Green Washing Dilemma: Youngster's Perceptions and Awareness of Sustainable Consumption

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Abstract: Global media plays a key role in influencing people's perception, shaping public opinion and driving consumer behaviour, transcending cultural norms from an international perspective. In the era of environmental sustainability, it is widely recognised that that most of the multinational corporations leverage global media and consumer culture to project an eco-friendly image for their brands, even though their practices may not even align with any aspect of sustainability. Global media has the power to create demand for specific product or lifestyles, through advertising and marketing strategies. This stimulus encourages consumers to purchase these products, thereby contributing to the rise of trends associated with multinational corporations (MNC's). As information about these products spreads across borders through these media, brands effectively communicate with consumers, shaping their preferences and driving changes in consumer behaviors. Ultimately, this process leads to the establishment of global trends in consumer behaviour, solidifying the brands presence on an international scale. There is a pressing requirement for greater transparency and accountability in corporate environmental claims, especially as global media continues to play a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour. Greenwashing is the practice of providing false or unverified information regarding environmental advantages of a product or service without sufficient proof and has become increasingly prevalent in a global, media- driven consumer culture. Hence this paper analyses the phenomenon of corporate green washing and its impact on consumer perceptions, particularly focusing on younger generation.

Keywords: Global media, Sustainability, Consumer behaviour, Marketing strategy, Green washing

Introduction

Global media plays an important role in shaping consumer perceptions in the era of heightened environmental awareness. Companies increasingly use green publicising

tactics to advance a economical edge and plea to environmentally conscious consumers. Though not all green advertising efforts are genuine, others engage in deceptive marketing tactics commonly known as greenwashing [1]which refers to misleading portrayal of products or companies as more environmentally friendly than actual nature. This practices infact affects the consumer trust, corporate ethics, and broader the sustainability aspects. The global media, through advertisements, branding and digital content acts as a primary conduit for such marketing messages, thereby influencing consumer's behaviour and their response to green claims. The growing demand for environmentally friendly products has reshaped consumer culture, with an increasing number of individuals prioritizing sustainability in their purchasing decisions. Green consumers, who value quality, price and environmental conservation, are driving the market for eco-friendly products.[2]The prevalence of greenwashing undermines green initiatives, creating skepticism and potential backlash. Some products merely appear environmentally friendly through deceptive packages, thereby undermining the credibility of legitimate green initiatives. Consumers who recognise greenwashing often experience a sense of betrayal, which negatively impacts their purchasing intentions. psychological contracts between the consumers and brands is breached when companies fail to uphold their environmental promises, leading to diminished brand loyalty and ethical concerns. Consumer's environmental responsibility levels further moderate this relationship, as those with higher sense of sustainability are more likely to reject greenwashed products and advocate for stricter regulations.[3]

The fast fashion industry is the prime example of an industry where greenwashing is prevalent. While companies recognise the significance of green marketing for brand performance, many exploit information asymmetries to mask their unsustainable practices. This misrepresentation affects consumer behaviors individuals who perceive greenwashing in the fast fashion sector exhibit lower intentions to purchase green products. Furthermore, the perception of greenwashing influences risk perception, with financial and environmental concerns impacting consumer trust.[4] The role of media in amplifying greenwashing practices is critical. The extent to which visibility and favourability influence corporate financial performance in greenwashing cases varies depending on local environmental regulations and media scrutiny. When regulatory bodies as well as media expose misleading claims, public trust erodes, negatively impacting corporate reputation and profitability.[5] The implementation of regulatory frameworks and stricter advertising standards can help curb misleading environmental marketing, ensuring that consumers make informed purchasing

decisions. Furthermore; global media's role extends beyond corporate advertising to shape environmental discourse. A multimodal discourse analysis of CNN's(which is a major global news organisation) greenwashing coverage reveals how knowledge selection process influences public awareness and understanding of corporate identities [6]. Social media has also become a battleground for green advertising, with corporations promoting their sustainability efforts. While often engaging in misleading tactics. More than 70% of green claims analysed in recent studies were found to be deceptive, underscoring the urgent need for more stringent oversight in advertisement practices.[7]Young consumers, in particular, are increasingly sceptical of corporate green claims and perceive greenwashing as a significant issue. This growing distrust highlights the need for stricter rules and ethical practices, which brings us to the statement of problem

