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Greenwashing Vs. Green Marketing: How Consumers Detect And React

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Abstract

This paper explores the critical role of media and advertising ethics in the context of green marketing and greenwashing, focusing on how responsible communication strategies and media accountability influence consumer perception and brand credibility. With the rise of environmental awareness among consumers, many brands employ green marketing tactics to appeal to eco-conscious audiences. However, the thin line between ethical green promotion and greenwashing has led to significant challenges in ensuring transparency and trust. Responsible marketing communication—rooted in evidence-based claims, certifications, and regulatory compliance—plays a vital role in sustaining consumer confidence and promoting environmentally sound business practices. Conversely, the media can either act as a safeguard against deceptive claims or, if negligent, a conduit for perpetuating greenwashing. Investigative journalism, watchdog organizations, and regulatory bodies have highlighted the media's potential to expose false sustainability claims and hold corporations accountable. However, uncritical reporting and the commercialization of digital spaces often enable the unchecked spread of greenwashing narratives. This duality underscores the ethical responsibility of both marketers and media professionals to uphold standards that protect consumer interests and support authentic sustainability. Drawing from literature and comparative studies, the paper emphasizes that only through collective accountability—where brands, regulators, and media work together—can the credibility of green marketing be preserved. Ethical advertising and critical media engagement are not merely optional practices but are fundamental to fostering long-term consumer trust and achieving meaningful environmental progress.

Keywords: Green Marketing, Greenwashing, Marketing Communication, Business Practices, Consumer Trust, Communication Strategies, Media Accountability, Awareness and Transparency

1. Introduction

In an age where environmental degradation poses an imminent threat to planetary health, the concept of green consumerism has gained prominence. Green consumerism refers to the practice of purchasing products and services that are environmentally friendly, sustainably produced, and ethically marketed. This form of conscious consumption is fueled by concerns over pollution, climate change, and resource depletion. Increasingly, consumers view their buying decisions as a means to contribute to environmental preservation and social responsibility. Consequently, green consumerism is now seen as a critical driver of sustainable development in both developed and developing economies (Akhtar, R et al., 2021).

Despite growing awareness, green consumerism is not without challenges. Studies highlight a persistent gap between consumers' pro-environmental attitudes and their actual purchasing behaviour. This discrepancy, known as the attitude-behaviour gap, often arises due to factors such as higher costs of green products, limited availability, and skepticism toward green claims made by corporations. Research suggests that motivations for green purchases are influenced by multiple drivers—ranging from individual ethics and social influence to structural factors like price and regulation (Caliskan, 2020). These factors must be understood in context to promote effective green marketing and sustainable business strategies.

Importantly, the expansion of green consumerism signals a shift in societal values toward environmental stewardship. Studies show that consumers increasingly associate health, wellness, and ethical responsibility with green consumption. Initiatives like green product labelling and sustainability certifications have become pivotal tools for influencing buying behaviour. Furthermore, social demographics such as education, age, and gender also play significant roles in determining green purchasing behaviour (Kuriakose & Mathew, 2024). As consumer consciousness continues to evolve, green consumerism is poised to become a powerful force in the global transition toward a low-carbon, circular economy (Sanny et al., 2022).

1.1. Rise of Environmental Awareness among Consumers

The rise of environmental awareness in recent years has played a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviour. Educational initiatives, media coverage, and the visibility of environmental crises—such as plastic pollution and climate-induced disasters—have raised public consciousness about ecological issues. This shift has led to a more informed and responsible consumer base, particularly among younger and urban populations. These consumers now demand products that align with their values of sustainability, safety, and ethical sourcing (Caliskan, 2020).

However, while awareness levels are rising, behavioural change is still moderated by practical barriers such as affordability and access to green alternatives. A recent study conducted in Indonesia revealed that consumers' green purchasing behaviour is significantly influenced by internal factors like environmental attitudes and perceived behavioural control, rather than by societal norms alone (Sanny et al., 2022). This indicates that although awareness is a necessary condition for sustainable behaviour, it must be supported by empowering conditions—such as product availability, affordability, and transparent labelling—to convert intention into action.

