared that they purchase the green version of goods and services, if they are available. An additional 40% of the participants indicated that they sometimes purchase them, while the remaining 20% of the participants admitted that they do not purchase them. For the majority of all participants, regardless of whether they indicated they do, do not, or sometimes purchase the green version of goods and services, they all expressed concern for the expense associated with these goods and services. Congruent with what was discussed within Themes 6 and 7, participants expressed concerns for personal health and for the environment as the two reasons for purchasing the green version of goods and services (the 40% that indicated that they do). For the 40% of the participants that revealed that they sometimes purchase the green version of goods and services, the majority articulated expense as the reason why they would not purchase them, all things being equal. One participant shared, "I do

buy the green version if it is not out of my prince range and also is the better alternative

to our health," while two other participants declared, "Yes, I do if I can afford it" and

"Yes, when I can afford it. Sometimes the greener alternative is more expensive."

Perhaps an indication of the limits wherein which consumers will purchase green-labeled

products, in spite of their legitimacy, one participant frankly responded,

> I do try to purchase green versions of products when the cost is within reason
>
> compared to a nongreen product. There are times when the cost does not justify
>
> the means.

Based on participant responses to the question, there is evidence with supports the

argument that many consumers (40%) purchase the green version of goods and services

out of concerns for their health and the health of their families, but that just as many

(40%) only sometimes purchase them, if they are not too expensive. As expressed within

the research participants' responses, it seems reasonable to suggest that these consumers

are dependent upon green-labeling in order to identify goods and services that are better

for them and that are reasonably priced (as compared to the nongreen versions).

Table 11

Expense

Theme	Participant #	Participant Count	Percentage
Expense	P1, P4, P6, P9, P14, P16, P18, P19	8	40%

Theme 9: Purchasing Power

According to the participants' responses to Interview Question 11, participants expressed more feelings of optimism than pessimism with respect to whether or not they feel they have the power to affect the ways within which corporations conduct their business. Sixty percent of the participants shared that they do believe that they have the power, as consumers, to affect the ways within which corporations conduct their business. The predominant method of affecting corporations, as expressed within the participants' responses, is through their purchasing behaviors. Although the majority of participants articulated their belief in their ability affect corporations through changes in their purchasing behaviors, the majority recognizes that *purchasing power* is limited. One participated stated,

> As one consumer, no, as a collective, we absolutely have power. If enough people demand something in order to have their product still sell, the company will either adapt or resort to new measures. Unfortunately, it's all about the money.

Another participant, answering along the same lines with respect to the limitations of power that single consumer wields, shared,

> As a single consumer, I do not. A corporation may not really miss my money but when we start discussing millions of disgruntled customers, this may shift the way the corporation conducts business.

One participant expressed the ability to be validated as a consumer by stating, "Yes, I use my money to make my voice heard," while another participant, in similar fashion, stated,

"Yes, I do by supporting businesses that are truly green and don't use slick marketing schemes to capitalize on the green movement." Regardless of whether consumers perceive that their *purchasing power* is limited or not, it seems that more consumers than not recognize they have the power to affect corporations.

Based on the participants' responses to the question, there is evidence that supports the argument that many consumers felt they have the power to affect the ways within which corporations conduct business. As articulated within the research participants' responses, consumers are more than willing to use their money to make their voices heard, and they will not hesitate to discontinue business with companies that are providing goods and services are that not legitimately green. Whether consumers realize their full extent of their power to affect a corporation's way of doing business, especially advertising green products, remains to be seen.

Table 12

Purchasing Power

Theme	Participant #	Participant Count	Percentage
Purchasing Power	P1, P5, P7, P8, P10, P11, P12, P14, P16, P17, P18, P19	12	60%

Summary

Twenty purposively selected participants answered interview questions designed to closely explore their experiences and perceptions of greenwashing. Through a robust data analysis process involving an open coding technique, I was able to identify themes in the data, which helped describe the essence of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing by providing relevant responses to the research questions. Participant responses to questions relating directly to Research Question 1 indicated a serious mistrust for green advertising and a generalized feeling that greenwashing simply equates to business as usual. Participant responses to questions relating to Research Question 2 revealed that consumers' experiences with greenwashing resulted in a sense of betrayal and the belief that the only way to protect one's self from being a victim of greenwashing is to educate one's self and exercise prudence when purchasing green-labeled goods and services. Participant responses to questions relating to Research Question 3 underscored participants' motivating factors for purchasing green-labeled goods and services (predominance of responses related to one's health or the health of one's family) as well as concerns for the environment. Participant responses also indicated the expense associated with green-labeled goods and services as a factor influencing their decisions to purchase the goods and services, or not. Chapter 5 consists of an interpretation of my findings, a discussion of the limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this empirical, phenomenological study was to explore and describe consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing. This chapter consists of an interpretation of the findings, a discussion of the limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, implications for positive social change, and a conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

The research questions for this study were as follows: (a) What does the concept of greenwashing mean to consumers? (b) What is the essence of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing? (c) How do consumers describe their purchasing behaviors with greenwashing? From these three questions, a questionnaire was developed and then submitted to 20 research participants via e-mail. The data analysis process revealed nine themes, which helped me document consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing.

