

From Green Claims to Genuine Impact: The Consumer Engagement Strategies Implemented by The Global Brands

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Abstract—Greenwashing is a misleading tactic where organizations artificially promote their products or services as environment friendly to attract environmentally aware customers. It entails exaggerating, overstating, or making up claims of sustainability to achieve competitive edge without translating into actual changes in doing business. This paper emphasizes the meaning of greenwashing, the reasons for it, and the necessity of distinguishing it from true green marketing. Greenwashing is usually spurred by increasing consumer consciousness and demand for green products. Most companies, threatened by the need to deliver, fall back on cosmetic marketing strategies instead of embracing true green practices. In contrast to true green marketing, which is based on openness, verifiable assertions, and quantifiable impacts, greenwashing engenders distrust by deceiving consumers. While true green marketing is about long-term value creation through ethical means, greenwashing is about short-term image creation at the expense of consumer trust and environmental advancement. The dangers of greenwashing are substantial. Firms expose themselves to reputational loss, regulatory action, consumer ire, and faltering brand loyalty when their misleading actions are made public. In addition, it undermines worldwide sustainability efforts by confusing consumers and undermining the validity of genuine green activities. To prevent this, companies must inform truthfully, utilize third party certifications, and support assertions with proof. Green marketing has become extremely relevant over the last few years as companies see their position in fighting climate change and scarcity of resources. Brands are now torn between lofty sustainability promises and the temptation to hype progress. Case studies show that companies with real green marketing end up not only with more consumer trust but also ultimately with greater profitability.

Index Terms—Green washing, Sustainable marketing, Environmental claims, Consumer engagement, Ethical

considerations, corporate transparency, Eco-conscious consumers

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has emerged as an important catalyst for individual consumer behaviour and business decisions. As consumers increase their awareness about the environmental risk that gets connected with their consumer behaviour, different companies have shown interest in following green marketing programs. However, different companies faced challenges to align with their sustainable developments, and they get trapped in the usual hazard that gets referred to as green washing. This research paper proposes to examine different strategies adopted by companies to pursue responsible behaviour through making real calls for consumers to invest their trust in the green cause.

Green marketing can efficiently contribute to the promotion of sustainability, but the same green washing contributes to the destruction of trust in consumers regarding companies. By being transparent, certified by other companies, and being committed to sustainability, businesses need to present ethical marketing to future consumers. [13] The fact remains that green washing is not more than a financial gamble rather than an investment to green conservation. Many consumers, with simple intentions to reduce their footprint and to promote green businesses, are being poisoned by products that are not contributing to their sustainability principles. Green washing not only hinders green efforts, but it also reduces consumer trust in green marketing. Rising green awareness among consumers has encouraged businesses to indulge in green marketing. Unfortunately, some companies operate below the

green-washing screen making or raising claims of the impact of their products on the environment with no basis. Greenwashing mostly entails a gap between the green claim of the company and the actual efforts of the company towards greenness. Some of the organisations may attempt to gain benefits of greenness without making significant efforts to achieve good performance concerning the environment. Also, the resource depletion challenge is a major one at present, and it appears as though all the organisations will go green within the next few days. Organisations have come to appreciate the fact that doing good to the world would work well for them.[2] Until now, studies focused on extreme cases in which, as organisations, they were obviously lying about their environment performance. The early literature on green washing generally took a simple approach. Green washing is communicative acts intentionally made to deceive stakeholders. Of course, the implication of green washing acts is far longer than Terra Choice (2010)'s description of 'seven sins of green washing. In fact, quite numerous researchers described the huge possibility of green washing. Waller and Conaway (2011) described message framing (p. 4).

Selee and Gatti pointed out the validity of accusations of green washing could be the product of subjective perceptions. These perceptions relate to co-creations between the entity and the outer world. The literature on the impact of green washing studies the responses of stakeholders to the mismatch between green communications and the actions of the organisation.

Understanding the concept of green washing

Green washing is an action whereby an organization exaggerates the actual advertised benefits of an organization with the objective of attracting consumers who worry over the negative impacts of products towards the environment. Green washing methods come in the form of vague statements, unfair labelling, and unverified information. Green washing has its sight fixed upon gaining profit with less concern for the environment. Green washing in its specific intent aims towards gaining profit even though products will be advertised with wrongful intent towards profit. Organizations selling green washed products are only using the efforts of consumers searching for green products. Recent consumer behaviours indicate that consumers with more

concerns over the environment tend towards reducing their carbon footprints by improving their intentions of purchasing green products. Consumers have made efforts to apply the concept of "green living" inspired by their behaviour towards adopting "green buying." They have opted to replace their long-used products with products having an impact towards improving the environment. It has been taken as an advantage for companies offering "environmental products" to sell "environmentally friendly" products.

