

Boycott reaction to greenwashing according to consumer profile: a survey in Brazil

Reacción de boicot al greenwashing según el perfil del consumidor: una encuesta en Brasil

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Abstract: not all responsible or sustainable organizational claims reflect genuine practices, but rather are characterized as greenwashing, a misleading communication strategy in which organizations exaggerate their environmental practices to improve their image in the market. With the current scenario of greenwashing proliferation, aggravated by the continued absence of effective regulatory mechanisms, the responsibility for regulating greenwashing practices is shifted to consumers. In this way, this study aimed to understand consumer reactions to the practice of greenwashing, particularly in terms of knowledge, judgment, and boycott motivation behavior, by investigating differences derived from consumer profiles. As a methodological procedure, a quantitative survey was conducted with a sample of 1,251 Brazilian consumers, performing a general descriptive analysis, followed by parametric analysis of variance (ANOVA). This made it possible to observe the high criticality of the sample in judging the practice of greenwashing, with a considerable self-declared predisposition in behavior motivating boycott. In addition, differences were identified in relation to all consumer profile variables in virtually all metrics investigated, such as gender, education, age, income, and professional management experience, with a greater reaction attributed to female consumers, those with high income and education, elder consumers, and also those with management experience. As a consequence, this study contributes to the understanding of consumer reactions to greenwashing based on their profiles.

Keywords: greenwashing, misleading, boycott, reaction, consumer, behavior, survey, Brazil.

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Resumen: no todas las afirmaciones responsables o sostenibles de las organizaciones reflejan prácticas genuinas, sino que se caracterizan por ser greenwashing, una estrategia de comunicación engañosa en la que las organizaciones exageran sus prácticas medioambientales para mejorar su imagen en el mercado. Con el panorama actual de proliferación del greenwashing, agravado por la continua ausencia de mecanismos reguladores eficaces, la responsabilidad de regular acaba recayendo en los consumidores. Este estudio tiene como objetivo comprender las reacciones de los consumidores ante el greenwashing, particularmente en términos de conocimiento, juicio y comportamiento de motivación al boicot, investigando las diferencias derivadas de los perfiles de los consumidores. Se realizó una encuesta con 1251 consumidores brasileños, realizando un análisis descriptivo general, seguido de la técnica de análisis paramétrico de varianza (ANOVA). Se observó la alta criticidad de la muestra en juzgar la práctica del greenwashing, con una predisposición autodeclarada en el comportamiento que motiva el boicot. Además, se identificaron diferencias en todas las variables del perfil de los consumidores en prácticamente todas las métricas investigadas, como el género, la educación, la edad, los ingresos y la experiencia profesional en gestión, con una mayor reacción atribuida a las consumidoras, a las personas con altos ingresos y educación, con más edad y con experiencia en gestión. Contribuye a una comprensión las reacciones.

Palabras clave: greenwashing, engañosa, boicot, reacción, consumidor, comportamiento, survey, Brasil.

Introduction

The growing discussion on economic models and their environmental impacts has consolidated concerns about environmental issues in society (Forliano *et al.*, 2025; Zhang; Dou, 2024). In this scenario, consumers have become more conscious of their consumption decisions, adapting their purchasing habits to minimize the environmental impact of their choices (Braga *et al.*, 2019; Martínez *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, there is a growing demand for more sustainable, environmentally, and socially responsible organizational attitudes (Janz *et al.*, 2024; Zhang; Dou, 2024).

However, not all organizational claims in this regard reflect genuine practices and can be characterized as greenwashing (Montgomery *et al.*, 2023). Introduced in the 1980s, the term greenwashing quickly became established as a misleading communication strategy in which organizations exaggerate their environmental practices to improve their image in the market (Forliano *et al.*, 2025; Ibrahim Nnindini & Dankwah, 2024). The concept of greenwashing is broad, involving a variety of communication practices, which increases its occurrence and makes it difficult to define precisely and identify in practice (Nygaard & Silkoset, 2023; Ioannou *et al.*, 2023).

The relevant literature is unanimous in arguing that the current scenario of proliferation of greenwashing practices is alarming (Forliano *et al.*, 2025; Montgomery *et al.*, 2023; Wang *et al.*, 2023). This is aggravated by the continued absence of effective regulatory mechanisms, which should monitor organizational actions to identify and, above all, punish such conduct (Kolcava, 2023; Andreoli *et al.*, 2025). As a result,

the responsibility for regulating greenwashing practices is shifted to consumers, who are expected not only to be able to identify it, but more importantly, to react to it (Andreoli *et al.*, 2025; Liu *et al.*, 2023). This means that consumers, as the target audience, can question current organizational practices and demand changes towards a more environmentally friendly stance (Liu *et al.*, 2023; Andreoli *et al.*, 2025).

Among the possible regulatory actions, the consumer boycott movement stands out, especially because of its anti-consumption character, with a direct negative impact on the target organization (Nguyen & Duong, 2025; Senan *et al.*, 2025). In this sense, boycotts are understood as a form of protest, repudiation, and/or retaliation by consumers, who express this by refusing to buy and consume a particular product or brand (Nguyen & Duong, 2025; Senan *et al.*, 2025). Despite this, a recent mapping of academic production shows that research on consumer boycotts of greenwashing practices remains scarce (Andreoli & Silva, 2024). Considering the above, this study aimed to understand consumer reactions to greenwashing, particularly in terms of knowledge, judgment, and boycott motivation behavior, and to investigate any differences derived from consumer profiles.

The study's rationale relates to the need for a better understanding of greenwashing practices in relation to consumers, the target audience and those most interested (Montgomery *et al.*, 2023), especially considering its possible regulatory role (Liu *et al.*, 2023). Thus, this study addresses the theoretical gap in research on more critical consumer reactions to greenwashing (Nguyen & Duong, 2025; Senan *et al.*, 2025),

extending the understanding through a theoretical-empirical approach by considering possible differences according to the consumer's profile, with basic demographic variables.