Statement of Problem

Youngsters form a huge portion of consumers in today's world. The purchases made by young adults and people below the age of 30 play a crucial role in the market. If these set of consumers make informed and conscious purchases, the environment will be saved from much of the harm caused by manufactures as well as consumers themselves to a great extent. Additionally, youngsters are aimed at this research because of the fact that youngsters are open to opinions and are logic-driven, so it makes it easier for them to understand and subsequently implement in the consumption patterns. Youngsters are the focus of this research as they are open to adaptations, making it easier for them to understand and implement changes in their consumption patterns. However, despite the potential for positive change, greenwashing has created a disconnect between consumer trust and corporate sustainability efforts. As a result, consumers are turning away from the green movement, despite global media's efforts to promote sustainability while greenwashing can temporarily enhance a multinational corporation's (MNC's) reputation and productivity; it has a detrimental effect on society and environment. Negative perceptions fuelled by global media and consumer culture can hurt all the stakeholders in the green industry. It is also essential to understand how our consumption patterns impact on the environment, as they can be a major cause of several environmental issues like pollution, wastage, etc. The more knowledge consumers have, better prepared they are to identify greenwashing and demand change. The findings of this study may potentially be helpful information for eco-friendly enterprises and acts as a planning tool for eco-friendly advertising campaigns. This research can be

significant in terms of exploring the perceptions of youngsters towards the concept of greenwashing and their awareness of its impact within the broader context of global media and consumer culture.

Research Objectives

- To analyze how global media and consumer culture influence public perception of greenwashing and shape purchasing decisions.

- To study the impact of greenwashing on environment and its effect on young consumers as perceived by them.

Sources of Data

The researcher for the purpose of this research has used a combination of primary and secondary data. It also provided the chance to look into the relationships between the theoretical framework and the actual study. The researched collected primary data through a questionnaire form which was in the form of Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs). It consisted of 16 questions which were based on the research objectives. It was formulated using Google Forms. The sample size of the survey was roughly 160 responses, consisting mainly of people aged between 18 to 30. The primary functions of the survey were to gather data and to explore the effects of greenwashing on the consumer. Also, the researcher used secondary sources of data consisted of research articles, journals, reports and books.

Hypothesis

H1: There is a significant relationship between consumer's awareness about greenwashing and their perception of its environment impact

H2: Greenwashing negatively affects not only consumers, but also corporations with real sustainable initiatives

Limitations

Time constraints was one of the limitation of the study The researcher also faced the issue of gathering data from a varied set of people in terms of age group. Another limitation of this research that the researcher could not gain first hand insight from the respondents about their views on the research problems due to the paucity of time, which is why the data was collected through a questionnaire.

Discussions

Global Media, Consumer Culture and Greenwashing: Shaping Perceptions

Global media and culture play a crucial role in the portrayal of environmentally friendly goods and services, but greenwashing distorts this image, by misleading consumers and influencing their purchasing decisions and environmentally sustainable behaviour. Studies already conducted suggest that greenwashing may have a negative effect on environmentally conscious customer behaviour. Consumers are growing doubtful and losing faith in green goods and services as a result of misleading strategies of companies amplified through global media. This makes it extremely important to know that whether youngsters are aware of the concept of greenwashing and how it affects their purchases and/or consumption pattern. As the purchasing choices of consumers significantly impact market trends and sustainability efforts, it's important to know how youngsters perceive greenwashing.

