

The Silent Signal: Investigating The Impact of Greenhushing on Employee Turnover Intention Through the Mediating Role of Perceived Organizational Hypocrisy

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, organizations have increasingly adopted sustainability initiatives; however, many deliberately limit the communication of such efforts, a phenomenon referred to as greenhushing. This study investigates the impact of greenhushing on employee turnover intention, with perceived organizational hypocrisy acting as a mediating variable. Drawing on data collected from employees across organizations in Kerala, the study employs a quantitative, descriptive research design using primary data gathered through a structured questionnaire. Established and validated measurement scales were adapted to assess greenhushing, perceived organizational hypocrisy, and employee turnover intention. The data were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques to examine direct and indirect relationships among the study variables. The findings reveal that greenhushing significantly influences employees' perceptions of organizational hypocrisy, which in turn increases turnover intention. The research contributes to the emerging greenhushing literature by empirically demonstrating its internal organizational consequences and offers practical insights for managers to adopt transparent and authentic sustainability communication practices to reduce employee turnover.

Keywords: Greenhushing; Organizational Hypocrisy; Employee Turnover Intention; Sustainability Communication; Green Human Resource Management

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, corporate environmental sustainability has shifted from a peripheral managerial concern to a core strategic priority, driven by escalating stakeholder expectations, stricter regulatory frameworks, competitive pressures, and mounting global climate challenges (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Aguilera et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2019; Porter & Kramer, 2011). Organizations increasingly adopt environmental and sustainability initiatives not only to reduce ecological footprints but also to enhance legitimacy, corporate reputation, stakeholder trust, and long-term competitive advantage (Suchman, 1995; Bansal & Roth, 2000; Delmas & Toffel, 2008). Consequently, sustainability communication has become a critical organizational function through which firms signal ethical values, responsibility, and strategic intent to both external and internal stakeholders (Du et al., 2010; Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

Alongside this growing emphasis on sustainability disclosure, scholarly attention has expanded beyond overt misconduct such as greenwashing toward more subtle and strategic forms of sustainability communication behavior. One such emerging phenomenon is greenhushing, defined as the deliberate organizational practice of

under-communicating, downplaying, or remaining silent about genuine environmental initiatives to avoid scrutiny, reputational risks, regulatory backlash, or accusations of symbolic compliance (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Hilton, 2025; Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). While greenhushing is often framed as a defensive or risk-management strategy in response to heightened public skepticism, activist monitoring, and regulatory uncertainty, its internal organizational consequences—particularly for employees—remain insufficiently explored in existing literature (Hilton, 2025; Wickert et al., 2016).

From an employee perspective, sustainability initiatives extend beyond operational practices and function as powerful symbolic signals of organizational values, ethical orientation, and moral commitment (Rupp et al., 2006; Gond et al., 2017). Rajeesh Kumar M et al. (2025) highlighted that effective sustainability awareness initiatives significantly influence stakeholder attitudes and promote green practices. The study emphasizes the importance of transparent environmental communication in strengthening sustainable engagement and organizational credibility. Prior studies demonstrate that transparent sustainability communication enhances employee trust, organizational identification, pride, and engagement, thereby strengthening psychological attachment to the organization (Kim et al., 2019; Glavas, 2016; Turker, 2009). Conversely, when organizations actively promote sustainability internally while remaining externally silent or ambiguous, employees may perceive a misalignment between espoused values and enacted communication strategies. Such perceived inconsistencies foster organizational hypocrisy, defined as discrepancies between organizational talk, decisions, and actions (Brunsson, 2007; Wagner et al., 2009). Research suggests that organizational hypocrisy undermines credibility, erodes trust, and generates employee cynicism, moral disengagement, and reduced commitment (Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Simons, 2002; Pfrombeck et al., 2020).