Distrust in Green Advertising

This theme refers to the meaning the participants assigned to the concept of greenwashing. Castaldo et al. (2009) posited that regarding consumers' expectations that corporations will provide the goods and services they advertise. Congruent with that, the participants expressed their distrust in corporations that greenwash goods and services. Perhaps even more significant is their distrust in green advertising in general which, according to Chen (2009), is significant because it erodes consumers' green *trust*. Green trust pertains to a consumer's "willingness to depend on a product, service, or brand

based on the belief or expectation resulting from its credibility, benevolence, and ability about its environmental performance" (p. 309). The majority of the participants perceived green advertising, in general, to be a *ploy* or the use of buzzwords used by corporations to trick consumers into buying their goods or services. This supports the idea presented by Alves (2009) that consumers will negatively react to the term green, in general, should they develop a reason to be skeptical. Congruent with Hong and Yang's (2009) argument that trust, out of all relationship factors, has the strongest effect on consumers' feelings and behaviors, skepticism and negative reaction to the term green was developed even after the first, and sometimes only, experience with greenwashing

Indifference (Business as Usual)

This theme is also related to the meaning the participants assigned to the concept of greenwashing. The findings regarding this theme were inconsistent with the literature associated with social identity theory, consumer corporate theory, and trust. Consumer indifference regarding greenwashing may indicate an evolved attitude regarding the phenomenon—one, which was not previously seen or experienced at the time research was previously conducted. As the only one of nine themes inconsistent with previously conducted research, it is possible this theme represents the emergence of defense mechanism, of sorts, that consumers use to protect themselves from the effects of broken trust relationships, as described by Hong and Yang (2009) and Alves (2009).

Betrayal

Participants described feelings of betrayal when expressing the essence of their lived experiences with greenwashing. Consistent with the findings within Chen's (2009)

study, which explored the development of consumers' trust in green products,

participants expressed feeling betrayed by the corporations in which they put their trust.

The participants expressed having trusted corporate advertising of green goods and

services, thereby identifying with the corporation (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), which

led to feelings of betrayal when they learned they had been deceived. The degree of each

of the participants' betrayal, as shared, seems to indicate the degree to which consumers

trust corporate advertising, in general. None of the participants declared having doubts in

the authenticity of the green claims of the offending corporations. Consistent with the

ideas presented by Arnould and Thompson (2005), the use of green goods and services

was as much about congruence with one's identity as it was with the benefits realized

through their use.

Education

Self-education was the predominant recommendation shared by participants in

response to the question regarding how one might handle the issue of greenwashing. In

addition to expressing feelings associated with deception by corporate advertising

practices, participants often shared that they, as consumers, should be careful to read

labels and self-educate before purchasing green-labeled goods and services. Participant

responses revealed that knowledge is the key to consumers avoiding being victims of

greenwashing—even if the onus is on corporations to produce the goods and services as

advertised. Bodger and Monks (2009) posited that as consumer awareness of

environmental issues increases, so, too, will their desire to use green goods and services,

which may help describe consumers' demands for them. Participant responses regarding

the need to self-educate seemed to be consistent with what Nieto (2009) posited,

regarding consumer validation of the claims that corporations make towards their goods

and services in advertising, which is that consumers will use their experiences with

greenwashing and educate themselves in order to be better able to validate future claims

in green advertising.

Prudence

Many of the participants that expressed the need to be prudent when purchasing

green-labeled goods and services shared their emotional reactions to being the victims of

greenwashing. Whereas some participants were angered, others were saddened by the

reality that corporations are engaging in advertising practices such as greenwashing. The

participants' responses revealed a relationship between the emotions they felt and a sense

of confusion that set in regarding how to know which green-labeled goods and services

they could trust. Consistent with Abderrazak (2009), consumer confusion regarding what

is legitimately green-labeled and that which is not has resulted in a change on consumers'

purchasing behaviors. With respect to how the participants divulged the manner in which

their purchasing behaviors changed as the result of experiencing greenwashing, they

predominantly revealed that they now approach green-labeled goods and services with

caution. The participants in this study, shared responses that were consistent with the

Parguel et al. (2011) posit that consumers are no longer able to differentiate between

corporations that genuinely deliver green goods and services. Participants agreed that in

addition to self-education, exhibiting prudence when selecting green-labeled goods and

services is paramount to avoiding becoming a repeat victim of greenwashing.

Personal Health

The participants expressed personal health implications as one of two primary motivational factors for *going* green. Participants described an awareness of the negative effects of certain products, which became the predominant motivation for them to purchase green-labeled goods and services. Participants expressed significant motivation after being educated on the *nasty* side effects of some goods and services. Some participants also expressed the lives and the health of their children and families as a strong motivation to use green-labeled goods and services, in some cases expressing fears associated with what chemicals and toxins they may have already been exposed to. Some participants disclosed the increase in the number of incidents involving cancers as a motivating factor for going green—for the sake of their entire families. As a matter of necessity, one participant revealed going green because of the sensitivities to things that the participant's children were exhibiting. Going green was seen as the ideal way to protect them from the effects of goods and services that were not green-labeled.

This theme supported answering Research Question 3, wherein the participants shared their personal motivations for joining the green movement. Participants expressed feeling hope that the goods and services that they believed were green would be better for them than the products they used previously. Participants proclaimed a trust in the advertisements of corporations that they believed would help them significantly decrease their and their family members' exposure to harmful products.

Concern for the Environment

Concern for the environment represented the second motivational factor for going green. Participant responses predominantly revealed a sense of personal responsibility for the state of the environment. Participants expressed being aware of the "consequences of their consumption" and "contributions to waste and the carbon footprint." This theme supported answering the research question as the participants revealed a high sense of responsibility for protecting the environment. Nearly half of the participants expressed concern for the environment, expressing trust that green-labeled goods and services would help them to do their parts in protecting the environment. There also were participants who viewed using the *environmentally less impactful* option (goods or services) as the morally right thing to do.

Consistent with consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), the participants' desire to use green goods and services in order to do less damage to the environment is a behavior associated with one's identity. One participant described joining a group in 1992, wherein the identity of the group was associated with *going green* and recycling. Many of this participant's personal behaviors became congruent with the identity of the group. Consumers who identified themselves as advocates for protecting the environment inclined toward the use of green-labeled goods and services.