Consumer behaviour is affected by the image that media portrays of numerous products, acting as a double-edged sword. When buying products from a local super market or online, consumer's consciences are troubled by various aspects of how the image is shown in medias about the products such as plastic consumption, carbon impact and animal experimentation, as shaped by media representation. This sense of dilemma of the consumers is often taken for granted and exploited by multinational corporations for income generation through the global media. In a hyper consumption-based society, groups claim they are attempting to rescue the earth by imposing guilt on consumers. This may seem enticing, but Greenwashing is more concerned with earning money and promoting products items to environmentally conscious consumer's than it is with actually implementing sustainable practices. Most of the time, consumers are misled by the companies that advertise their products through global media

Public and government pressure on corporations to decrease their environmental consequence is rising. In addition, strengthening sustainability is becoming a viable business strategy, whether to attract investors or customers. As a result, corporations use greenwashing strategies to promote their products and appeal to the ever-expanding environmentally conscious consumer base. However, greenwashing may also be persistent, driven by marketing efforts. For example, if a cosmetic firm sells their product in a bamboo container and asserts that it is cruelty-free and vegan, this will appear to be a credible option for those wishing to "Go Green." However, factors such as the bulk packing, their transportation footprint, and the plastic wrapping used to avoid water damage, are often concealed.

However, along with the increase in demand for eco-friendly products, public acquaintance of greenwashing is also widespread. As a result, firms face a have a greater likelihood of being exposed. Greenwashing occurs when a company swanks about its sustainable practices while failing to uphold them. Since consumers are becoming more interested in eco-friendly goods and services, manufacturers have invested heavily in marketing and promoting so-called "green" products[8]. Influenced by global media and consumer culture, businesses that take part in greenwashing may claim about the energy-saving features or recycled materials used to make their products. While some of these assertions may be partially true, companies frequently exaggerate their environmental sustainability or benefits in an effort to mislead customers. as a result of global sustainability initiatives. Due to global sustainability practices, companies of all sizes are now required to disclose more information about their governance, social responsibility, and ecological initiatives risks

Greenwashing may involve making unproven claims regarding a company's carbon footprint reductions. Actual emissions are reported in both absolute and relative amounts (like emissions per dollar of revenue, per employee, etc.). Negative externalities should be measured, as well as the consumption and repair of environmental resources. The primary risk associated with greenwashing is that consumers are cheated and may continue to unwittingly subsidize enterprises that harm the environment. Greenwashing may be detrimental to human health as well as the environment due to the relationship between environmental degradation and a rise in respiratory illness diagnoses. If a company is revealed to be greenwashing, customer trust will decline, and the company will need to find strategies to regain consumer confidence. Due to this spoiled reputation, there is a chance that consumers may overlook future environmentally beneficial products/services offered by a company that has engaged in greenwashing. It is essential to keep in mind that not all companies engage in greenwashing. Genuinely "green" goods marketers will be precise about their products' advantages. It is difficult to distinguish greenwashed items from genuine sustainable products and to make ethical purchasing decisions. False claims may result in inadvertent environmental damage, despite the fact that consumers seek to buy sustainable items. Moreover, if exposed, the company's image might be tarnished. The primary strategies include savvy consumer targeting through social media and advertising, guilt-tripping, fear-mongering, and sophisticated marketing strategies. Food or supplements are labelled as natural without a clear definition of the phrase, which might make anything sound 'greener' and 'fresher.' Terms like "gluten-free" are tossed about casually, and items like corn, rice, soy, sorghum,

and buckwheat are labelled and sold as "gluten-free" when they are naturally so. Other extensive phrases such as biodegradable, sustainable, organic, chemical-free, mindful, eco-friendly, etc. mislead customers into believing they are making environmentally responsible decisions.

Another area where individuals fall victim to greenwashing is the fashion industry. Mass consumption depends on continuous promotions and discounts, which will increase sales. When demand exceeds supply, ethical fashion might vanish before anyone would notices. Not only do companies benefit by advertising their products under the pretext of being ethical, but they also make no attempt to conceal their actions. Governments and civil society organizations are exerting a growing amount of pressure on corporations throughout the globe to comply with environmental standards. The commitments made by notable Indian companies to reduce harmful emissions constitute a significant portion of this commitment. As the frequency of environmental catastrophes rises, there is a high likelihood that civil society will not tolerate businesses that disregard environmental regulations. Global media plays a significant role in amplifying public awareness of green washing. Through investigative journalism, social media campaigns, consumer advocacy, global media exposes the instances of green washing, there by shaping consumer culture and influencing purchasing behaviors. This is particularly evident among younger consumers, who are more likely to be influenced by global media platforms and are more skeptical of corporate claims.