The implications of perceived organizational hypocrisy are particularly salient for employee retention outcomes. Extensive research indicates that ethical inconsistency, integrity violations, and value incongruence contribute to psychological contract breach, which is a strong predictor of employee withdrawal behaviors (Zhao et al., 2007; Rousseau, 1995). Among these behaviors, turnover intention has received substantial scholarly attention due to its robust association with actual turnover and its detrimental effects on organizational performance, productivity, and knowledge retention (Griffeth et al., 2000; Bothma & Roodt, 2013). When employees perceive their organization as hypocritical or ethically inconsistent, their emotional attachment and organizational identification weaken, increasing their propensity to search for alternative employment (Wagner et al., 2009; Ashforth et al., 2008).

Despite the expanding body of research on sustainability, green human resource management, and employee outcomes, existing studies have predominantly emphasized the positive effects of visible, proactive, and transparent environmental practices, such as enhanced engagement, commitment, and reduced turnover intention (Ren et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Makarim & Muafi, 2021). In contrast, the “silent side” of sustainability communication—particularly greenhushing—has received limited empirical scrutiny. Moreover, although organizational hypocrisy has been examined as a direct antecedent of negative employee attitudes, its mediating role in explaining how greenhushing influences employee turnover intention remains largely unexplored. This omission represents a significant theoretical gap, as greenhushing inherently involves communicative inconsistency, which lies at the core of hypocrisy perceptions (Brunsson, 2007; Wagner et al., 2009).

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the impact of greenhushing on employee turnover intention through the mediating role of perceived organizational hypocrisy. By integrating sustainability communication theory, organizational hypocrisy theory, and turnover intention literature, this study makes three key contributions. First, it extends greenhushing research by shifting the analytical focus from external legitimacy and reputation management to internal employee outcomes. Second, it advances organizational hypocrisy theory by positioning hypocrisy perceptions as a central psychological mechanism linking sustainability silence and employee withdrawal intentions. Third, it enriches turnover intention literature by introducing greenhushing as a novel antecedent rooted in ethical signaling and sustainability communication. In doing so, this study offers timely theoretical insights and practical implications for organizations striving to balance sustainability risk management with employee retention in an era of heightened ethical scrutiny and stakeholder accountability.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Greenhushing and Employee Turnover Intention

Greenhushing refers to the intentional withholding or minimization of communication regarding genuine environmental and sustainability practices, primarily driven by concerns over greenwashing accusations, regulatory enforcement, reputational vulnerability, and stakeholder skepticism (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Lyon & Montgomery, 2015; Hilton, 2025). Although such strategic silence may reduce external exposure, it can generate unintended internal consequences for employees. Research in sustainability management and human resource literature consistently demonstrates that transparent environmental communication strengthens employees' organizational pride, trust, and value congruence—key antecedents of retention and engagement (Kim et al., 2019; Glavas, 2016; Hajj Hussein & Bou Zakhem, 2024).

Conversely, when sustainability initiatives are concealed or under-communicated, employees may perceive organizational hypocrisy, leading to cynicism, moral discomfort, and reduced organizational identification (Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Wagner et al., 2009). Empirical studies indicate that perceived organizational hypocrisy, weak ethical signaling, and value misalignment are positively associated with turnover intention, as employees experience psychological contract breach and diminished trust (Zhao et al., 2007; Bothma & Roodt, 2013; Pfrombeck et al., 2020). Furthermore, green human resource management research suggests that sustainability visibility improves work environment quality and employee engagement, both of which significantly reduce turnover intention (Ren et al., 2018; Makarim & Muafi, 2021). Thus, although empirical studies directly linking greenhushing and turnover intention remain limited, existing evidence strongly suggests that greenhushing may indirectly increase employee turnover intention by undermining trust, value alignment, and perceived organizational integrity.

H1: Greenhushing has a significant positive effect on employee turnover intention.

Greenhushing and Organizational Hypocrisy

Greenhushing involves the deliberate downplaying or omission of sustainability communication despite the presence of substantive environmental initiatives (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Hilton, 2025). While framed as a strategic risk-management approach, emerging literature suggests that such silence may unintentionally foster perceptions of organizational hypocrisy among employees (Brunsson, 2007; Wagner et al., 2009). Organizational hypocrisy arises when employees perceive inconsistencies between organizational values, promises, and actions, leading to distrust and cynicism (Cha & Edmondson, 2006).