Expense

Expense appeared to be a significant factor for why the participants would only sometimes purchase the green version of goods and services or not at all. In almost all cases, the participants expressed the willingness to purchase the green version of certain

products if they could afford to purchase them. The participants, for whom expense was a determining factor, communicated the belief that it is possible to find and purchase cheaper products that are just as good for the environment as green-labeled items, especially if the cost of green-labeled goods and services seemed unfair (as compared to the costs of goods and services that are not green-labeled). Some participants admitted to having established ranges for prices that they are willing to pay. In spite of how beneficial to the environment a product may be, if it is out of these particular participants' price ranges, they will not purchase them. When it comes to price, there seems to be a limit to that which some participants are willing to spend.

This theme supported answering the research question, as participants candidly voiced their feelings about the expense associated with the purchasing of green-labeled goods and services and the impact it had on whether they would purchase the green version of certain products if they were available. Regardless of the degree to which one identified one's self with the green movement however, expense appeared to be a limiting factor in the purchasing and use of green products.

Purchasing Power

Participants identified the use of their purchasing power as the most effective means of affecting a corporation's manner of doing business. The participants expressed agreement in the realization of the power they have as consumers to affect the manners in which corporations conduct their business. Participants also expressed agreement that abstinence from purchasing green-labeled products from corporations that engage in greenwashing can make significant financial effects on corporations. These sentiments

and, in most cases, participant practices are consistent with findings presented by

Montague and Mukherjee (2010), which connect a corporation's poor, economic

performance to its greenwashing practices. Some of the participants communicated that

they "use their money to make their voices heard." Although some of the participants

expressed having limited power as a single consumer, they expressed their belief that

consumers' strength lies in their numbers—the more consumers who stop buying goods

and services from greenwashing corporations, the more impactful (financially) the

consumers' message. The participants expressed recognition that it is all about the money

(profit margins), and if enough consumers are willing to take a stand, corporations will

have no choice but to produce the goods and service they advertise or legitimize their

marketing strategies.

Limitations of the Study

The most significant limitation of this qualitative empirical phenomenological

study, which was designed to explore and describe consumers' lived experiences with

corporate greenwashing, is its narrow scope and lack of transferability. I used a purposive

sampling strategy to recruit 20 research participants, which resulted in the conclusions

and findings of the study being limited to those who already had insight into the

phenomenon of greenwashing. The narrow scope of this study and its phenomenological

nature preclude the transferability of the results of this study. To obtain a set of data that

is transferable, future research be designed to incorporate a larger sample population and

a different research methodology. Not only might this help ensure the transferability of

the results, it might also help with the replicability of the findings, which is also

significantly limited, if not completely precluded, when using a small sample population and a phenomenological study.

Dependability is another issue of trustworthiness that serves as a limitation to the study. In order to ensure a consistent process throughout my study, I incorporated an audit trail (see Appendix C), which helped me to ensure a systematic approach when executing the data collection and analysis processes. Taking a systematic approach throughout the entire process helped ensure consistency between the results of the data I collected and analyzed and the results that I presented. With additional respect to dependability, I decided not to use member checking, because I determined that the participants' responses were not ambiguous. Not using member checking as a method of ensuring the credibility and dependability does represent another limitation of this study.

With the goal of phenomenological data collection being to get the most comprehensive description of the essence of participants' experiences with the phenomenon studied, a researcher would (ideally) use a face-to-face interview. Face-to-face interviews are typically longer, provide more detail, and are more nuanced than the typically shorter, written reply, as were acquired within this study. Because I sent questionnaires via email, I was not able to take advantage of the nuanced information inherent with a face-to-face protocol. I recognize this as one of the more significant limitations of my study. Another limitation of my study pertained to my decision to not verify the extent of experiences with greenwashing, as reported by participants. My inability to assess variations in meaning of greenwashing across products and manufactures constituted another limitation of my study, as conducted.

Another limitation to my study was my inability to control for country of origin effects on consumer feelings and beliefs expressed about products and manufacturers. My study elicited generic responses to experiences with and feelings about greenwashing; questions did not include specificity with regard to brand names and manufacturers of products. Perhaps a study, or multiple studies, that seek to determine consumers' experiences and perceptions of greenwashing with specific brands and manufacturers of products might help to assess those variations in meaning.

Recommendations for Action

According to evidence from this study, corporations should discontinue using greenwashing as a marketing strategy in order to regain consumer trust. If there is any hope for consumer trust in green-labeled goods and services, a concerted effort on the part of corporations to provide the green goods and services they advertise is needed. It is important that corporate leaders fully understand the effects that greenwashing is having on consumers so that they will take efforts to implement genuine change in their strategies for marketing green goods and services. The research suggests that consumers are quickly losing confidence in green-labeled goods and services, even after the first experience of greenwashing. Consumer skepticism toward green-labeled goods and services results in increased use of products that are harmful to the environment, which is the opposite effect that green goods and services was intended to have. The data suggests that consumers are not able to differentiate between goods and services that are legitimately green and those that were merely advertised as such.

The findings from this study may help inform corporate leaders and marketing strategists of the multiple negative effects, that greenwashing is having on consumers. Data derived within Themes 1 and 3 indicated that consumer culture and social identity theories may have accurately indicated the manners in which consumers identify with particular products and brands, but they failed to succinctly address the importance of consumer trust and how consumers might react to violations of that trust. Understanding the importance of trust and the emotional reactions to violations of consumer trust might help leaders determine more appropriate marketing strategies in order to reestablish consumer-sustainable product trust relationships.