The geographical scope of the study, Brazil, is justified by its relevance as one of the largest emerging economies and consumer markets, combined with increasing societal attention to environmental issues and sustainable consumption (Braga *et al.*, 2019). In addition, the proliferation of organizational environmental claims in contexts marked by institutional and regulatory challenges may intensify the risks and impacts of greenwashing practices (Kolcava, 2023; Montgomery *et al.*, 2023). Previous Brazilian studies have indicated consumer sensitivity to misleading environmental communication (Andreoli & Negrais, 2023; Andreoli *et al.*, 2025), reinforcing the importance of examining this phenomenon in a national context that remains underexplored in the international literature. In this sense, Brazil offers a relevant empirical setting to advance the understanding of consumer reactions to greenwashing in emerging markets.

Greenwashing and consumer boycotts

Not all socio-environmental claims made by organizations are necessarily true, a practice characterized as greenwashing, which has recently attracted the attention of both the literature and the market (Freitas Netto *et al.*, 2020; Santos *et al.*, 2024). Greenwashing comprises the organizational practice of intentionally misleading consumers with false, empty, and/or ambiguous claims while managing public perceptions and shaping brand reputation (Braga *et al.*, 2019; Martínez *et al.*, 2020).

Identifying greenwashing by consumers is a significant challenge, as the practice tends to generate confusion and mistrust, making it difficult to distinguish between genuinely sustainable products and those that merely make misleading claims, especially given the multitude of ways in which this phenomenon can manifest (Freitas Netto *et al.*, 2020; Sajid *et al.*, 2024). However, when detected, this inconsistency between

discourse and practice can generate negative repercussions for the organization, including consumer boycotts (Neureiter *et al.*, 2024; Tao, 2025).

A boycott is defined as the voluntary and intentional abstention of consumers from purchasing and/or consuming a product or brand as a form of retaliation or punishment against the organization in question (Kim *et al.*, 2022). Thus, it represents a conditional anti-consumption manifestation in which the consumer breaks off relations with the organization in response to unfavorable conduct or behavior considered inappropriate (Nguyen & Duong, 2025; Senan *et al.*, 2025). Generally, these movements stem from consumer dissatisfaction and are driven by a sense of moral outrage and a desire for change, in which it is believed that anti-consumption actions can influence an organization's behavior or mitigate its negative impacts (Zejjari & Benhayoun, 2025; Cummings *et al.*, 2025). However, consumer boycott motivation behavior is complex and needs to be better understood, especially when related to the practice of greenwashing (Andreoli *et al.*, 2025; Nguyen & Duong, 2025; Senan *et al.*, 2025). This reinforces the need to deepen our understanding of consumer behavior according to variables in their profiles, such as gender expression, education, income, age, and professional experience.

First, in general, women are generally considered more sensitive to environmental changes and more willing to accept higher prices for products that do not cause environmental damage (Kreczmańska-Gigol & Gigol, 2022). More specifically, female consumers are more skeptical of greenwashing than men, as shown in a survey of university students and professors predominantly residing in Germany, Pakistan, and Indonesia, conducted by Farooq and Wicaksono (2021). According to the authors, this result supports previous studies from different fields, which relate the female gender, first, to greater environmental concern, and second, to a lower belief in institutions.

Previous studies have analyzed the relationship between gender and the propensity to boycott, although not specifically linked to greenwashing practice. They defend that wom-

en show greater motivation to boycott, with a greater propensity for adherence and engagement (Klein *et al.*, 2004; Barda & Sardianou, 2010; Mata *et al.*, 2023; Kim *et al.*, 2023; Park & Jang, 2024). Complementarily, Li *et al.* (2025) emphasized that women have a strong sense of ethics and social responsibility, which may discourage them from engaging with organizations that practice greenwashing, and they prefer to favor more reasonable, legally compliant, and mutually beneficial business relationships.

Greater female involvement may be related to historical and social factors, such as the gender roles traditionally assigned to women, which position them as more collectivist, caring, and empathetic (Cruz *et al.*, 2013). Consequently, and linked to a more holistic view, women show greater environmental concerns (Farooq & Wicaksono, 2021). Furthermore, historically, the responsibility for managing family life has been delegated to women, reinforcing peer care (Barda & Sardianou, 2010). As a result, this condition has also placed them at the forefront of domestic consumption, causing them to make purchasing decisions (Barda & Sardianou, 2010). This includes the pre-purchase stage of researching and mapping options, which may have made them more attentive to corporate communications focused on socio-environmental claims (Barda & Sardianou, 2010). Consistent with this, women report lower trust in institutions and their socio-environmental claims, possibly because of their greater critical thinking skills (Farooq & Wicaksono, 2021). This may favor greater sensitivity to practices perceived as deceptive, such as greenwashing, as well as stimulate more incisive reactions, such as boycotts, which are derived from greater engagement.

Therefore, the first hypothesis relates to the expectation of greater criticality in judging the practice of greenwashing and greater boycott motivation behavior among female consumers, as explained below.

H1- Female consumers account for (a) greater knowledge about greenwashing and related topics, (b) greater criticality in judging the practice, and (c) greater boycott motivation.

Second, education is another variable of interest. More broadly, Schmuck *et al.* (2018) found that environmental knowledge was positively and significantly correlated with formal education, suggesting that more educated individuals tend to have greater access to socio-environmental information. Complementarily, Witek and Kuźniar (2020) highlighted that the level of education is generally associated with greater knowledge of issues of environmental degradation and threats to the environment, which favors conscious purchasing behavior and prioritizes ecological products.