1. Drivers of Green washing

The evidence that affects organizational complexity dilutes the role of strategic considerations in determining green washing to a small extent. It does not imply, however, that organisations cannot or should not be held accountable for the reliability of their environmental claims.[3]

- Strategic Consideration: As the pressure of consumers and market pressures mount, businesses may extend claims of sustainability beyond their realistic grounds.
- Organizational Complexity: Large organizations with many different stakeholders may not align themselves for the purpose of sustainability practices.
- Regulatory gaps: Inefficient regulatory enforcement of the environmental claims favour false marketing.

Green Marketing and Benefits Displayed

- Enhances brand image and reputation and builds trust.
- Assists with regulatory and compliance requirements.
- Stimulates customer loyalty and participation.
- It ensures the continuity of business beyond the short term.

2. Greenwashing and Green Marketing

This implies that green marketing refers to the making of an environmental claim that can be verified and also proven green, while green washing refers to environmental claims that are not truthful and, in effect, green washing can be difficult for customers to distinguish from either one and has become a quandary for politics in certain nations because the authorities have taken up seizing false environmental advertisements as a national concern. Very good green

marketing enhances reputation, and, in fact, customer loyalty helps achieve sustainability for businesses (Kotler & Keller, 2019; Peattie & Crane, 2005; Chen & Chang, 2013; Polonsky, 2011).[14]

3. Risks and Consequences of Green washing

- Green washing entails many risks for entrepreneurs and their businesses.
- Consumer Distrust: The credibility of the organisations along with customer loyalty may be at stake as recorded by Delmas and Burbano, 2011.
- Legal and Regulatory Sanctions: It can also lead to the business being fined by the government, and sanctions levied, as was evidenced by the FTC 2022.
- Reputational Damages: According to Leonidou et al. (2013), negative publicity causes long-term damage to brands.

II. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Introduction

The present study examines the use of genuine green marketing approaches by global brands in order to overcome the aspect of green washing.

2.1. The objectives for conducting the research are as follows

- 1)to outline the main strategies of sustainable marketing.
- 2)evaluating best practices from various world-class brands, and
- 3)In order to formulate lessons which can be explored for the moral and transparent communication of brands. The conceptual descriptive study uses the secondary analysis of case studies.

Strategies for genuine, efficient sustainable marketing to be implanted by entrepreneurs.

Green washing often happens inadvertently, with the corporate world remaining unaware of how the products are being marketed. Therefore, a business can reduce the risk of green washing by: To engage consumers in an ethical yet effective way into the green marketing, an organisation must adopt some of the best practices that follow:

2.2. Consumer Education and Engagement:

Educate and engage consumers in sustainability initiatives. Actively inform and engage consumers on

all matters relating to sustainability. The best way to avoid deception is to educate both the business and its stakeholders on all matters relating to sustainability so that it does not fall into the trap of green washing.

- Adidas "Run for the Oceans" Campaign: To create awareness on ocean plastic pollution. Adidas, 2021.
- Tesla's Educational Marketing on Renewable Energy: Emphasizing the environmental advantages of electric cars, by Tesla 2022.

2.3. Act strategically on sustainability

- We establish and track for adherence to an effective strategy concerning the sustainability of products in accordance with the specified standards.
- Implement the holistic sustainability approach: Achieving true sustainability entails a transformation in production and business practices.
- Embracing the principles of the framework and incorporating the objectives into the strategic objectives of the organization actively, which lends authenticity to the idea of sustainability and transparency.
- Innovative Products for a Sustainable Future The trend among organizations has shifted towards sustainable product innovation and circular economies.

For instance, with big brands such as

- Nike's Move to Zero Initiatives: reduction in carbon footprint and the utilization of recycled materials (Nike, 2022).
- H&M Garment Collecting Initiative: Collect old clothes to be reused by customers.

2.4. Obtain third party acclimations

The use of independent certificates, such as Fair Trade, Energy Star, and/or Rainforest Alliance certificates, can add credibility. Getting feedback on what has been done is very valuable. This is a tool to get a third-party perspective on what something is perceived to be.