In accordance with the components of Themes 4 and 5, corporate leaders, marketing strategists, and global human services organizations could invest time and resources into generating consumer education programs that both inform consumers and motivate corporations to legitimize advertising strategies. The focus of such efforts is to add legitimacy to corporate communications as well as rebuilding and strengthening consumer-sustainable product relationships. Because consumers will continue to be motivated to use green-labeled goods and services, as identified within Themes 6 and 7, it is in the best interest of corporations to supply the demands of consumers with legitimately green products. Personal health and environmental concern represent personal and powerful motivating factors for consumers to want to purchase green goods and services—often times in spite of expense, as identified within Theme 8. Efforts to rebuild and maintain trust relationships with consumers may go a long way toward reconciling any perceptions by consumers that they are not valued by corporations.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study provides the opportunity for additional research and further study, which is particularly related to consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing. The findings of this study were determined from the results of 20 research participants, who were purposively selected from within a relatively small community in Germany. As a method of determining the degree to which the results of this study are transferable, researchers might consider using a sample population that is not constrained to such a limited geography, such as a community in Germany, as well as a research methodology better suited for producing transferable results. These same researchers might consider not using Babbie's (1994) snowballing technique to derive a sample; acquiring a sample using a random sampling technique might provide interesting results. Whereas this study was conducted using a data collection instrument sent via email, researchers may use a face-to-face protocol in order to be able to acquire more detailed and nuanced participant responses.

Due to the narrow scope of this qualitative phenomenological study, additional research may be necessary to determine the validity of the nine themes that emerged from the participants' responses. A recommendation would be for researchers to conduct a case study using consumers, who use goods and services with various brand names and from various manufacturers. Because this study focused on consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing, in a general sense, a case study would move past generalization and allow for an exploration of the influences that brand names and manufacturers may have on consumers' perceptions and experiences of greenwashing.

Examining for generational differences in experiences with greenwashing is another recommendation for further study. This study used a small sample of research participants, which predominantly included only two age ranges: ages 35-44 (60%) and ages 25-44 (35%). The remaining participant, consisting of the remaining 5% of research participants, fell into the 45-54-age range. I recommend that an even distribution of population, with respect to age, be used in order to examine whether there are any generational differences in consumers' experiences with and perceptions of greenwashing. The study results may reveal different findings for consumer groups with varying generational constructs. The differences in these findings could generate different recommendations for action and recommendations for further study, especially if enough variances exist between each generation of consumer.

Researchers might also considering conducting longitudinal studies in order to acquire a deeper understanding of brand loyalty and consumers' purchasing behaviors. A longitudinal study of this nature could follow consumers' purchasing behaviors over a period of time, in order to determine any changes in purchasing behaviors with regard to experiences with greenwashing and loyalties to particular brands or manufacturers. Researchers could use the results of this type of study to determine the essence of brand loyalty, over both the short and long term.

Implications

Implications of this study included both theoretical and methodological inferences related to the level of trust the consumers have for green-labeled products and the strength of the consumer-sustainable product relationship. The findings presented in the

study may promote positive social change by highlighting consumers' experiences with and their feelings and perceptions of corporations' use of greenwashing as a marketing strategy when advertising green goods and services, which may be used to motivate corporations to generate truthful, more effective marketing strategies. This study supported the central arguments posited by Castaldo et al. (2009) that the consumer-corporation trust relationships are centered upon the expectation that corporations will fulfill the promises they make in advertising.

With respect to consumer culture (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and social identity (Bartels & Hoogendam, 2010) theories, the results of this study underscored the necessity for both theories to make trust a more central of the discussion regarding consumers' identification with particular brands and products. The results of this study indicated the precarious nature of the trust that consumers have for corporations, which is an aspect around which consumer culture theory and social identity theory focused too little. Participants described making conscious decisions to educate themselves about green-labeled goods and services as a result of the loss of trust that they have for corporate green advertising. They also made it clear that they would (and have) taken measures in reaction to violations of the trust relationships they felt were violated.

A focal point of this research was underscoring the need for change in advertising green goods and services and for exploring corporate responsibility in implementing those changes. This research may help extend awareness of the problem and inform corporate marketing strategists of their current effects on consumer trust and what might be done to reconcile those trust relationships. The results of this study may be used by

corporate leaders and marketing strategists to understand consumer perspectives and perceptions of marketing strategies, in general, and may be used to educate marketing strategists and corporate leaders of the effects that greenwashing is having on consumers. If corporate marketing strategists are routinely gauging consumers' interests and market place demands, as posited by Devinney (2009), the implications for the results of this study are improved and legitimized advertising strategies in order to rebuild consumer-corporate trust and consumer-sustainable product relationships.

This study could positively affect consumers by educating corporate leaders and marketing strategists, who recognize the seriousness of the negative effects that greenwashing is having and make the effort to discontinue greenwashing. Consumer literacy initiatives, promoted by a global human services organization such as the American Marketing Association (among others), may integrate the findings of this study into a consumer-corporate awareness program designed to educate both parties. Consumer literacy organizations such as Consumer Reports, Terra Choice, GreenWorksGov, and the U.S. Small Business Association, which maintain green label databases and promote environmental marketing awareness, may use the findings of this study to educate consumers and corporations. The implications for such initiatives are marketing strategies that may improve and create stronger trust relationships between consumers and corporations, which may be attributable to the larger, global society.

I explored the lived experiences of 20 research participants, who are consumers, in order to derive meanings from their experiences with greenwashing. The information they shared regarding their experiences with and reactions to greenwashing may motivate

corporate leaders and marketing strategists in developing green advertising campaigns that legitimately portray the goods and services being offered.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative empirical phenomenological study was to explore and describe consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing.