1.2. The Role of Digital Media and eWOM

One of the defining features of the current green consumer era is the role of digital platforms in spreading information. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)—including online reviews, social media discussions, and influencer content—has become a key tool for consumers to validate or challenge corporate environmental claims. In a world where sustainability narratives can be manufactured as easily as authentic ones, peer-shared experiences serve as a crucial checkpoint. Recent research emphasizes that eWOM helps consumers detect inconsistencies in environmental messaging and exposes cases of greenwashing to wider audiences (Ekta & Yadav, 2025). This collective vigilance empowers consumers to make better-informed decisions and encourages companies to act with greater transparency.

Social media, review websites, and environmental watchdog platforms now serve as real-time spaces where green claims are debated, scrutinized, and sometimes debunked. This dynamic has dramatically increased the pressure on companies to ensure their sustainability initiatives are backed by data and third-party verification. Brands that fail to meet these expectations risk backlash, reduced sales, and long-term reputational damage. On the flip side, companies that engage transparently in genuine environmental practices can benefit from consumer advocacy and positive digital word-of-mouth promotion.

2. Conceptual Framework: Green Marketing vs. Greenwashing

As sustainability becomes a growing concern in global markets, businesses have increasingly adopted "green marketing" strategies to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers. Green marketing encompasses the promotion of products and services based on their environmental benefits—such as being biodegradable, ethically sourced, or carbon-neutral. However, the popularity of green branding has given rise to a troubling counter-trend: greenwashing, where companies falsely portray themselves as environmentally responsible without making genuine sustainability efforts (Sankar Ganesh & Sudhamaheswari, 2024). This duality presents a conceptual tension between authenticity and deception in environmental marketing.

Greenwashing undermines the core values of green marketing by distorting consumer perception. While true green marketing builds on transparency and measurable sustainability practices, greenwashing is a strategic façade—employing vague language, misleading imagery, or unverifiable claims to simulate environmental concern. Studies show that greenwashing erodes consumer trust and leads to skepticism even toward legitimate green initiatives. Companies caught greenwashing often face reputational damage and legal scrutiny. This is exacerbated by the lack of universal standards in certifying green claims, leaving consumers vulnerable to deceptive marketing strategies (Jeevan, 2017).

Scholars emphasize the need for a clear differentiation between greenwashing and authentic green marketing practices to guide both corporate ethics and consumer awareness. A 2024 study emphasizes that building a trustworthy green brand image requires more than cosmetic changes; it demands full integration of sustainability into operations, transparent reporting, and third-party certifications (Tu et al., 2024). Another analysis finds that promoting genuine green marketing involves proactive stakeholder engagement, education campaigns to prevent consumer confusion, and regulatory safeguards to combat false advertising (Aragon et al., 2024). In summary, a conceptual framework of green marketing must encompass both ethical business practices and mechanisms to resist the dilution of environmental integrity by greenwashing.

2.1. Defining Green Marketing: Principles and Practices

Green marketing refers to the strategy of promoting products, services, or brand values based on genuine environmental benefits. It is not merely about eco-labels or recycled packaging, but about embedding sustainability into the full product lifecycle—from sourcing and production to distribution and disposal. Core principles include transparency, accountability, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based claims.

Effective green marketing practices involve:

- **Life cycle assessment to evaluate environmental impact:** Life cycle assessment (LCA) examines a product's environmental impact from raw material extraction to disposal, helping companies reduce emissions, waste, and resource use across all production stages.
- **Third-party certifications (e.g., Energy Star, Fair Trade):** Certifications from trusted third parties validate a product’s environmental or ethical claims, enhancing consumer trust and providing standardized benchmarks for sustainability (e.g., Energy Star, Fair Trade, USDA Organic).
- **Consumer education on sustainable choices:** Educating consumers empowers them to make informed eco-friendly decisions. This includes transparency about product origins, environmental impact, and alternatives that reduce carbon footprints or promote ethical sourcing.
- **Clear, verifiable messaging free from greenwashing jargon:** Green marketing must avoid vague buzzwords and instead use specific, evidence-backed claims. Verifiable messaging ensures accountability, builds consumer confidence, and guards against deceptive greenwashing practices.

Crucially, green marketing requires businesses to align brand identity with long-term sustainability goals. It is a holistic approach—not a promotional gimmick—and should be reflected in corporate values, supply chain decisions, and community engagement.

By fostering authenticity and transparency, green marketing strengthens consumer trust and brand loyalty, while contributing to environmental well-being. Companies that fail to uphold these principles risk falling into greenwashing, which not only damages their credibility but also undermines broader sustainability efforts across industries.