When organizations internally emphasize sustainability values but externally remain silent or ambiguous, employees may interpret this behavior as a lack of authenticity, transparency, or moral courage (Simons, 2002; Wickert et al., 2016). Prior research shows that transparent sustainability communication enhances employee trust and organizational identification, whereas opacity weakens moral legitimacy and psychological attachment (Kim et al., 2019; Glavas, 2016). Hypocrisy theory further suggests that even well-intentioned actions may backfire when communication strategies create ambiguity or symbolic inconsistency, particularly in ethically sensitive domains such as sustainability (Wagner et al., 2009; Brunsson, 2007). Accordingly, greenhushing emerges as a salient antecedent of perceived organizational hypocrisy.

H2: Greenhushing has a significant positive effect on perceived organizational hypocrisy.

Organizational Hypocrisy and Employee Turnover Intention

Organizational hypocrisy reflects employees' perceptions of misalignment between stated values, communicated intentions, and actual organizational practices (Brunsson, 2007; Wagner et al., 2009). Such inconsistencies undermine credibility and signal a lack of moral integrity, resulting in employee cynicism and distrust toward management (Cha & Edmondson, 2006). Behavioral integrity research highlights that perceived misalignment between words and deeds significantly erodes trust and commitment (Simons, 2002).

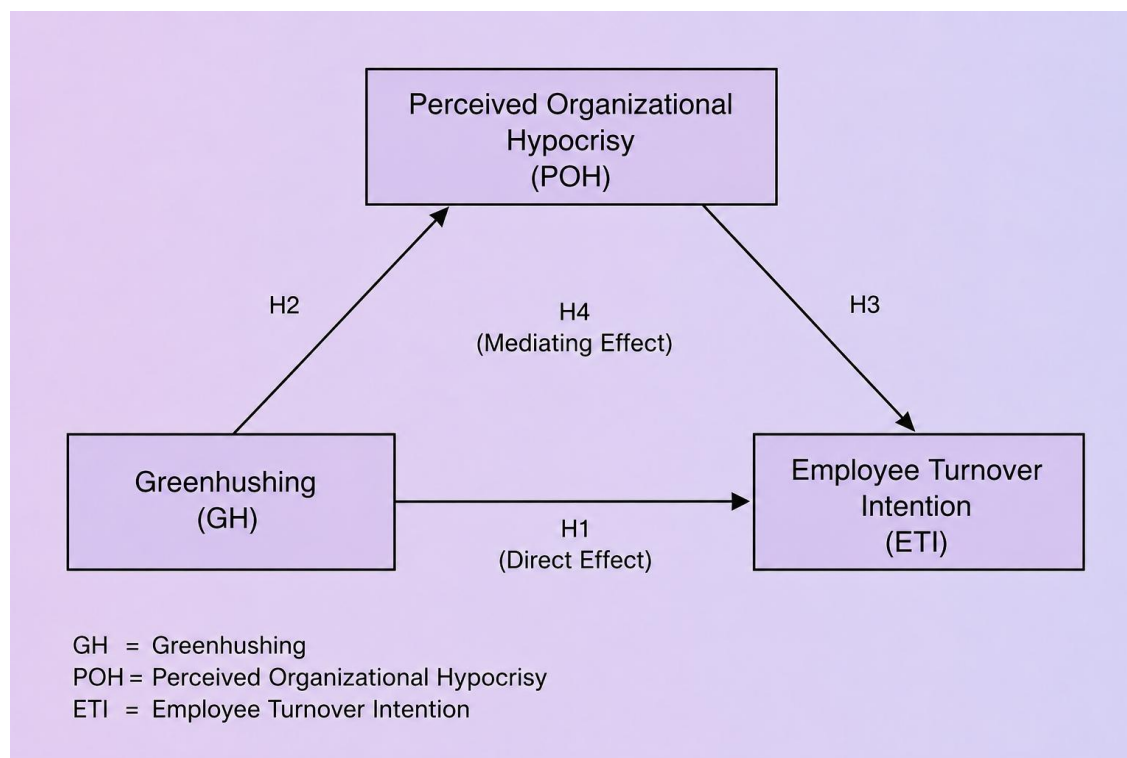
Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that perceptions of organizational hypocrisy are positively associated with psychological contract breach, which in turn increases withdrawal cognitions such as turnover intention (Zhao et al., 2007; Rousseau, 1995). Turnover intention literature further indicates that ethical inconsistency, unfairness, and value incongruence significantly increase employees' intentions to leave (Griffeth et al., 2000; Bothma & Roodt, 2013). Moreover, hypocrisy perceptions weaken organizational identification and emotional attachment, increasing employees' willingness to seek alternative employment (Wagner et al., 2009).