Distrust in green advertising, indifference, betrayal, education, prudence, personal health, environmental concern, expense, and purchasing power represented the nine major themes that supported the essence of consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing. The results of this qualitative empirical phenomenological study were consistent with some findings associated with the theoretical framework on social identity theory described in Chapter 2. The significance of the study presented in Chapter 1 and the results of the study, as presented in Chapter 4, provided the basis for the discussion on implications for positive social change.

The findings from this study supported recommendations for building trusting relationships between corporations and consumers, which stemmed from a recommendation that corporations engaged in the marketing strategy of greenwashing discontinue the practice. The findings also supported recommendations for further study, which focused on the areas around which closer examination is warranted; more questions might be asked in order to generate answers that allow for the creation of deeper meaning.

This study indicated critical aspects of consumers' lived experiences with greenwashing that may be used to address the persistence of greenwashing as a corporate

marketing strategy. The exploration of the participants' lived experiences with greenwashing included their generalized distrust for green advertising, their sense of betrayal associated with corporate greenwashing, and their thoughts regarding how to potentially deal with greenwashing, as consumers. The results of this study generated important insights into consumers' lived experiences that may help generate ways to educate consumers and offset the effects of greenwashing, a practice that persists.

References

Alcañiz, E., Cáceres, R., & Pérez, R. (2010). Alliances between brands and social causes: The influence of company credibility on social responsibility image. *Journal of Business Ethics, 96*(2), 169-186. doi:10.1007/s10551-010-0461-x

Alves, I. M. (2009). Green spin everywhere: How greenwashing reveals the limits of the CSR paradigm. *Journal of Global Change & Governance*, *2*(1), 1-26. Retrieved from http://www.globalaffairsjournal.com

Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C. J. (2005). Consumer culture theory (CCT): Twenty years of research. *Journal of Consumer Research, 31*(4), 868-882. Retrieved from http://www.ejcr.org/

Atkinson, L., & Rosenthal, S. (2014). Signaling the green sell: The influence of eco-label source, argument specificity, and product involvement on consumer trust. *Journal of Advertising*, *43*(1), 33-45. doi:10.1080/00913367.2013.834803

Babbie, E. (2004). *The practice of social research*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Learning, Inc.

Bakan, J. (2004). *The pathological pursuit of profit and power*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Bartels, J., & Hoogendam, K. (2011). The role of social identity and attitudes toward sustainability brands in buying behaviors for organic products. *Journal of Brand Management, 18*(9), 697-708. doi:10.1057/bm.2011.3

Boccia, F., & Sarno, V. (2012). Corporate social responsibility: An analysis on consumer perception. *Journal of Agricultural Science & Technology A, 2*(9A), 1119-1125.

Retrieved from http://jast.journals.modares.ac.ir

Bodger, A., & Monks, M. (2010). Getting in the red over green: The risks with 'green marketing. *Journal of Sponsorship, 3*(3), 284-293. Retrieved from http://www.sponsormap.com/journal-of-sponsorship

Brown, J., & Forster, W. (2013). CSR and stakeholder theory: A tale of Adam Smith. *Journal of Business Ethics, 112*(2), 301-312. doi:10.1007/s10551-012-1251-4

Brusseau, J., Chiagouris, L., & Brusseau, R. (2013). Corporate social responsibility: To yourself be true. *Journal of Global Business & Technology, 9*(1), 53-63. Retrieved from http://gbata.org/journal-of-global-business-and-technology-jgbat

Castaldo, S., Perrini, F., Misani, N., & Tencati, A. (2009). The missing link between corporate social responsibility and consumer trust: The case of fair trade products. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *84*(1), 1-15. doi:10.1007/s10551-008-9669-4

Chen, Y. (2010). The drivers of green brand equity: Green brand image, green satisfaction, and green trust. *Journal of Business Ethics, 93*(2), 307-319. doi:10.1007/s10551-009-0223-9

Chitakornkijsil, P. (2012a). Brand integrity, advertising and marketing ethics as well as social responsibility. *International Journal of Organizational Innovation*, *4*(4), 109-130. Retrieved from http://www.ijoi-online.org

Chitakornkijsil, P. (2012b). Moral meaning in green marketing and socially responsible marketing. *International Journal of Organizational Innovation*, *4*(3), 113-128. Retrieved from http://www.ijoi-online.org

Crane, A., & Ruebottom, T. (2011). Stakeholder theory and social identity: Rethinking stakeholder identification. *Journal of Business Ethics, 102*, 77-87. doi:10.1007/s10551-011-1191-4

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Currás-Pérez, R., Bigné-Alcañiz, E., & Alvarado-Herrera, A. (2009). The role of self-definitional principles in consumer identification with a socially responsible company. *Journal of Business Ethics*, (4), 547. doi:10.2307/27735211

Dahlberg, K., Dahlberg, H., & Nystrom, M. (2008). *Reflective lifeworld research* (2nd ed.). Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.

Delmar, C. (2010). "Generalizability" as recognition: Reflections of a foundational problem in qualitative research. *Qualitative Studies, 1*(2), 115-128. Retrieved from http://ojs.statsbiblioteket.dk/index.php/qual

Delmas, M. A., & Burbano, V. (2011). The drivers of greenwashing. *California Management Review, 54*(1), 64-87. Retrieved from http://cmr.berkeley.edu

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Devinney, T. M. (2009). Is the socially responsible corporation a myth? The good, the bad, and the ugly of corporate social responsibility. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 23*(2), 44-56. doi:10.5465/AMP.2009.39985540

DeWitt, A. O., & Dahlin, L. A. (2009). Socially responsible marketing. *Proceedings of the Northeast Business & Economics Association*, 69-72. Retrieved from http://www.nbea.us