3. Historical Evolution and Global Trends

The evolution of green marketing and greenwashing reflects a growing global tension between sustainable branding and deceptive environmental messaging. As consumer demand for eco-conscious products surged in the late 20th century, companies began to integrate environmental claims into their marketing. While this signalled progress toward sustainability, it also opened the door to greenwashing—a tactic where firms falsely portray themselves as environmentally responsible. This dual evolution continues today, shaped by policy, activism, and market incentives. Studies reveal that while authentic green branding can boost consumer trust, greenwashing significantly undermines it.

In recent years, academic attention has turned to regulatory gaps and the rise of sophisticated greenwashing techniques across industries—from fashion to food to energy. Research underscores the urgent need for transparent sustainability metrics, consumer education, and third-party verification systems to counter deceptive practices (Aragon et al., 2024). Today, the battle between genuine green marketing and greenwashing continues to shape brand perception and ethical business strategy worldwide.

3.1. Evolution of Environmental Marketing Practices

- **1970s–1980s:** The roots of environmental marketing emerged during the environmental movement of the 1970s, where companies began promoting eco-friendly products as a niche strategy. Messaging focused on pollution reduction, conservation, and biodegradable packaging. However, there was little regulation, and green marketing was mostly reactive and symbolic.
- **1990s:** The 1990s saw the formalization of green marketing strategies due to growing consumer awareness and environmental regulation. Concepts like corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental audits became more mainstream, leading brands to integrate environmental claims into core advertising.
- **2000s:** Environmental marketing matured, incorporating sustainable design, carbon labelling, and eco-efficiency. Firms began aligning with the triple bottom line (people, planet, profit), while green product certifications gained visibility. But this decade also witnessed the early rise of misleading claims—planting seeds of future greenwashing.
- **2010s:** The widespread adoption of digital platforms enabled brands to broadcast sustainability narratives. Terms like "organic," "eco," and "green" became common. However, studies reported an increase in vague or unsubstantiated green claims, prompting watchdog organizations to raise concerns over deceptive marketing practices (Priyadarshini & Udupa, 2022).
- **2020s–Present:** Today’s environmental marketing emphasizes authenticity, ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) performance, and traceability. Companies integrate sustainability across the supply chain and use life cycle analysis. However, the complexity of sustainability metrics also allows for more sophisticated greenwashing, requiring better regulation and consumer vigilance (Tu et al., 2024).

3.2. Rise in Greenwashing Cases Across Industries

The rise in greenwashing cases across industries has become a significant concern in the age of sustainability-driven consumerism. As businesses increasingly use environmental claims to gain competitive advantage, many have adopted deceptive tactics that mislead consumers about the true environmental performance of their products or practices. Greenwashing is especially prevalent in sectors like fashion, food, automotive, and energy, where companies use vague terms like “eco-friendly” or “natural” without third-party verification or measurable sustainability data. Research shows that this form of misleading marketing has grown more sophisticated in the digital era, often disguised through social media campaigns, influencer endorsements, and selective disclosure of environmental metrics (Savić & Frfulanović, 2024).

Scandals such as the Volkswagen emissions case and controversies surrounding “fast fashion” brands have brought greenwashing into public scrutiny. These cases demonstrate how companies may market products as sustainable while continuing harmful environmental practices behind the scenes. Studies warn that greenwashing not only erodes consumer trust but also hampers the progress of legitimate green initiatives by creating confusion and skepticism among buyers. As a result, there is growing demand for stricter regulations, third-party certifications, and transparency mechanisms to ensure that environmental claims reflect genuine corporate responsibility rather than marketing spin (Tu et al., 2024).

4. Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

In response to the rise of greenwashing, governments and international organizations have been working to build robust legal and regulatory frameworks to protect consumers and ensure environmental integrity in marketing. Globally, institutions like the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States and International Organization for Standardization (ISO) have created tools such as the FTC Green Guides and ISO 14024, which offer guidance on environmental labelling and claims. These frameworks aim to promote honest marketing and provide consumers with clear, reliable information. The FTC Green Guides, for example, specify how terms like “eco-friendly,” “biodegradable,” or “recyclable” should be substantiated, thus protecting consumers from deceptive environmental advertising. ISO 14024 provides internationally recognized standards for Type I environmental labelling, requiring independent third-party certification, life cycle assessments, and regular audits to validate green claims (Sciortino et al., 2025).