Furthermore, Gopal and Pisharady (2024) observed that consumers with higher levels of education tend to be more aware and skeptical of the practice, focusing on the cosmetics industry. Nguyen *et al.* (2019) also found that knowledge influences the ability to identify and differentiate greenwashing practices, which negatively affects green purchase intentions. Gardberg and Newbury (2013) argued that education provides access to information and knowledge about social and corporate issues, which can contribute to empowering individuals to try to change adverse conditions such as greenwashing, encouraging adherence to boycott movements.

Thus, the level of education is also related to the propensity to boycott, which defends the representativeness of consumers with higher levels of education (Mata *et al.*, 2023; Park & Jang, 2024). Mata *et al.* (2023) explored the profile of European consumers who participate in boycotts for political, ethical, or ecological reasons, based on data from the 2022 European Social Survey, finding a tendency for greater participation by consumers with higher levels of education, as well as females. This had already been argued by Gardberg and Newbury (2013), who found a significant association between higher education and boycotts related to environmental issues. Park and Jang (2024) found similar results in relation to education when investigating motivations for participating in a tourist boycott promoted in South Korea against Japan due to political and historical tensions.

This argument is supported by the fact that higher levels of education expand participants'

general knowledge and enhance their ability to interpret complex social issues (Mata et al., 2023). As a result, it is attributed not only to ease of access to information, but also to more skilled processing, contributing to a greater critical sense (Mata et al., 2023). Higher education also influences sustainable purchasing behavior and the willingness to pay more for products that do not cause environmental harm (Kreczmańska-Gigol & Gigol, 2022). This makes education a key variable in predicting participation in critical consumption practices, such as boycotts (Mata et al., 2023; Park & Jang, 2024). More educated consumers tend to be more aware and skeptical of practices such as greenwashing (Gopal & Pisharady, 2024), which may encourage them to adopt protest behaviors, such as boycotting, when they perceive corporate practices to be misleading.

Based on this, in the second hypothesis, it is expected that consumers with higher education will have a more critical stance in judging greenwashing practices, accounting for greater boycott motivation behavior.

H2- Consumers with higher levels of education account for (a) greater knowledge of greenwashing and related topics, (b) greater criticality in judging the practice, and (c) greater boycott motivation behavior.

Third, income has also been the subject of research. Jog and Singhal (2024) found that income level has a significant impact on environmental awareness and sustainable purchasing behavior, showing that the higher the income level, the greater the environmental awareness, which, in turn, results in greater green purchasing behavior. Similarly, Kreczmańska-Gigol and Gigol (2022) found that financial status influences sustainable purchasing behavior, noting that people in better financial conditions accept higher prices for products that do not harm the environment.

Regarding greenwashing, income was the only variable in the consumer demographic profile that returned a significant relationship in the study by Van Kehnové and Biro (2016), which found that higher income levels were

related to greater degrees of skepticism. It has also been argued that consumers with higher income levels are more likely to boycott (Park & Jang, 2024). Neilson (2010) conducted a study with a sample of 21,535 individuals, using data from the 2002/2003 European Social Survey (ESS), with the aim of analyzing boycotts in the context of political consumerism, finding a positive correlation between income and involvement in boycotts.

The main justification for consumers with greater purchasing power is the possibility of greater autonomy in purchasing decisions (Van Kenhove; Biro, 2016; Cruz et al., 2013; Kreczmańska-Gigol; Gigol, 2022). Thus, these consumers have a greater capacity to adopt sustainable consumption patterns by purchasing ethical products or products that align with their ideals, even at higher costs (Kreczmańska-Gigol; Gigol, 2022). This makes the adoption of concerns and attitudes towards sustainable causes relatively easier, as well as favoring a more critical stance towards environmental claims (Kreczmańska-Gigol; Gigol, 2022; Jog; Singhal, 2024). In addition, greater purchasing power allows for flexibility in the purchasing decision-making process, including increasing the possibility of engaging in anti-consumption actions, especially when misleading environmental practices are perceived, making boycotting a viable alternative (Cruz et al., 2013).

Given this, consumer income is expected to influence not only the level of criticality in judging greenwashing practices but also the motivation to boycott, comprising the third hypothesis of the study, presented below.

H3- Consumers with higher income levels account for (a) greater knowledge of greenwashing and related topics, (b) greater criticality in judging the practice, and (c) greater motivation to boycott.

Furthermore, regarding age, our fourth point, elder people demonstrated greater knowledge of environmental issues in general, as well as greater ecological awareness, both directed at themselves and at organizational

attitudes (Boermans *et al.*, 2024). A similar defense was found in relation to elder consumers' greater knowledge of green products (Witek & Kuźniar, 2020).

The study by Boermans *et al.* (2024) mentioned above, exposed the greater criticality of elder consumers in relation to organizational environmental practices, reporting tangible skepticism by this audience, both in terms of the credibility and authenticity of the actions promoted. However, there was no explicit mention of the term greenwashing. With direct mention, some studies worked with specific generational segments, mainly with the selection of younger audiences, as in the cases of the studies by Szabo and Webster (2020) and Bulut *et al.* (2021), which analyzed the influence of the perception of greenwashing on consumer behavior, the former with the delimitation of Generation Z and the latter with post-millennials.

Despite this, age has already been investigated in relation to boycott movements, and it has been argued that elder consumers are more willing to participate (Barda & Sardianou, 2010; Park & Jang, 2024). Barda and Sardianou (2010) analyzed Greek consumers during a period of high prices and, by observing which personal characteristics influenced participation in economic boycotts, found that age (in addition to gender) played a relevant role. This was corroborated more recently by Park and Jang (2024), who indicated that age influences the propensity to participate in boycotts, along with gender, education, and income.