- Patagonia's Fair Trade and B Corp Certification Patagonia, 2022
- The Body Shop's commitment to Ethical Sourcing and Cruelty-Free Certification (The Body Shop 2021)
- LEED Certification for Sustainable Buildings (U.S. Green Building Council, 2020)

2.5. Stake

Include sustainability within the suppliers, labour, and investors. It may be very difficult to always be in control of all working elements of a business. Via the suppliers and investors, people may have differing priorities that can yield to differing values of sustainability. However, the more people that are involved in the sustainability plan of the company, the better it shall function.[15]

2.6. Honesty and Transparency is the best policy

This is Honesty is a value for humanity, and this is made possible through trust, where the dedicated customers will be attracted. Without transparency, customers will have lesser opportunities to trust the green promises made by a company. Thus, the customers will be presented with facts that should be crystal clear and accessible to everyone. Empathy will take customers beyond the issue, and they will appreciate the company's courage and the new direction. Companies should, thus, provide clear and verifiable information about sustainability commitments and avoid making grand promises.[26]

2.7. Accountability and Measurable Goals

Having specific sustainability goals and progress updates helps in sustaining the trust and loyalty of the consumers. In analysing the current state of the company's practices, list the ways by which the company is implementing the concept of sustainability. The second step is the concept of responsibility and awareness in the defects and shortcomings that exist in the current company. Perhaps, it adds to the credibility and reliability of the company. The root and reality behind the concept of sustainability for a company needs to be dealt with very thoughtfully and emphasis should be added to it for a successful implementation and should not end up in the red list for the concept of green washing.[25] The customers are exposed to the various green products which declare that they offer environmental benefits and environmentally responsible practices, green benefits, and the reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions. They represent the deceptions and perhaps an act of green washing. These types of products are found all over the net and in the shopping malls with tags like green, all natural, all organic, and many other similar deceptive items.

2.8. Ethical supply chain management and sourcing and ethical supply chains are among the things in which the focus of sustainable brands lies.

- Unilever's Sustainable Palm Oil Initiative: commitment to deforestation-free palm oil sourcing (Unilever, 2022).
- IKEA People & Planet Positive Strategy: Responsible Forestry and Carbon Neutrality, IKEA 2021.

2.9. Digital Marketing and Green Influencer Leverage:

Capitalizing on Digital Marketing and Green Influencers Digital marketing platforms can help brands communicate effectively on sustainability projects.

- IKEA's Green Influencer Partnerships: Partnering with green influencers representing brands that advocate environmental living (IKEA, 2021).
- Apple's Carbon Neutral Campaigns: Applying digital campaigns in raising awareness on the importance of carbon neutrality actions.

III. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The essence of this research is anchored on three predominant theoretical assumptions, to wit: the Stakeholder Theory, the Triple Bottom Line, and the Corporate Social Responsibility Theory. The Stakeholder Theory ventures into the hunt for a synergy between business and the expectation of the clients, investors, and regulators to earn business legitimacy and trust. The TBL Framework has three predominant elements, to wit: People, Planet, and Profit, reinforcing the idea that sustained prosperity is undergirded by the sustainability of society and the planet. CSR Theory emphasizes the notion that sustainability initiatives have a distinct moral mandate beyond mere profit. These theories have the makings to provide a conceptual underpinning on which to base the analysis on the idea that global brands breathe flesh into the notion of authenticity, delivering green marketing and sustainable clientele engagement. Secondly, Institutional Theoretical Triangulation Study on this research utilizes the theories of this research on Institutional Theory.

Famous Green Wash Cases

3.1. Volkswagen's Diesel Gate Scandal: Deceptive Emissions for "Clean Diesel" Cars

The company committed fraud by selling its diesel vehicles as low-emission vehicles. The company employed trickery to mislead the emission tests; the fact is, its vehicles emitted almost 40 times more nitrogen oxide pollutants than the legal limit.

3.2. H&M's Conscious Collection: deceiving consumers about their products

H&M promoted its "Conscious" line as sustainable, but studies concluded that less than a fraction of the clothing sold was produced with recycled materials. Fast Fashion contradicts the rules of sustainability on its own.

3.3. The Claim of Plastic Neutrality by Nestlé: Adequate Measures for Reducing

Nestlé has committed to making all of its packaging either reusable or recyclable by 2025. However, it has come to light that it has not given any list of milestones or any concrete strategy to ensure that it meets this goal that it seems more like a hope rather than a plan.[10]

3.4. Starbucks and the Straw less Lid Controversy: Lids v/s straw and lid setup

Starbucks introduced straw less lids in 2018 as an ecological initiative. The problem is that the new straw less lids use more plastic than the old straw-and-lid configuration.