H3: Perceived organizational hypocrisy has a significant positive effect on employee turnover intention.

Organizational Hypocrisy as a Mediator

Greenhushing may indirectly influence employee turnover intention through its effect on perceived organizational hypocrisy. Strategic silence regarding sustainability initiatives can create perceived inconsistencies between internal values and external communication, intensifying hypocrisy perceptions (Brunsson, 2007; Wagner et al., 2009). These perceptions erode trust, weaken organizational identification, and foster withdrawal behaviors (Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Simons, 2002). Turnover intention research further supports the role of ethical misalignment and psychological contract breach as key mechanisms driving employee exit intentions (Zhao et al., 2007; Bothma & Roodt, 2013). Consequently, organizational hypocrisy provides a robust explanatory mechanism linking greenhushing and employee turnover intention.

H3: Perceived organizational hypocrisy mediates the relationship between greenhushing and employee turnover intention.



METHODOLOGY

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to assess the clarity, reliability, and feasibility of the research instrument before the final data collection. The questionnaire was administered to a small sample of 100 employees selected using convenience sampling. Feedback from the respondents helped in refining the wording, sequence, and relevance of the items. Reliability analysis indicated acceptable internal consistency for all constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold. Based on the pilot results, minor modifications were made to improve the effectiveness of the final survey instrument.

Population and Sample Size

Data Collection and Respondent Profile

This study was conducted among employees working in various organizations across Kerala, India, particularly those exposed to sustainability-related practices and organizational communication initiatives. The respondents represented diverse sectors and organizational backgrounds, enabling a broader understanding of perceptions related to greenhushing, organizational hypocrisy, and employee turnover intention.

Following a successful pilot study involving 100 employees, the final structured questionnaire was distributed through online platforms, including organizational networks, professional contacts, email communication, and Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to capture employees' perceptions regarding sustainability communication practices and related organizational outcomes.

- Total questionnaires distributed: 750
- Responses received: 418 (Response rate: 55.7%)
- Valid responses analyzed: 372 (Validity rate: 89.0%)

Respondent Profile

Category	Sub-category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	214	57.5
Gender	Female	158	42.5
Gender Total		372	100.0
Age Range	Below 25 Years	96	25.8
Age Range	25-35 Years	154	41.4
Age Range	Above 35 Years	122	32.8
Age Range Total		372	100.0
Employment Sector	Private Sector	221	59.4
Employment Sector	Public Sector	91	24.5
Employment Sector	Others	60	16.1
Employment Sector Total		372	100.0
Work Experience	Below 5 Years	143	38.4
Work Experience	5-10 Years	129	34.7
Work Experience	Above 10 Years	100	26.9
Work Experience Total		372	100.0
Overall Total		372	100.0

Measures

The study examined the relationship between Greenhushing (GH) and Employee Turnover Intention (ETI), with Perceived Organizational Hypocrisy (POH) acting as a mediating variable.