This argument is justified by the maturity of the elder audience, resulting from greater life experience, with a wealth of information and experiences, including those related to the organizational sphere, which can help consolidate a more critical sense of the content. There is also the inference that elder consumers are possibly in a better personal and professional situation, which would allow them to take advantage of the benefits discussed in relation to their greater purchasing power (Gardberg & Newburry, 2013).

Thus, it is expected that age will be associated with more critical consumer judgment regarding greenwashing practices, as well as with

boycott motivation behavior. This leads to the fourth hypothesis of this study, which is formulated as follows:

H4 - Elder consumers account for (a) greater knowledge about greenwashing and related topics, (b) greater criticality in judging the practice, and (c) greater boycott motivation.

Finally, no articles were found that specifically researched professional experience in relation to greenwashing, similar to age-related studies. The closest study to this was the consideration of the profession from a qualitative perspective in the study by Szabo and Webster (2020), who interviewed professionals who held management positions in green organizations to capture their perceptions of greenwashing in the context of their activities. The participants reported examples of greenwashing observed in other organizations and recognized its potential negative impact on consumer trust, brand loyalty, purchase intentions, and attitudes toward companies. Given this, they emphasized the importance of more authentic and transparent communication strategies, in addition to the use of third-party certifications as mechanisms to mitigate the perception of greenwashing and increase the credibility of environmental actions in the public's perception. These findings indicate a degree of criticality among these professionals in identifying misleading environmental practices, suggesting that individuals with management experience may be more critical of greenwashing.

Similarly, Andreoli and Negrais (2023) conducted a focus group with consumers to ascertain their opinions on greenwashing and marketing practices, noting greater scrutiny in reports of both identification and indignation at misleading communications. Other examples relate to the analysis of employees' perspectives on greenwashing, showing that the negative consequences of the practice are influenced by factors such as employees' personal and professional values and their level of knowledge about environmental issues and organizational practices (Miao *et al.*, 2023; Robertson *et al.*, 2023).

There is no precedent in the literature on the relationship between management and boycott movements. Despite this, Gardberg and Newbury (2013) indirectly investigated the relationship between public marginalization and the propensity to support boycotts, discussing the possibility that the sample was composed of more established professionals closer to the corporate elite, but without directly investigating this relationship.

Nevertheless, the argument is that professional management experience allows for a better understanding of the organizational environment, with a deeper understanding of internal processes, including marketing and communication skills. This competence contributes to a more refined critical sense of the reality of organizations, enabling them to identify inconsistencies between promoted communications and actual environmental practices.

Thus, this professional profile is expected to be associated with both greater criticality in judgment and greater motivation to boycott brands that practice greenwashing, supporting the formulation of the following hypothesis, albeit exploratory:

H5—Consumers with management experience account for (a) greater knowledge of greenwashing and related topics, (b) greater criticality in judging the practice, and (c) greater motivation to boycott.

Materials and methods

This study was non-experimental, cross-sectional, with descriptive-comparative design. The methodological procedure was submitted for evaluation to the university's Ethics Committee, which approved it in 2025.

A quantitative survey was conducted with 1,251 Brazilian consumers selected for convenience sampling. Data collection was conducted remotely from July to October 2023. The collection link was widely publicized, being made available in various WhatsApp groups and on social networks, as well as relying on partnerships to boost its reach (researchers, students, teachers, digital influencers on related topics,

and organizations related to them). The platform allowed only one response per device per participant. It should be noted that despite the high reach of the survey, the sample was not representative.

The research instrument consisted of four metrics of interest: judgment about the practice of greenwashing, a reverse scale used by Andreoli *et al.* (2025), with 13 statements; boycott motivation behavior, with an adaptation of the scale validated by Cruz *et al.* (2013), with seven statements; and knowledge about topics and terms related to greenwashing, with five statements. All these scales had random presentation of statements for each participant, who was asked to assign a score, with the first three being agreement on an 11-point Likert scale, anchored at 0=strongly disagree and 10=strongly agree, and the one on knowledge of performance.

Exploratory factor analyses were conducted for these metrics, ensuring that consistency assumptions were met ($n \geq 5$ for each variable; multivariate normality of data; significant Bartlett's sphericity test; $MSA \geq 0.5$; communality ≥ 0.5). This allowed for a classification score of the subjects in the evaluated metric, complemented by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, to attest to the reliability and internal consistency. All metrics of interest comprised a single factor, with the following results: judgment of greenwashing practices, with 62% of the total variance explained ($KMO=0.956$ and $\alpha=0.948$); boycott motivation behavior, with 62% ($KMO=0.890$ and $\alpha=0.892$), and knowledge of related topics and terms, with 67% ($KMO=0.806$ and $\alpha=0.872$).

Discriminant analysis was conducted to better understand the data structure and determine how the five sociodemographic variables behave in differentiating the groups for each of the three metrics of interest. Thus, the measurements of knowledge, judgment, and boycott were categorized into a dummy variable (below and above the overall average) and analyzed with the independent variables of gender, education, income, age, and management experience, reporting the Wilks' Lambda test.

Considering the normal distribution of data, parametric analysis of variance (ANOVA) was

adopted to investigate possible differences according to the variables of the respondents' profile, namely gender expression, education, age, income, and professional management experience. To this end, some classifications were made, considering the composition of the sample: gender expression included cisgender female and cisgender male; education comprised postgraduate, higher education, and others; age was divided into quartiles (<28, 29-39, 40-49, and >50); income was also divided into quartiles (<R\$3,000, R\$3,001-6,000, R\$6,001-10,000, and >R\$10,001); and current professional management experience or not. Finally, correspondence analysis was conducted in a complementary manner, generating perceptual maps with the averages obtained from the metrics investigated according to consumer profile variables.