Dilling, P. A. (2011). Stakeholder perception of corporate social responsibility. *International Journal of Management & Marketing Research, 4*(2), 23-34. Retrieved from http://www.theibfr.com/ijmmr.htm

Dimitriadis, S., & Papista, E. (2011). Linking consumer-brand identification to relationship quality: An integrated framework. *Journal of Customer Behaviour*, *10*(3), 271-289. Retrieved from http://www.westburn-publishers.com/journal-of-customer-behaviour/journal-of-customer-behaviour.html

Dominici, G., Basile, G., & Palumbo, F. (2013). Viable systems approach and consumer culture theory: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Organizational Transformation and Social Change, 10*(3), 262-285. doi:10.1179/1477963313Z.00000000018

Ekstrand, S., & Nilsson, K. (2011). Greenwashing? *European Food & Feed Law Review*, *6*(3), 167-173. Retrieved from http://effl.eu

Ericsson, D. D. (2011). Demand chain management: The evolution. *Orion, 27*(1), 45-81. doi:10.5784/27-1-97

Friedman, M. (1970, September 3). The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits. *New York Times Magazine.*

Furlow, N. E. (2010). Greenwashing in the new millennium. *The Journal of Applied*

Business and Economics, 10(6), 22-25. Retrieved from

http://www.nabusinesspress.com

Gaile-Sarkane, E. (2010). Diversity of marketing—Trends and developments.

Economics & Management [serial online], *15*, 478-482. Retrieved from

https://www.iuj.ac.jp/research/outputs/economics.cfm

Gazzola, P. (2012). Social performance enhances financial performance: Benefits from

CSR. *Annals of the University of Oradea, Economic Science Series*, *21*(1), 112-

121. Retrieved from http://anale.steconomiceuoradea.ro/en

Gibson, K. (2000). The moral basis of stakeholder theory. *Journal of Business Ethics,*

26(3), 245-257. Retrieved from http://www.springer.com/social+sciences

Giorgi, A. (1985). Sketch of a psychological phenomenological method. In A. Giorgi

(Ed.), *Phenomenology and psychological research*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne

University Press.

Greenwood, M., & Buren III, H. (2010). Trust and stakeholder theory: Trustworthiness in

the organisation–stakeholder relationship. *Journal of Business Ethics, 95*(3), 425-

438. doi:10.1007/s10551-010-0414-4

Gupta, R., & Sen, S. (2010). Causes at the checkout: The role of temporal construal in

consumer reactions to corporate social responsibility. *Advances in Consumer*

Research, (37), 526. Retrieved from

http://www.markingpower.com/community/arc/pages/research/journals

Hong, S., & Yang, S. (2009). Effects of reputation, relational satisfaction, and customer-

company identification on positive word-of-mouth intentions. *Journal of Public*

Relations Research, 21(4), 381-403. doi:10.1080/10627260902966433

Husserl, E. (1931). *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology*. (Boyce Gibson, W.R. Trans.). London, England: George Allen and Unwin. (Originally published 1913)

Husserl, E. (1970). *Logical investigations*. New York, NY: Humanities Press.

Hyun Ju, J., Hye-Jin, P., Mira, L., & Morrison, M. (2012). The effects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on consumers responses to brands in social media. *American Academy of Advertising Conference Proceedings*, *135*.

Iftekhar, H., Ayub, A., Razzaq, A., & Aslam, M. (2013). Detrimental effects of marketing practices on consumers' buying behaviors. *Business Management Dynamics, 2*(10), 01-05. Retrieved from http://www.bmdynamics.com

Jahdi, K. S., & Acikdilli, G. (2009). Marketing communications and corporate social responsibility (CSR): Marriage of convenience or shotgun wedding? *Journal of Business Ethics*, *88*(1), 103-113. doi:10.1007/s10551-009-0113-1

Janesick, V. J. (2011). *"Stretching" exercises for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Jong-Weon, K., Eun-Jung, K., Seung-Min, K., & Han-Gook, H. (2011). Effects of fit with CSR activities and consumption value on corporate image and repurchase intention. *International Journal of Business Strategy, 11*(1), 35-46. Retrieved from http://www.iabe.org

Kelly, M. (2009). Not just for profit. *Reflections*, *10*(1), 9-19. Retrieved from http://reflectionsjournal.net

Kim, Y., & Choi, S. (2009). Congruence effects in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities: The case of companies with bad reputations. *American Academy of Advertising Conference Proceedings, 79.*

Korschun, D., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2009). Using corporate social responsibility to strengthen employee and customer relationships. *Advances in Consumer Research - Asia-Pacific Conference Proceedings, 864-866.* Retrieved from http://www.acrwebsite.org/search/search-conference-proceedings.aspx

Kreng, V. B., & May-Yao, H. (2011). Corporate social responsibility: Consumer behavior, corporate strategy and public policy. *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal, 39*(4), 529-541. doi:10.2224/sbp.2011.39.4.529

Law, P. (2011). Audit regulatory reform with a refined stakeholder model to enhance corporate governance: Hong Kong evidence. *Corporate Governance, 11*(2), 123-135. doi:10.1108/14720701111121001

Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2010). *Practical research: Planning and design* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Lii, Y., & Lee, M. (2012). Doing right leads to doing well: When the type of CSR and reputation interact to affect consumer evaluations of the firm. *Journal of Business Ethics, 105*(1), 69-81. doi:10.1007/s10551-011-0948-0

Liu, T., Wang, C., & Wu, L. (2010). Moderators of the negativity effect: Commitment, identification, and consumer sensitivity to corporate social performance. *Psychology & Marketing, 27*(1), 54-70. doi:10.1002/mar.20319

Mainardes, E. W., Alves, H., & Raposo, M. (2011). Stakeholder theory: Issues to resolve.