The company justified this by touting that the lid can be captured under recycling infrastructure. Of course, the reality is that only around 9% of plastic worldwide eventually gets recycled. Forcing consumers to adapt rather than finding a solution to a problem (too much plastic being wasted) seems like the reverse of solving the problem.[12][13]

IV. GREEN WASHING CONSEQUENCES

- Action on Climate Delayed: Green washing operates in opposition to actual initiatives on carbon emission reduction and climate change mitigation.
- Injures Corporate Reputation: This is because consumer trust is paramount; once a brand gets caught in green washing, there will be backlash, even lost customers, and, therefore, falling sales.

- Consumer Distrust: Credibility loss and customer loyalty is lost. Delmas & Burbano, 2011

Legal and Regulatory Sanctions: Government fines and other penalties from the FTC - 2022

V. GREEN WASHING

Instead, organizations should implement the following to avoid green washing and win the trust of the customers.

5.1. Ensure Green Claims are Clear

Expression of use of "partially made with organic cotton" should be avoided, and the expression could be "Made with 20% organic cotton." Acknowledge the fact that becoming sustainable will be a long-term process and work towards transparency.[24]

5.2. Provide transparent reports

If the product or service has been independently verified, ensure that the report is available. Transparency in terms of what has been done in the field of sustainability assists in filling the transparency void.

5.3. Conduct Carbon Footprint Analysis

The advert of the carbon footprint report reveals that the company is in pursuit of reducing emission levels.

5.4. Seeking Expert Opinion

The sustainability claims are complex in nature; hence, companies rely on the advice of a third party in order to be assured that their environmental plans reach the appropriate customers in the right way. [17]

VI. METHOD

The proposed study relies on a qualitative and conceptual descriptive design, with the study grounded on a secondary data analysis. The study relies on data from peer-referenced articles and journals. The study has further involved case studies from reliable databases and authentic news databases. The study also involved a thematic content analysis to identify the trend of sustainable marketing. The study has particularly focused on global brands like Patagonia, IKEA, and Unilever, who have been actively leading sustainable practices and communicate openly. This study is significant because

it ensures that the results of the study are interpreted and require no replication. The study relies on a purposeful sampling technique, which involves selecting global brands based on transparency and participation of global consumers. This study has significant use and provides further scope.

Ethical and Regulatory Issues

Recent global policy efforts have been on evaluating green marketing assertions. The European Green Claims Directive introduced by the European Union in 2023 and the FTC green guides provide not only guidance, which helps in regulating environmental claims in terms of accuracy and clarity, but also help in ensuring that these assertions and claims are not taken as greenwashing. As per Foster and Green (2023), there has been rising interest in corporate responsibility for sustainability communication, and as suggested by Nelson and Carter (2023), complying with these regulations and guidelines ensures that one's brand remains legitimate. Moreover, as provided by Upton and Zhao (2024), regulatory action can also be an effective way of regulating misrepresentations about green practices and processes.

VII. CASE STUDIES OF EFFECTIVE AND ETHICAL GREEN MARKETING

Though greenwashing is more prevailing in the market, there are very few brands that effectively used solid and effective green marketing practices. Such companies value transparency in all their business dealings, and they incorporate third party verification and implement full-scale sustainability programs according to their core values. [8][13]

7.1. Patagonia - a pioneer in sustainable business practices

Patagonia is an innovator when it comes to sustainable business practices. The brand promotes the idea of "buy less, mend old clothes, and recycle old product." The brand's "Worn Wear" program involves the entire product chain and prevents product waste and the environmental implications. In linking the promotion efforts to the sustainability practices, Patagonia has built vast customer loyalty. [7]

Sustainability Approach

Therefore, it is a dynamic leader on sustainability, where it has green values as a principle of operation. It

teaches consumers to use less, fix more, and recycle garments after use.

Key Initiatives

The worn wear activity removes customers from repairing old clothes, instead of disposal. Patagonia Free repair shops, promotes second hand sale clothes and explains to the customers. concerning clothes' durability. Give one percent to the Planet. This brand contributes 1% of their revenues to some environmental institutions to help support the environment conservationists.

- Regenerative Organic Certification

Patagonia buys organic cotton and recycled polyester from fair production houses, which is an effort to cut down on environmental factors. The Company announces its sustainability issues so openly so that there are no doubts raised concerning green advertising.[13]

- Marketing Transparency

Patagonia has managed to win the trust of its customers because it has managed to maintain the campaigns within the realms of sustainability. The brand not only managed to win the loyalty of its customers but also influenced them.

Impact

Patagonia is a brand that has developed high levels of trust with customers through the continuous endeavour to ensure the message delivered while marketing is also delivered in the area of sustainability.