To mitigate the bias common to the method, considering the collection format (online, in which the independent and dependent variables were collected simultaneously), in addition to randomizing the presentation of the scale items to the participants, Harman's single factor test was also performed using non-rotated exploratory factor analysis. This analysis indicated a total explained variance close to 32%,

below the critical limit of 50%, accepting that the data collection was free from the bias common to the method.

Results and discussion

The sample (n=1,251) consisted of a preponderance of respondents expressing cisgender female gender (66.5%, followed by male with 32.8%), with high levels of education—the vast majority with postgraduate degrees (49.9%) and higher education (41.9%)—and high income (average of R\$ 8,928, SD=9,840), without current professional management experience (76.4%). The average age was 39 years (SD=13.48).

The discriminant analysis returned statistically significant importance for practically all five variables in differentiating the groups for the three metrics of interest. The only exception was gender expression related to knowledge. Thus, the results of the discriminant analysis validated the importance of sociodemographic variables in differentiating the groups for knowledge, judgment, and consumer behavior motivating the boycott of greenwashing.

Table 1
Results of the discriminant analysis

Knowledge	Judgment	Boycott
Gender F=1.799, p=0.180 Education F=20.604, p<0.000 Income F=8.726, p=0.003 Age F=4.740, p=0.030 Management experience F=9.186, p=0.003	Gender F=3.537, p=0.05 Education F=55.112, p<0.000 Income F=5.635, p=0.018 Age F=8.554, p=0.004 Management experience F=3.661, p=0.05	Gender F=5.832, p=0.016 Education F=19.253, p<0.000 Income F=6.211, p=0.013 Age F=32.433, p<0.000 Management experience F=3.571, p=0.05

In terms of knowledge of relevant topics and terms, all statements had averages above the midpoint (between 5.9 and 6.8), with respondents showing moderate knowledge (6.3) of aspects related to greenwashing practices, which may indicate a greater critical sense among the sample population. Four variables

in the respondents' profiles showed statistically significant differences. First, education (F=21.676, p=0.001) showed that respondents with postgraduate degrees reported greater knowledge (M=6.70), followed by those with higher education (M=5.99), and then the other levels (M=5.35). Second, age (F=11.660,

$p < 0.000$), with younger respondents ($M = 5.78$, $SD = 2.19$) reporting less knowledge compared to all others ($M = 6.42$, $SD = 2.09$; $M = 6.23$, $SD = 2.33$; $M = 6.83$, $SD = 2.02$; respectively). Third, income ($F = 9.651$, $p < 0.000$) was significant, with the lowest income group ($M = 5.97$, $SD = 2.02$) reporting less knowledge than the two highest income groups ($M = 6.57$, $SD = 2.06$ and $M = 7.06$, $SD = 2.05$, respectively), the latter also differing from the second income stratum ($M = 6.35$, $SD = 2.25$). Finally, current professional management experience ($F = 37.187$, $p = 0.001$), in which manager participants stated that they knew more about the subjects ($M = 7.01$) than non-managers did ($M = 6.08$). Thus, these results validate four of the five hypotheses, failing to support the difference in relation to gender.

Regarding the judgment of greenwashing practices, all statements had an average below the midpoint (between 2.5 and 4.2), with a low average (3.4), which shows the significant self-declared criticality of respondents. Statistically significant differences were found according to the respondents' profiles, related to gender expression, education, age, income, and current professional management experience. First, in relation to gender expression ($F = 7.423$, $p = 0.007$), women declared themselves to be more critical ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 2.07$) than men ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 2.05$). Second, regarding education ($F = 33.93$, $p < 0.000$), respondents with postgraduate degrees were more critical ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.89$), followed by those with higher education ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 2.11$), and then those with other levels of education ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 2.22$). Third, in terms of age ($F = 7.215$, $p < 0.000$), with younger respondents ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 2.07$) returning lower criticality compared to all others ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 2.07$; $M = 3.27$, $SD = 2.10$; $M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.94$; respectively). Fourth, in terms of income ($F = 7.205$, $p < 0.000$), with the

lower-income group ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 2.24$) responding with lower criticality compared to all others ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 2.06$; $M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.97$; $M = 3.12$, $SD = 2.01$; respectively). Finally, in terms of professional management experience ($F = 5.909$, $p = 0.015$), managers were more critical ($M = 3.15$) than others ($M = 3.50$).

More importantly, in terms of boycott motivation behavior, all statements had high averages (between 6.8 and 8), with a significant result (7.4), corroborating the high criticality discussed above, in this case, actually carried out in a real action, with a high self-declaration of predisposition to join the demonstration. Statistically significant differences were observed in all variables of the respondents' profiles, consistent with the results of the assessment of greenwashing practices. First, in relation to gender expression ($F = 9.340$, $p = 0.002$), women declared themselves more prone to boycott-motivated behavior ($M = 7.51$, $SD = 2.09$) than men ($M = 7.09$, $SD = 2.26$). Second, regarding education ($F = 10.156$, $p = 0.001$), respondents with postgraduate degrees were more likely ($M = 7.65$, $SD = 2.07$), followed by those with higher education ($M = 7.07$, $SD = 2.24$), and those with other levels ($M = 6.99$, $SD = 2.25$). Third, age ($F = 20.970$, $p < 0.000$), with younger respondents ($M = 6.65$, $SD = 2.18$) showing a lower propensity to boycott compared to all others ($M = 7.27$, $SD = 2.30$; $M = 7.65$, $SD = 1.98$; $M = 7.98$, $SD = 1.99$; respectively). Fourth, in terms of income ($F = 4.574$, $p = 0.003$), the lowest income group ($M = 7.02$, $SD = 2.19$) showed the lowest propensity compared to the second and highest strata ($M = 7.61$, $SD = 2.16$ and $M = 7.75$, $SD = 2.10$, respectively). Finally, regarding current professional management experience ($F = 9.227$, $p = 0.002$), managers were more likely to agree ($M = 7.71$, $SD = 2.03$) than non-managers ($M = 7.25$, $SD = 2.21$). Thus, all five hypotheses defined in this study were confirmed.