Management Decision, 49(2), 226-252. doi:10.1108/00251741111109133

Marin, L., Ruiz, S., & Rubio, A. (2009). The role of identity salience in the effects of

corporate social responsibility on consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics,*

84(1), 65-78. doi:10.1007/s10551-008-9673-8

Mason, C., & Simmons, J. (2014). Embedding corporate social responsibility in corporate

governance: A stakeholder systems approach. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *119*(1),

77-86. doi:10.1007/s10551-012-1615-9

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.).

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Meadows, D. H. (2008). *Thinking in systems: A primer*. White River Junction, VT:

Chelsea Green Publishing.

Meghisan, F., Craciun, L., & Barbu, C. (2010). Corporate social responsibility and

marketing. *Young Economists Journal / Revista Tinerilor Economisti, 8*(15), 78-

84.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San

Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded*

sourcebook (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mish, J., & Scammon, D. L. (2010). Principle-based stakeholder marketing: Insights from

private triple-bottom-line firms. *American Marketing Association, 29*(1), 12-26.

doi:10.1509/jppm.29.1.12

Mitchell, L. D., & Ramey, W. D. (2011). Look how green I am! An individual-level

explanation for greenwashing. *The Journal of Applied Business and Economics,*
12(6), 40-45. Retrieved from http://www.na-businesspress.com/jabeopen.html

Montague, J., & Mukherjee, A. (2010). Marketing green products: What really matters?
Proceedings of the Northeast Business & Economics Association, 433-441.
Retrieved from
http://www.nabet.us/Archives/2010/NABET%20Proceedings%202010.pdf

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Neuman, W. L. (2006). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative*
approaches (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Nieto, D. (2009). Corporate Social Responsibility as part of your brand. *Manager: British*
Journal of Administrative Management, *68*, 28-29. Retrieved from
http://journalseek.net/cgibin/journalseek/journalsearch.cgi?field=issn&query=135
3-5188

Orts, E., & Strudler, A. (2009). Putting a stake in stakeholder theory. *Journal of Business*
Ethics, *88,* 605-615. doi:10.1007/s10551-009-0310-y

Parguel, B., Benoît-Moreau, F., & Larceneux, F. (2011). How sustainability ratings might
deter 'greenwashing': A closer look at ethical corporate communication. *Journal*
of Business Ethics, 102(1), 15-28. doi:10.1007/s10551-011-0901-2

Parmar, B. L., Freeman, R. E, Harrison, J. S., Wicks, A. C., de Colle, S., & Purnell, L.
(2010). *Stakeholder theory: The state of the art* [Abstract]. Cambridge, England:
Cambridge University Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand

Oaks, CA: Sage.

Polonsky, M. J., Carlson, L., Grove, S., & Kangun, N. (1997). International

environmental marketing claims: Real changes or simple posturing? *International*

Marketing Review, 14(4), 218-232. doi:10.1108/02651339710173426

Rake, M., & Grayson, D. (2009). Embedding corporate responsibility and

sustainability—Everybody's business. *Corporate Governance, 9*(4), 395-399.

doi:10.1108/14720700910984945

Rivoli, P., & Waddock, S. (2011). The grand misapprehension. *California Management*

Review, *53*(2), 112-116. Retrieved from http://cmr.berkeley.edu

Rizkallah, E. G. (2012). Brand-consumer relationship and corporate social responsibility:

Myth or reality & do consumers really care? *Journal of Business & Economics*

Research, 10(6), 333-343. Retrieved from

http://gulib.georgetown.edu/newjour/j/msg04856.html

Siegel, D. S. (2009). Green management matters only if it yields more green: An

economic/strategic perspective. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *23*(3), 5-

16. doi:10.5465/AMP.2009.43479260

Singh, J., Iglesias, O., & Batista-Foguet, J. (2012). Does having an ethical brand matter?

The influence of consumer perceived ethicality on trust, affect and loyalty.

Journal of Business Ethics, *111*(4), 541-549. doi:10.1007/s10551-012-1216-7

Srivastava, V., & Nandan, T. (2010). A study of perceptions in society regarding

unethical practices in advertising. *South Asian Journal of Management, 17*(1), 61-

69. Retrieved from http://www.sajm-amdisa.org

Stanaland, A., Lwin, M., & Murphy, P. (2011). Consumer perceptions of the antecedents

and consequences of corporate social responsibility. *Journal of Business Ethics,*

102(1), 47-55. doi:10.1007/s10551-011-0904-z

Stanciu, M., Daniasa, C., Tomita, V., & Stuparu, D. (2011). Successful knowledge

management strategies and global market trends. *Economics, Management, and*

Financial Markets, 6(2), 821-826. Retrieved from

http://www.addletonacademicpublishers.com/economics-management-and-

financial-markets

van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action*

sensitive pedagogy. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Vivek, S. D., Beatty, S. E., & Morgan, R. M. (2012). Customer engagement: Exploring

customer relationships beyond purchase. *Journal of Marketing Theory &*

Practice, *20*(2), 122-146. Retrieved from http://www.jmtp-online.org

Walker, K., & Wan, F. (2012). The harm of symbolic actions and green-washing:

Corporate actions and communications on environmental performance and their

financial implications. *Journal of Business Ethics, 109*(2), 227-242.

doi:10.1007/s10551-011-1122-4

Warner, W. (1991). *Improving interpretive validity of camera-based qualitative research.*

A paper presented at the Qualitative Health Research Conference. Edmonton,

Alberta, CA.

Wilson, A., Robinson, S., & Darke, P. (2010). When does greenwashing work?