Despite these guidelines, enforcement remains a challenge globally. Many countries still lack binding legal provisions to penalize greenwashing. As a result, misleading green claims continue to surface, especially in sectors like agri-food, cosmetics, and fashion. These industries often rely on voluntary standards or ambiguous eco-labels that do not require thorough verification. Research from the EU and Southeast Asia shows that inconsistent regulations, overlapping certifications, and poor consumer awareness contribute to ineffective enforcement of sustainability standards (Buttigieg & Pulis, 2024). The problem is further compounded by the growth of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) investment products, which are increasingly being scrutinized for overstated sustainability claims. Without harmonized international oversight, greenwashing remains a global legal grey area.

In India, the legal battle against greenwashing is still evolving. Although India does not yet have specific greenwashing legislation, it leverages general consumer protection, environmental, and advertising laws to regulate false green claims. The Consumer Protection Act (2019) and Environmental Protection Act (1986) can be invoked against misleading eco-marketing, especially in cases where consumers suffer material or psychological harm. Indian authorities such as the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) also monitor advertisements and can issue penalties or demand retractions for misleading environmental messaging. Several case studies from the Indian FMCG and Ayurveda sectors highlight how companies have been called out for false green claims, prompting regulatory investigations (Vijayalakshmi, 2024). However, research shows that consumer awareness about these legal rights remains limited. Despite India’s strong cultural values around environmentalism and recycling, greenwashing often goes undetected or unchallenged by the average consumer (Devireddy, 2024).

International and Indian regulatory environments are gradually adapting to the complex challenge of greenwashing. While global standards such as the FTC Green Guides and ISO 14024 serve as guiding frameworks, their enforcement varies by region. In India, the current legal toolkit addresses greenwashing only indirectly, and stronger, green-specific regulation is urgently needed. Enhancing consumer education, mandating independent third-party certifications, and streamlining eco-label criteria are key next steps toward creating a credible and transparent green marketing environment.

5. Cognitive Biases in Green Product Evaluation

Consumer evaluations of green products are not purely rational; rather, they are heavily shaped by cognitive biases that influence perception and decision-making. One common bias is the halo effect, where a single eco-friendly attribute—like recyclable packaging—leads consumers to assume the product is entirely sustainable. Similarly, confirmation bias drives consumers to interpret ambiguous claims in a way that aligns with their preexisting environmental beliefs. Research shows that such heuristics can distort judgment, leading individuals to overvalue marginal sustainability efforts while overlooking misleading claims (Islam et al., 2024). These biases are often reinforced by marketing strategies that frame messages to trigger positive emotional responses, rather than fact-based evaluations.

Moreover, the use of anchoring and message framing plays a pivotal role in shaping green product perceptions. When environmental claims are presented with bold visuals, slogans, or pricing cues (e.g., "save the planet for $1 more"), they act as cognitive anchors that influence consumers' perceived value of the product. Experimental studies reveal that consumer willingness to pay for green products often increases based on how environmental benefits are framed, not necessarily on product performance or actual ecological impact. This supports findings that many consumers rely on peripheral cues—such as color schemes, labels, and slogans—rather than engaging in critical evaluation. Other studies further highlight the role of environmental consciousness and green cognition levels in amplifying these biases. Consumers with higher levels of green knowledge and awareness tend to exhibit greater intention to purchase eco-friendly products, yet they may still fall prey to cognitive shortcuts that mislead decision-making. This is particularly relevant in the age of digital marketing, where consumers are inundated with rapid, superficial sustainability claims that are difficult to verify. As green marketing becomes more prevalent, so does the need for consumer education on evaluating such claims objectively. Marketers, therefore, must strike a balance between persuasive messaging and ethical responsibility. Understanding how biases work enables companies to design communications that align with sustainable goals while avoiding manipulation. Ethical use of these psychological mechanisms fosters trust, credibility, and long-term consumer loyalty (Verma, 2024).

5.1. Role of Environmental Skepticism in Consumer Decision-Making

Environmental skepticism—doubt about the legitimacy of environmental claims—has become a growing force in shaping consumer behaviour, especially amid increasing greenwashing. While some skepticism can promote critical thinking and demand accountability, excessive doubt can suppress green purchasing altogether. Many consumers now question whether brands genuinely contribute to sustainability or are simply riding the eco-marketing trend. Research shows that skeptical consumers often demand concrete evidence, third-party verification, and transparency in order to be persuaded of a product's environmental value (Devireddy, 2024).