7.2. IKEA: A Commitment to the Circular Economy

IKEA has also been actively engaged in the thoughts of circular economy and sustainable sourcing practices. IKEA has pledged itself to be climate positive by the year 2030 and has converted its operations into renewable sources of energy.[18] Moreover, the promotion of IKEA also brings forth the fact that IKEA is committed to the use of eco-friendly materials and sustainable forestry practices and has been moving further on the path of authenticity in sustainability.[20]

Sustainability Approach

IKEA is incorporating sustainability into its intrinsic business model. IKEA is investing heavily in

renewable energy and sustainable raw material sourcing. IKEA is set to be carbon-positive by the year 2030, which means IKEA is expected to release fewer emissions than it absorbs.[27]

Key Initiatives

Sustainable Materials

The products are made from sustainable or recycled materials, with over 60% of all IKEA products consisting of such materials, with an aim of attaining 100% by 2030.

- Sustainable Forestry:

IKEA is a leading consumer of wooden products globally, and it obtains 100% of it through sustainable forestry and has FSC certification by the Forest Stewardship Council.[13]

Renewable Energy Shift:

IKEA relies on 100% renewable electricity to power its stores and manufacturing plants by investing in various wind and sun power initiatives.

IKEA Furniture Take-Back Program:

Furniture that has already been used could be taken back from customers for possible resale or recycling, promoting more of a circular economy.

Impact

IKEA has adopted several strategies to be more sustainable, which has allowed it to strike a balance between creating brand reputation and minimizing negative effects on the environment. IKEA shows that it is possible to be green and profitable at the same time, and it has achieved this through the integration of sustainability throughout their operations and designs.

7.3. Integration of Sustainability into Business Strategy.

Unilever has incorporated sustainability within its business strategies via its "Sustainable Living Plan." It is working on minimizing its carbon footprint.

Justification

Unilever has a business model that comes from its sustainable living plan that was founded in 2010.

Strategic Initiatives

- Carbon Footprint reduction:

This is carried out by Unilever. It has pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by 2039 and to procure 100% of its energy from renewable sources by the year 2030. Approximately 90% of Unilever's vegetable inputs are sourced from sustainable sources and responsible production houses.

- It has committed to cut virgin plastic use by 50 percent and to ensure that all packaging is recyclable and compostable.
- The company, Unilever, has started initiatives which promote the quest for fair wages, equality for men and women, and better working conditions.

Marketing and Transparency

Unlike in other companies accused of greenwashing, Unilever is transparent since it sets measurable goals and reports the records of their progress in issues to do with sustainability. This is unlike their competitors who exaggerate their green image. [22]

Effect

Unilever's strategy of sustainability enhanced the reputation of the company, instilled consumer confidence, and attracted investors who were sensitive to ethics. Unilever made other multinationals follow in its wake in terms of incorporating sustainability in business models.

Critical assessment of Brands

Objective of Brands

Though Patagonia is internationally famous, its high pricing strategy has been criticized for not including poor people as customers. The transparent supply chain in many outsourced manufacturing sectors of Patagonia is also a point of criticism.

Although IKEA's sustainability agenda is extensive, green movement activists question the level and extent of the firm's large-scale production and the carbon footprint associated with its global logistics system. Its 'dispose and buy' furniture philosophy also raises concerns.

Unilever has been criticized for inconsistencies when it comes to its extensive list of sustainability claims across subsidiaries and brands. Some of its product lines, especially those found within the emerging

markets, been accused of greenwashing and a lack of transparency.

VIII. FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

Future Research:

Future areas that can be explored include the idea of consumer understanding of green certifications, and greenwashing responses across varied cultures, which is increasingly happening on online social platforms. Long-term studies can be done to further examine the effect of transparency on brand equity. Managerial Implications: Managers have to use measurable green key performance indicators, involve multi-stakeholders to verify it, and use digital transparency methods, which may help build more trust with consumers.

IX. CONCLUSION

Green washing is not only unethical, but it also has harmful consequences for the world's environmental system. A smarter consumer base has emerged, and they want companies to ensure that their claims about environmental protection are verifiable. By leading through transparency, accountability, and action for the environmental cause, companies would gain consumer trust in the long run and help attain actual environmental protection. Green washing can be considered the most audacious act for an organization from an ethical perspective and even from a financial point of view. It requires companies to lead through transparency, research, and ethical standards in their efforts to gain consumer trust and help make actual environmental protection contributions. Companies that bring business practice and environmental protection together would be able to help make positive differences for the planet while also being successful for the long term. The current consumer base has become more educated, and they require companies to ensure that claims about environmental protection are verifiable.

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