Table 2
Hypotheses and study results

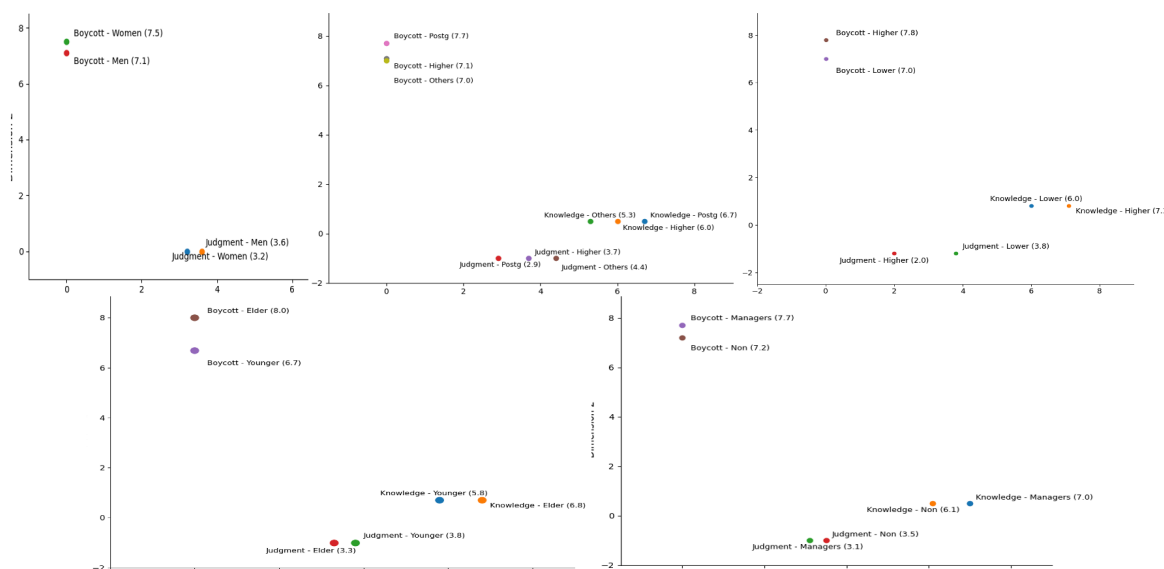
H1- Women	H1b - Judgment $F = 7.423$, $p = 0.007$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$	Women ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 2.07$) < Men ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 2.05$)
	H1c - Boycott $F = 9.340$, $p = 0.002$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$	Women ($M = 7.51$, $SD = 2.09$) > Men ($M = 7.09$, $SD = 2.26$)
H2- Consumers with higher levels of education	H2a - Knowledge $F=21.676$, $p<0.000$, $\eta^2=0.04$	Graduate degree ($M=6.70$, $SD=2.18$) > Higher education ($M=5.99$, $SD=2.12$) > Others ($M=5.35$, $SD=2.19$)
	H2b - Judgment $F=33.93$, $p<0.000$, $\eta^2=0.06$	-- Graduate ($M=2.87$, $SD=1.89$) < Higher education ($M=3.71$, $SD=2.11$) < Others ($M=4.38$, $SD=2.22$)
	H2c - Boycott $F=10.156$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.02$	Graduate degree ($M=7.65$, $SD=2.07$) > Higher education ($M=7.07$, $SD=2.24$) and others ($M=6.99$, $SD=2.25$)
H3- Consumers with higher income levels	H3a - Awareness $F=9.651$, $p<0.000$, $\eta^2=0.04$	Lower income ($M=5.97$, $SD=2.02$) < the two highest income brackets ($M=6.57$, $SD=2.06$ and $M=7.06$, $SD=2.05$, respectively), the second income stratum ($M=6.35$, $SD=2.25$)
	H3b - Judgment $F=7.205$, $p<0.000$, $\eta^2=0.02$	Lowest income ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 2.24$) > all others ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 2.06$; $M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.97$; $M = 3.12$, $SD = 2.01$; respectively)
	H3c - Boycott $F=4.574$, $p=0.003$, $\eta^2=0.02$	Lower income ($M=7.02$, $SD=2.19$) < second stratum ($M=7.61$, $SD=2.16$) and highest income bracket ($M=7.75$, $SD=2.10$)
H4- Elder consumers	H4a - Knowledge $F=11.660$, $p<0.000$, $\eta^2=0.03$	Younger consumers ($M=5.78$, $SD=2.19$) < all others ($M=6.42$, $SD=2.09$; $M=6.23$, $SD=2.33$; $M=6.83$, $SD=2.02$; respectively)
	H4b - Judgment $F=7.215$, $p<0.000$, $\eta^2=0.02$	Younger individuals ($M=3.75$, $SD=2.07$) > all others ($M=2.95$, $SD=2.07$; $M=3.27$, $SD=2.10$; $M=3.29$, $SD=1.94$; respectively)
	H4c - Boycott $F=20.970$, $p<0.000$, $\eta^2=0.05$	Younger individuals ($M = 6.65$, $SD = 2.18$) < all others ($M = 7.27$, $SD = 2.30$; $M = 7.65$, $SD = 1.98$; $M = 7.98$, $SD = 1.99$; respectively)

H5- Consumers with management experience	H5a - Knowledge $F=37.187$, $p<0.000$, $\eta^2=0.033$	Managers ($M=7.01$, $SD=2.00$) > non-managers ($M=6.08$, $SD=2.21$)
	H5b - Judgment $F=5.909$, $p=0.015$, $\eta^2<0.01$	Managers ($M=3.15$, $SD=2.01$) < non-managers ($M=3.50$, $SD=2.15$)
	H5c - Boycott $F=9.227$, $p=0.002$, $\eta^2<0.01$	Managers ($M=7.71$, $SD=2.01$) > non-managers ($M=7.25$, $SD=2.15$)

In addition, to facilitate visualization, perceptual maps of the averages obtained in the metrics investigated were generated according

to the five variables of the consumer profile through correspondence analysis.