This skepticism can be particularly strong in markets where regulatory frameworks are weak or inconsistent, allowing deceptive practices to go unpunished. In such environments, consumer distrust can generalize across entire product categories, leading to reluctance even toward genuinely sustainable products. A study of Indian green product markets found that while awareness of eco-friendly alternatives is growing, consumer hesitancy is driven by confusion and lack of trust in labelling standards and brand claims (Vijayalakshmi, 2024). Thus, overcoming skepticism requires more than just visual branding; it calls for educational outreach, transparency, and a credible alignment between corporate actions and environmental messaging.

6. Tools for Detecting Greenwashing

In response to growing consumer concern over greenwashing, various tools and mechanisms have emerged to enhance transparency and detect misleading sustainability claims. These tools span technological, regulatory, and consumer-driven solutions aimed at ensuring that environmental marketing aligns with actual business practices. One approach involves leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing (NLP) to analyze corporate communications, sustainability reports, and social media activity for inconsistencies between stated claims and actual impact. AI-supported systems can flag vague language, detect deceptive terminology, and cross-verify claims against verified environmental databases (Boedijanto & Delina, 2024). Additionally, social media activism, environmental watchdogs, and consumer reviews play a crucial role in crowd-sourcing evidence against greenwashing, holding brands publicly accountable. These evolving tools not only empower regulators but also enhance consumer literacy and corporate responsibility.

6.1. Third-party Certifications and Eco-labels

Third-party certifications and eco-labels remain foundational tools in the battle against greenwashing, serving as independent verifiers of environmental claims. Labels such as Energy Star, Fair Trade, FSC, and ISO 14024 aim to validate the sustainability credentials of products based on rigorous environmental and social criteria. These systems are built around life cycle assessment, carbon emissions audits, and transparent reporting to assure consumers that the certified product meets strict standards. Research shows that trustworthy certifications can significantly increase consumer trust and willingness to pay a premium for sustainable products (Colasante et al., 2024). However, the effectiveness of these certifications depends on enforcement, credibility, and consumer understanding.

Despite their utility, third-party certifications face criticism. Some studies point to issues like “certification fatigue,” where the abundance of labels confuses consumers, and “free riding,” where firms obtain certification without meaningful action. Moreover, in regions with weak governance or lax enforcement, even certified firms may engage in greenwashing, undermining the label’s value. For example, analysis of Colombian manufacturing sectors reveals that over 50% of certified firms did not adhere to core sustainability standards, indicating a gap between certification and genuine practice. Thus, while eco-labels are critical tools, they must be accompanied by regular audits, transparent disclosures, and consumer education to maintain their effectiveness in combating greenwashing.

6.2. Digital Literacy and Social Media Activism

Digital literacy and social media activism have emerged as grassroots tools for exposing greenwashing and educating the public about genuine sustainability. As brands increasingly market themselves as eco-conscious, consumers are turning to online platforms to scrutinize claims, share reviews, and challenge misleading advertisements. Empowering consumers with the skills to decode environmental language, verify data, and critically evaluate corporate claims is essential to counter deceptive marketing. A study on greenwashing literacy found that interventions using visual and textual exemplars significantly improved users' ability to detect misleading claims, especially when shared through social media channels (Eng et al., 2021).

Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn now host communities that actively call out greenwashing through viral hashtags, influencer commentary, and investigative content. Social media users engage in eWOM (electronic word of mouth), amplifying both praise for authentic green efforts and criticism of deceptive tactics. This real-time, decentralized form of activism increases transparency and pressures companies to either substantiate their claims or face reputational backlash (Ekta & Yadav, 2025). However, digital literacy remains uneven. Misinformation and “greenhushing” (deliberate silence on environmental matters to avoid scrutiny) are growing risks that require continuous public education and digital tools for claim verification.

7. Impact of Greenwashing on Consumer Trust

The growing prevalence of greenwashing has emerged as a critical concern in the relationship between companies and environmentally conscious consumers. While green marketing aims to align brand values with environmental sustainability, greenwashing misrepresents such intentions, often leading to significant distrust among buyers. In a consumer-driven market, trust is a foundational component that not only governs purchasing behaviour but also determines brand loyalty and long-term engagement. When consumers perceive deception in environmental claims, the authenticity of the brand suffers, potentially impacting its market standing, reputation, and financial performance. Greenwashing also contributes to broader skepticism toward green initiatives, adversely affecting firms that genuinely invest in sustainability. Several empirical studies indicate that once consumer trust is breached, it becomes exceedingly difficult to restore, even with corrective measures. This section delves into five interconnected consequences of greenwashing that significantly erode consumer trust: erosion of brand credibility, reduction in loyalty, negative word-of-mouth, increased skepticism, and legal as well as financial consequences.