Consumer perceptions of corporate parent and corporate societal marketing firm

affiliation. *Advances in Consumer Research*, *37*(1)*,* 931-932. Retrieved from

http://www.acrwebsite.org

Youssef, A., & Abderrazak, C. (2009). Multiplicity of eco-labels, competition, and the

environment. *Journal of Agricultural & Food Industrial Organization*, 1-22.

Retrieved from http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/jafio

Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent

Hello:

You are invited to take part in a research project, designed to explore and describe the perceptions of consumers who have experienced corporate greenwashing. You were chosen for the study because it is anticipated that as a consumer within your household, you are exposed to any number of modes of advertising.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Mark Wood, who is a doctoral student with Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced *greenwashing*, which is a marketing strategy used by corporations when they communicate that their products and services are better for the environment than they actually are.

Procedures:
If you agree to this study, you will be asked to:

- Answer interview questions, to be administered and answered via email

- Understand and agree to have your responses maintained (securely) during the course of the study and for a period of no more than 5 years subsequent to the conclusion of the study

- If necessary, engage in follow-up email conversations, wherein which you may be asked to provide clarifying information in order to ensure the accuracy of the data and the accuracy of what you intend to communicate.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary—your decision not to participate will be respected. Of course, even if you agree to participate in the study, you may, at any time, change your mind. And, your agreement to participate in the study does not mean that you are required to answer all of the questions. If there are questions that you feel are too personal, you may skip them.

Risks and Benefits:
I assess that there are no risks associated with your participation in this study. I have a robust plan and method of ensuring your confidentiality within this study, so the social risks associated with your reputation and social standing have been mitigated.

The primary benefit to participating in this study is the knowledge that you have participated in a research project through which I intend to promote positive social change.

Compensation:
To compensate you for your time, you will receive a $5 gift card once the interview has been completed.

Confidentiality:
All information you provide, to include your personally identifiable information and demographic information will be kept confidential. I will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Additionally, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

Person to Contact:
You may ask questions you have now or, if you have questions later, you may contact me. If you want to speak privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative, who can discuss this with you. She can be reached via email at IRB@waldenu.edu. Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-10-14-0257779 and it expires on October 9, 2015.

Please print and save this consent form for your records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By returning a completed survey, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Appendix B: Questionnaire

1. What is your gender?

_____Female

_____Male

2. What is your age?

_____18-24 years old

_____25-34 years old

_____35-44 years old

_____45-54 years old

_____55-64 years old

_____65-74 years old

_____75 years or older

3. What is your highest level of education?

_____Less than high school

_____High school/GED

_____Some college

_____2-year college degree (Associates)

_____4-year college degree (BA, BS)

_____Master's Degree

_____Doctoral Degree

_____Professional Degree (MD, JD)

4. Are you aware of any instances when you purchased products that were green-washed? If yes, please share your experience(s) with respect to how it made you feel.

A:

5. Describe your experiences with greenwashing?

A:

6. Describe your experiences from when you started going green (basing your actions on working to protect the environment) and describe any issues that may have influenced your decision to start going green.

A:

7. Do you purchase the 'green' versions of certain products, if they are available? If yes, please explain why. If no, please explain why not.

A:

8. If you hold negative perceptions of greenwashing, how would you recommend handling the issue of greenwashing? If you do not hold negative perceptions of greenwashing, you may skip this question.

A:

9. Based on your experiences with being a consumer, what are your perceptions regarding a corporation's relationship with its consumers?

A:

10. If you have experienced greenwashing, how did it make you feel and have you changed your purchasing behaviors? If yes, please explain. If no, please explain why not.

A:

11. Do you feel you have power, as a consumer, to affect the ways within which corporations conduct their business? If yes, please explain how so. If no, please explain why not.

A:

12. How do you perceive greenwashing by corporations?

A:

Appendix C: Audit Trail

The purpose of this audit trail is to disclose the steps taken during the data collection, data management, and description/interpretation of the data processes, respectively. By prescribing the steps to be taken, I am able to ensure the trustworthiness, specifically the dependability and confirmability, of my conclusions and findings.

I. Data Collection

A.) Send questionnaires to participants, with consent forms

B.) Receive participant responses (already in transcript form)

C.) Conduct initial review of transcripts

D.) If necessary, conduct member checking to clarify ambiguous responses

II. Data Management

A.) Conduct more thorough review of transcripts

B.) Begin hand-coding data and identifying emerging themes

C.) Ensure open coding processes

D.) Remain vigilant of nonconforming data and discrepancies

III. Description and Interpretation of Data

A.) Focus on participants responses relevant to research questions

B.) Compartmentalize themes beyond scope of research questions

C.) Conduct final review of transcripts to identify layered themes

D.) Present conclusions and findings

Appendix D: E-mail to Participants Requesting Participation in the Study

Hello:

My name is Mark E. Wood, and I am pursuing a PhD in Management from Walden University. The purpose of my dissertation is to explore consumers' lived experiences with corporate greenwashing, which is a marketing strategy and practice whereby corporations mislead consumers regarding the environmentally-friendly nature of their products. I would greatly appreciate your participation in this study, as your participation and responses will provide much-needed insight for my research project.

I have included a "Letter of Informed Consent," which should provide you with information regarding my research project to help you make an informed decision regarding your participation. I will consider a returned survey as your understanding of the terms of the study and subsequent agreement to participate in the study. And, as stated within the Letter of Informed Consent, I can assure you of the strictest confidentiality when receiving and using your information in this study.

By way of establishing inclusion/exclusion criteria, I am not able to accept or include responses from participants who are under the age of 18. Additionally, I am not able to accept or include responses from participants who are residents of any facility (prison, treatment facility, nursing home, assisted living, or group home for minors).

I would very much appreciate your participation in this study, and I thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mark E. Wood
Walden University
Doctoral Candidate