- **Greenhushing (GH):** Measured using adapted items from sustainability communication and greenwashing/greenhushing literature (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Hilton, 2025), focusing on the extent to which organizations intentionally under-communicate or remain silent about genuine environmental initiatives. The construct was measured using a 5-point Likert scale.

- **Perceived Organizational Hypocrisy (POH):** Measured using an adapted scale from Brunsson (2007) and Wagner et al. (2009), assessing employees' perceptions of inconsistencies between organizational values, statements, and actual practices. The construct was measured using a 5-point Likert scale.
- **Employee Turnover Intention (ETI):** Measured using a standardized scale adapted from Bothma and Roodt (2013), evaluating employees' intention to leave the organization in the near future. The construct was measured using a 5-point Likert scale.

The present study examines three key concepts, namely greenhushing, perceived organizational hypocrisy, and employee turnover intention, using multiple variables to capture each construct comprehensively. Greenhushing is measured through variables such as intentional non-disclosure of environmental initiatives, minimization of sustainability achievements in external communication, avoidance of public sustainability reporting, fear of greenwashing accusations, strategic silence on environmental performance, and limited transparency in sustainability communication. Perceived organizational hypocrisy is assessed by examining inconsistencies between stated values and actual practices, mismatches between internal communication and external messaging, perceived lack of authenticity in sustainability claims, discrepancies between promises and actions, perceived ethical inconsistency, and loss of trust in organizational integrity. Employee turnover intention is measured using variables including intention to leave the organization, desire to search for alternative employment, thoughts of quitting the current job, likelihood of leaving in the near future, reduced commitment to remain with the organization, and willingness to accept job offers elsewhere.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The analysis was carried out for the final valid sample of 372 employees. The statistical procedures included reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and mediation analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. The constructs examined were Greenhushing (GH), Perceived Organizational Hypocrisy (POH), and Employee Turnover Intention (ETI).

Reliability Analysis

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Greenhushing (GH)	6	0.872	Good internal consistency
Perceived Organizational Hypocrisy (POH)	6	0.889	Good internal consistency
Employee Turnover Intention (ETI)	6	0.858	Good internal consistency
Overall Scale	18	0.914	Excellent internal consistency

The Cronbach's Alpha values for all three constructs exceeded the generally accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating that the measurement scales possessed satisfactory internal consistency. Therefore, the items used for measuring greenhushing, perceived organizational hypocrisy, and employee turnover intention were considered reliable for further analysis.

Descriptive Statistics and Normality

Construct	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Greenhushing (GH)	372	3.48	0.74	-0.214	-0.381

Perceived Organizational Hypocrisy (POH)	372	3.55	0.71	-0.186	-0.294
Employee Turnover Intention (ETI)	372	3.42	0.78	-0.102	-0.417

The mean scores indicate that respondents reported moderately high levels of greenhushing, perceived organizational hypocrisy, and turnover intention. The skewness and kurtosis values remained within the acceptable range of ± 2 , suggesting that the data were approximately normally distributed and suitable for parametric statistical testing.

Correlation Analysis

Variables	GH	POH	ETI
Greenhushing (GH)	1		
Perceived Organizational Hypocrisy (POH)	0.632**	1	
Employee Turnover Intention (ETI)	0.548**	0.671**	1

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

The correlation results show significant positive relationships among all study variables. Greenhushing was positively associated with perceived organizational hypocrisy, indicating that employees who perceived greater silence or under-communication regarding sustainability initiatives were more likely to perceive organizational inconsistency. Greenhushing was also positively related to employee turnover intention. Further, perceived organizational hypocrisy showed a strong positive relationship with employee turnover intention, suggesting that perceptions of organizational inconsistency may increase employees' intention to leave.

Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Path Tested	Beta	t-value	p-value	R ²	Result
H1	GH -> ETI	0.548	12.60	<0.001	0.300	Supported
H2	GH -> POH	0.632	15.70	<0.001	0.399	Supported
H3	POH -> ETI	0.671	17.40	<0.001	0.450	Supported

The regression analysis supports the first three hypotheses. Greenhushing had a significant positive effect on employee turnover intention, confirming that organizational silence regarding sustainability initiatives may contribute to employee withdrawal intentions. Greenhushing also had a significant positive effect on perceived organizational hypocrisy, demonstrating that sustainability silence can create perceptions of inconsistency between organizational values and actions. Finally, perceived organizational hypocrisy significantly increased turnover intention, showing that employees are more likely to consider leaving when they perceive the organization as ethically inconsistent.

Mediation Analysis

Effect Type	Path	Coefficient	Bootstrapped 95% CI	p-value	Interpretation
Total Effect	GH -> ETI	0.570	0.481 to 0.659	<0.001	Significant
Direct Effect	GH -> ETI controlling POH	0.210	0.118 to 0.302	<0.001	Significant
Indirect Effect	GH -> POH -> ETI	0.360	0.282 to 0.432	<0.001	Significant
Mediation Type	Partial Mediation	-	-	-	POH partially mediates the relationship

The mediation analysis indicates that perceived organizational hypocrisy significantly mediates the relationship between greenhushing and employee turnover intention. The indirect effect was significant, as the bootstrapped confidence interval did not include zero. Since the direct effect of greenhushing on turnover intention remained significant even after including perceived organizational hypocrisy, the mediation was partial rather than full. This suggests that greenhushing influences turnover intention both directly and indirectly through employees' perceptions of organizational hypocrisy.

Hypotheses Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Greenhushing has a significant positive effect on employee turnover intention.	Supported
H2	Greenhushing has a significant positive effect on perceived organizational hypocrisy.	Supported
H3	Perceived organizational hypocrisy has a significant positive effect on employee turnover intention.	Supported
H4	Perceived organizational hypocrisy mediates the relationship between greenhushing and employee turnover intention.	Supported

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The findings indicate that greenhushing is not merely an external sustainability communication issue but also an internal organizational concern. When organizations remain silent or under-communicate genuine sustainability initiatives, employees may interpret such silence as a lack of transparency, authenticity, or ethical courage. This can weaken trust in organizational communication and increase perceptions of inconsistency.

The significant effect of greenhushing on perceived organizational hypocrisy shows that employees evaluate not only what organizations do, but also how openly and consistently they communicate what they do. In the sustainability context, silence may create doubts about organizational integrity, particularly when internal messages emphasize environmental responsibility while external communication remains unclear or muted.

The strong relationship between perceived organizational hypocrisy and employee turnover intention highlights the importance of ethical consistency in retaining employees. When employees believe that organizational claims, values, and practices are not aligned, their emotional attachment to the organization may decline, increasing their willingness to consider alternative employment.

The mediation result further clarifies the mechanism through which greenhushing influences turnover intention. Greenhushing increases perceptions of organizational hypocrisy, and such perceptions subsequently increase employee turnover intention. Therefore, transparent sustainability communication can serve as a retention-supportive practice by reducing employee cynicism and strengthening trust.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that greenhushing has a significant positive influence on employee turnover intention among employees working in organizations across Kerala. The findings demonstrate that employees respond negatively when sustainability initiatives are deliberately under-communicated or kept silent, especially when such silence creates perceptions of inconsistency between organizational values and communication practices.

Perceived organizational hypocrisy emerged as an important mediating variable in the relationship between greenhushing and employee turnover intention. This confirms that the impact of sustainability silence on employee withdrawal intention operates partly through employees' perceptions of organizational inconsistency and ethical mismatch.

The study contributes to the emerging literature on greenhushing by shifting attention from external reputation management to internal employee outcomes. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that organizations should adopt transparent, balanced, and authentic sustainability communication practices. Communicating genuine environmental initiatives with clarity can strengthen employee trust, reduce perceptions of hypocrisy, and support employee retention.

Overall, the study emphasizes that silence in sustainability communication may create unintended organizational consequences. Managers should therefore treat sustainability communication as both a reputational and human resource concern, ensuring alignment between organizational actions, values, and communication.

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