- **Erosion of Brand Credibility:** Greenwashing severely damages a company's credibility by creating a perception of dishonesty and manipulation. When consumers recognize that a brand has exaggerated or falsified its environmental claims, they lose faith not only in that specific product but also in the company's broader ethical stance. This erosion of trust impacts long-term relationships with customers and investors. Studies show that greenwashing leads to confusion, reduced trust, and a negative brand image, particularly when environmental performance cannot be verified (Isac et al., 2024).
- **Reduced Consumer Loyalty:** When brands are exposed for greenwashing, consumer loyalty declines significantly. Customers who initially believed in a company's environmental commitments may feel deceived, triggering feelings of betrayal. This emotional fallout is particularly damaging in markets where consumers align their values with brand choices. Research indicates that greenwashing diminishes green brand attachment and purchase intentions, especially among environmentally conscious customers (Nguyen et al., 2021).
- **Negative Word-of-Mouth and Social Backlash:** In today's digital age, greenwashing can provoke intense backlash online, leading to viral criticism and long-term reputational harm. Consumers are quick to call out perceived dishonesty, particularly on platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. This negative word-of-mouth (NWoM) spreads rapidly, often reaching new and existing customers and amplifying damage. Studies show that greenwashing directly fuels brand avoidance and negative online reviews, especially when green trust is broken.
- **Skepticism Toward Genuine Green Marketing:** Widespread greenwashing has led consumers to develop skepticism even toward brands that engage in legitimate environmental efforts. When consumers are repeatedly exposed to misleading claims, they become cynical, doubting the authenticity of any green messaging. This skepticism weakens the impact of genuine campaigns, making it difficult for ethical brands to stand out. Research finds that greenwashing increases consumer confusion and reduces trust in green claims overall.
- **Legal and Financial Repercussions:** Greenwashing exposes companies to legal liability and regulatory sanctions. Misleading environmental claims can violate consumer protection laws, resulting in fines, class action lawsuits, or bans. In regions like the EU, new laws directly target vague or unverifiable green claims. Research highlights how consumers are legally entitled to transparent and truthful marketing, and violations can incur financial losses and loss of investor trust (Marcatajo, 2022).

8. Comparative Studies: Green Marketing vs. Greenwashing Effects

Comparative studies analyzing the effects of green marketing and greenwashing provide valuable insights into how consumers process sustainability messages and make purchasing decisions. Authentic green marketing—rooted in verifiable eco-friendly practices—positively influences consumer attitudes, enhances brand loyalty, and builds long-term trust. These findings are consistent across various industries such as food, fashion, and consumer electronics, where transparency and environmental values significantly shape consumer behaviour. In contrast, greenwashing generates short-term visibility but leads to long-term brand erosion. Showed that consumers penalize brands found guilty of greenwashing with reduced willingness to buy and increased skepticism toward all green messaging. Thus, while green marketing is positively associated with trust and brand equity, greenwashing reverses these outcomes, often leading to reputational loss.

Moreover, comparative empirical studies demonstrate that consumer response to green messages is moderated by factors such as environmental concern, product involvement, and awareness of greenwashing practices. According to Verma et al. (2024), high-involvement consumers—those who actively seek information about a product's environmental impact—are more likely to differentiate between genuine and false claims, thereby rewarding authentic brands and rejecting greenwashers. Conversely, low-involvement consumers may initially respond positively to both types of messages but later experience cognitive dissonance upon realizing the deception. Jeevan, P. (2017) argue that while both green marketing and greenwashing affect purchase intent, only the former generates sustainable brand loyalty. Furthermore, they caution that repeated exposure to greenwashing leads to generalized mistrust, weakening the overall effectiveness of environmental advertising, including that of legitimate brands. These comparative insights highlight the ethical and strategic importance of adopting honest and verifiable sustainability practices in brand communication. Companies aiming for long-term consumer loyalty and competitive advantage must, therefore, focus on credibility, third-party certifications, and transparent disclosures rather than deceptive green tactics (Jeevan, P. 2017).