Figure 1
Perceptual map (correspondence analysis model)



Discussion of the results

The results obtained in this study show that consumers are critical of greenwashing, as shown by their greater knowledge of greenwashing and related topics, more critical judgment of organizations' environmental communications, and considerable predisposition toward boycott motivation behavior. These findings reinforce the understanding

of the role of consumers as possible regulatory agents capable of pressuring the market toward authentic and transparent attitudes in communicating environmental practices (Andreoli *et al.*, 2025; Liu *et al.*, 2023).

Consumers' knowledge of greenwashing and related topics proved to be moderate, which corroborates the trend argued by the literature on consumers seeking information, who express greater interest and concern

about the socio-environmental implications of organizations and their own choices (Braga *et al.*, 2019; Martínez *et al.*, 2020). Given this, we emphasize the importance of knowledge as an initial step toward greater awareness, enabling consumers not only to identify but also to question misleading environmental actions, as well as to exert social pressure for more environmentally friendly attitudes (Le *et al.*, 2024; Liu *et al.*, 2023).

Consumers showed a critical stance toward greenwashing practices, which adds to the argument about the challenges consumers face in identifying greenwashing, especially given the ambiguity and communicational complexity involved (Freitas Netto *et al.*, 2020; Sajid *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, it corroborates the literature that highlights the importance of consumer criticality in exercising its regulatory function in the face of misleading discourse (Nguyen & Duong, 2025; Senan *et al.*, 2025). Finally, it also validates the metric used in this study as an important measurement tool for the practice of greenwashing, a point argued as a research gap (Bernini *et al.*, 2024).

Regarding boycott motivation behavior, the results reveal consumers' concrete willingness to act in the face of greenwashing practices, which shows that the criticality previously identified in the judgment of environmental practices translates into an effective intention to retaliate through the non-consumption of products. This finding is consistent with studies that understand boycotts as a response motivated by moral indignation and a desire to transform organizational behavior (Cruz *et al.*, 2013; Cummings *et al.*, 2025), reinforcing the role of consumers as regulatory agents of greenwashing practices.

The results indicate the emergence of a more conscious, engaged consumer profile willing to adopt a critical stance and actively reject organizations that, although positioning themselves as sustainable, are perceived as inconsistent or misleading in their environmental communications. The high predisposition to boycotts identified in this study highlights consumers' expectations regarding the authen-

ticity and transparency of environmental communication promoted by organizations.

To deepen this understanding, this study proposed five hypotheses that relate consumer profile variables to their levels of knowledge about greenwashing and related topics, criticality in judging the practice, and behavior motivating the boycott. As a result, it was possible to validate practically all of them, showing the influence of gender, education, income, age, and current professional management.

First, the possible regulatory role of women stands out, who, in line with the literature, demonstrate greater criticality in their judgment regarding greenwashing (Farooq & Wicaksono, 2021) and greater motivation to boycott (Klein *et al.*, 2004; Mata *et al.*, 2023; Li *et al.*, 2025). Second, a more comprehensive result was found in relation to consumers with higher levels of education, in line with previous studies, returning greater knowledge on the topics concerned (Witek & Kuźniar, 2020) and criticality towards greenwashing (Gopal & Pisharad, 2024), as well as greater motivation to boycott it (Mata *et al.*, 2023; Park & Jang, 2024). Third, there was a similar emphasis on consumers with higher incomes, corroborating the literature by finding greater knowledge (Jog & Singhal, 2024; Kreczmańska-Gigol & Gigol, 2022) and greater critical awareness of greenwashing (Van Kehnové & Biro, 2016), in addition to greater motivation to boycott (Park & Jang, 2024). Fourth, the emphasis on elder consumers reinforces more general studies related to the greater maturity of this audience and its consequences in terms of reactions to organizational practices (Boermans *et al.*, 2024; Barda & Sardianou, 2010; Park & Jang, 2024). In the absence of more specific findings, this study contributes to the literature by confirming this logic in relation to greenwashing, both in terms of knowledge and judgment, and in terms of behavior motivating boycotts. Finally, consumers' professional management experience was also highlighted, supporting broader arguments focused on the contribution of organizational experience in assessing corporate conduct, including in the context of greenwashing

practices (Szabo & Webster, 2020). As discussed previously, in the absence of more direct investigations, this contributes to validating the influence of the profession on reaction behavior, both in terms of greater knowledge and critical judgment, and in terms of behavior motivating a boycott of greenwashing practices.

Thus, the confirmation of the five hypotheses reinforces the possible role of consumers as regulators in the face of greenwashing practices, highlighting more accurate knowledge about greenwashing and related topics, more critical reactions to the practice, and more considerable boycott-motivated behavior. Among them, female consumers with higher education and income, elder consumers, and those with professional management experience were prominent. These results pose relevant challenges for organizations, which must not only review their discourse but also align their environmental practices with what they communicate, with responsibility, authenticity, and transparency, at the risk of facing rejection by increasingly conscious and discerning consumers.

This study highlights the importance of organizations considering different consumer profiles when developing environmental communication strategies, especially when targeting specific segments or audiences. As discussed here, the demographic characteristics of consumers substantially differentiate their reactions to greenwashing practices, influencing both their stated knowledge and the criticality of their attitudes toward flaws in the authenticity of environmental messages and the expressiveness of anti-consumerist reactions.