9. Role of Media and Advertising Ethics

Media and advertising ethics play a vital role in shaping public understanding of sustainability and corporate responsibility. With increasing environmental awareness, brands often use green messaging to attract consumers. However, ethical boundaries must be clearly defined to ensure these messages are accurate, evidence-based, and not misleading. Ethical media practices involve fact-checking, transparency, and the clear separation of editorial content from promotional material. Advertising professionals must avoid vague environmental terminology and ensure claims are verifiable, often through third-party certifications. Meanwhile, journalists and media outlets bear the responsibility of exposing deceptive green narratives and holding companies accountable. Ethical lapses—whether through negligence or intentional complicity—can contribute to the spread of greenwashing, damaging consumer trust and undermining genuine sustainability efforts. Ultimately, media and advertisers must act as gatekeepers of truth, balancing corporate interests with public good, and ensuring that green marketing does not become a tool for manipulation or misinformation.

9.1. Responsible Marketing Communication Strategies

Responsible marketing communication ensures that environmental messages are truthful, clear, and evidence-based, preventing greenwashing and preserving consumer trust. As sustainability becomes a key purchasing factor, many companies attempt to capitalize on eco-consciousness through marketing. However, the line between ethical green communication and manipulation is thin. Brands must avoid vague buzzwords like "eco-friendly" or "natural" unless these claims are substantiated by verifiable data or third-party certifications. Responsible marketing includes life cycle analysis, transparent labelling, and alignment between internal sustainability practices and external messages. According to Ekta, E., & Yadav, P. (2025), marketing ethics should prioritize clarity, fairness, and accountability, ensuring green claims are both measurable and consistent with company values (Ekta, E., & Yadav, P. 2025). Deshmukh and Tare (2023) argue that integrating green communication with corporate social responsibility (CSR) strengthens authenticity and reduces reputational risk (Deshmukh & Tare, 2023). When communication is grounded in measurable sustainability goals and monitored for accuracy, it not only benefits the planet but also builds lasting consumer loyalty.

9.2. Media’s Role in Exposing or Perpetuating Greenwashing

Media plays a dual role in either exposing or perpetuating greenwashing. On one hand, responsible journalism and watchdog reporting can uncover misleading green claims, driving public awareness and regulatory scrutiny. Investigative pieces that highlight inconsistencies between corporate messaging and actual practices often lead to accountability and corrective action. Chowdhury (2024) emphasizes that ethical branding and media transparency are key in preventing greenwashing from flourishing in digital spaces, where influencer marketing and native ads frequently bypass scrutiny (Chowdhury, 2024). On the other hand, when media outlets or platforms disseminate unverified environmental claims—especially through social media—they contribute to consumer misinformation and normalize superficial sustainability narratives. Kwon et al. (2023) found that over 70% of green ads on digital platforms were misleading, showing how digital media can unintentionally facilitate deception (Kwon et al., 2023). Thus, the media must apply rigorous fact-checking and resist commercial pressure to maintain its integrity. Ethical journalism must challenge environmental exaggeration, not promote it.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of media and advertising ethics in the realm of environmental communication is both significant and dual-faceted. On one hand, responsible marketing strategies can act as powerful tools to foster genuine consumer trust, promote sustainable consumption, and incentivize businesses to align with authentic green practices. Ethical advertising, grounded in transparency, evidence-based claims, and third-party verification, strengthens brand integrity and contributes to a well-informed, environmentally conscious consumer base. On the other hand, when media and advertising bodies fail to uphold ethical standards, they inadvertently serve as enablers of greenwashing, misleading the public and diluting the effectiveness of authentic green efforts. The unchecked spread of vague or exaggerated environmental claims, particularly through digital media and influencer marketing, has blurred the boundaries between legitimate sustainability messaging and deceptive promotion. Investigative journalism and independent watchdogs have been instrumental in identifying and exposing greenwashing practices, demonstrating the critical oversight role media can play. However, this role must be actively reinforced through regulatory compliance, journalistic integrity, and critical evaluation of green claims before public dissemination. The ethical burden is therefore shared—corporations must ensure their claims reflect real environmental performance, and media outlets must validate these claims through scrutiny and accountability. By working in tandem, advertisers and media platforms can prevent greenwashing from undermining consumer trust and sustainability goals. Strengthening ethical advertising practices and reinforcing the media’s watchdog role is not just a matter of corporate responsibility but a prerequisite for achieving genuine environmental change and preserving public trust in green marketing narratives.

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