It should be noted that, although previous studies have supported some of the hypotheses of this study, there is little research focused on consumer profiles and the relationship between their variables and their reaction to greenwashing practices. In this sense, the present study offers theoretical and empirical contributions by integrating this, and promoting an understanding of consumer behavior motivating boycotts of greenwashing practices based on consumer profiles.

Conclusions

This study aimed to understand consumer reactions to greenwashing, particularly in terms of knowledge, judgment, and boycott motivation behavior, and investigated possible differences derived from their profile. As a result, a high criticality of the sample was observed, with a considerable self-declared predisposition toward boycott motivation behavior. In addition, differences were identified in relation to all consumer profile variables in virtually all metrics investigated, such as gender, education, age, income, and current professional management experience. Overall, the findings reinforce that consumer resistance to greenwashing constitutes a relevant, yet socially differentiated, mechanism of market accountability, whose effectiveness depends not only on awareness but also on the structural conditions that shape consumers' capacity to critically evaluate and react to such environmental misconduct.

In this sense, validating all the hypotheses of the study, it was found that cisgender female consumers, elder, with higher levels of education and income, and with current professional management experience, accounted for more accurate knowledge of greenwashing and related topics and greater criticality in judging the practice, as well as greater motivation to boycott. Thus, this study deepens the discussion on the role of consumers as possible regulatory agents in the market, highlighting their ability to exert pressure through the active rejection of brands that engage in deceptive environmental practices. Taken together, these findings indicate that the reaction to greenwashing is not uniformly distributed among consumers but is associated with specific sociodemographic characteristics. The predisposition to boycott appears stronger among individuals with higher levels of educational, economic, and professional capital and among women. This suggests that the consumer's possible regulatory role in the context of greenwashing is socially structured rather than generalized across the market. Therefore, market-based regulation through consumer response may depend on segments with greater

access to information, critical capacity, and decision-making skills.

This study makes an academic contribution to the understanding of consumer behavior in the face of greenwashing by investigating it as a possible regulatory agent. Thus, it deepens the understanding of consumer reactions, both in relation to declared knowledge and criticality and to the manifested predisposition to boycott behavior. In addition, it contributes to a greater understanding of the influence of demographic variables on consumer profiles. Thus, it defends the effort of this study to understand consumer behavior motivated by boycotts of greenwashing practices, both in general and in detail. By demonstrating that boycott predisposition and critical judgment are associated with structural and demographic characteristics, this study advances the greenwashing literature by challenging homogeneous assumptions about the “green consumer” and highlighting that consumer-based regulation is not a uniform phenomenon but one conditioned by social positioning and access to resources.

From a managerial perspective, the stronger boycott predisposition observed among women, higher-income, and more educated consumers suggests a greater likelihood of negative consumer responses in segments characterized by greater informational access and critical awareness. Organizations targeting these segments should adopt stricter transparency standards and ensure consistency between environmental discourses and actual practices.

The higher predisposition identified among consumers with managerial experience indicates that resistance to greenwashing may also emerge among individuals with organizational influence and decision-making authority. This finding suggests that reactions to misleading environmental claims may extend beyond private consumption choices, reinforcing the importance of ethical environmental communication in broader stakeholder environments.

So, given the consumers’ growing sensitivity to greenwashing, companies must ensure consistency between their organizational dis-

course and the environmental practices they implement. A commitment to genuine, transparent, and consistent environmental action is fundamental to protecting the brand from negative consumer reactions, such as boycott movements. In this sense, the findings of this study highlight the risk that greenwashing practices pose to organizations while emphasizing the possible active and critical role of consumers in the face of this type of conduct, manifesting a predisposition to boycott as a form of protest against it. Organizations that work with more specific market segments should consider the particularities of their target audience, especially if they comprise women with higher education, income, and age, as well as professional management experience.

Simultaneously, the small effect sizes observed suggest that demographic characteristics explain only part of consumer reactions. This indicates that reliance on consumer-driven regulation may be limited, reinforcing the importance of complementary institutional and regulatory mechanisms to curb greenwashing practices. In this sense, the social contribution of the study is argued to discuss and better understand the phenomenon of greenwashing, given its negative potential.

However, the limitations of this study must be considered. Thus, it should be noted that this is a methodological procedure developed by the authors with a specific research instrument applied to a convenience sample with a cross-sectional design. In addition, the use of self-reported data should be considered, as well as the limitations of the analysis techniques, which do not allow for causal inferences. Therefore, although a substantial number of consumers responded, the results cannot be generalized.

In view of this, some suggestions for future studies emerge. Further research is needed on potential consumer reactions to greenwashing, either maintaining the scope of boycott movements or extending the scope to other similar movements, such as protests. In this sense, other variables can be considered as derivatives of the perception of greenwashing, such as consumer

disappointment and hatred directed at the practicing brand. In addition, it is important to cover other variables in the consumer profile, whether demographic, such as ethnicity or housing, or psychographic, such as environmental concern or sustainable consumption behavior. Finally, it would be interesting to detail consumer reactions to this practice in different contexts, such as specific markets, certain product categories, or even defined target brands. In this regard, analyses and comparisons with other locations are encouraged.

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Author Declaration - CRediT Taxonomy

Authors	Contributions
Taís Pasquotto Andreoli	Conceptualization, formal analysis, research, methodology, supervision, writing. Original draft, writing. Review and editing.
Isabela Marques Kumer	Writing. Original draft, writing. Review and editing.

Statement on the use of artificial intelligence

The authors **DECLARE** that, in the preparation of the article titled “Boycott Reaction to Greenwashing According to Consumer Profile: An Interview in Brazil,” artificial intelligence (AI) was not used at any stage of the process.