The Impact of Corporate Greenwashing on Consumer Trust Among Youngsters

The practise of "greenwashing" carries both high risk and high reward. The effects of greenwashing don't just affect customers; they also have an impact on all businesses competing in the green market, whether or not they engage in it. Consumers are left in the dark about which products are truly green and which are not due to the practise of "greenwashing." Because of the negative effects of consumer scepticism and the consumer habit of labelling all green marketing as "greenwashing," these businesses are aware of this. The inability of consumers to distinguish between greenwashing and green marketing with genuine eco-friendly goals appears to be one of the main issues, leading to negative consumer perceptions and purchasing intentions. The consumer frequently pays more attention to bad corporate behaviour. Consumer mistrust and scepticism are on the rise, and there are more and more greenwashed claims being made, which has led to a negative backlash against the term "green." According to the research done by the author, there are several things that need to be noted when it comes to the

consumer's perception about greenwashing. The consumer will begin post-purchase behaviour once they have made their decision to buy and will either be unhappy or satisfied with it. In green marketing, the terms "environmentally friendly" and "green" are frequently used to describe goods and services that make a claim to have little to no impact on the environment. Companies frequently utilise these words to advance their own objectives. The overuse of these terms typically alludes to "greenwashing," which is defined as a marketing strategy that encourages the purchase and usage of environmentally friendly goods and services, therefore minimising their negative social and environmental effects. People can lessen their impact on the environment in a variety of ways, such as recycling, avoiding products with hazardous components, conserving paper and power, using clean energy, using biodegradable products, and eating locally grown fresh foods.

Green consumers are frequently more willing to try out new goods and services if they are environmentally friendly. This is the major cause of why consumers with pro-environmental attitudes are more inclined to embrace sustainable and environmentally friendly consumer behaviour and are more susceptible to the effects of greenwashing and green marketing. Market segmentation, customer behaviour, purchasing intentions, and willingness to pay theories are frequently the foundation of studies in green marketing. Analysis of consumer perceptions of greenwashing can also be done with the help of the survey conducted by the researcher. Global media plays a pivotal role in shaping these consumer perceptions. Through advertising and marketing strategies, global media creates demand for specific products and lifestyles often promoting them in a sustainable manner. Consumers go through a five-step process of decision-making, recognising, comparing alternatives, information seeking, purchasing intention, and post-purchase intentions. For instance, someone who wants to live an environmentally friendly lifestyle may decide to hunt for things to satisfy that need. Consumers will seek out information about the environmental attributes of items at this phase in order to form opinions about the product. Consumer purchasing intentions are significantly influenced by perceptions. The consumer is assisted by perceptions in choosing, organising, and comprehending the information at their disposal. Following information collection, the consumer will search for other products and evaluate them using the information acquired. A consumer could, for instance, compare the products' costs, qualities, or benefits to the environment. The attitudes and views of consumers toward environmental friendliness are crucial, therefore let these attitudes and perceptions influence their decision to purchase goods with superior environmental features. This

highlights the need for further analysis of consumer perceptions of green washing as explored in the survey conducted by the researcher.

The following question was answered by 157 people, out of which 59 were female and 97 were male.

Greenwashing is the process of conveying a false impression or providing misleading information about how a company's products (mostly clothing) ...nmentally sustainable. Did you know about this?
157 responses
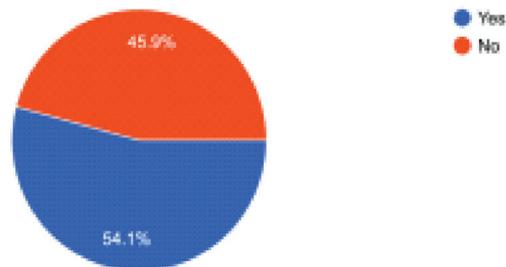
According to the responses given above, it is evident that almost 46% of the youngsters are unaware of the concept of greenwashing. On the bright side, 54% of the respondents indicated they are aware of the concept of greenwashing. However, it is important to note that a significant 46% of youngsters still remain unaware of greenwashing practiced by brands and companies. This skepticism is further fuelled by global media, which often exposes instances of greenwashing through investigative journalism and social media campaigns.

The next question in the questionnaire was to ascertain whether the consumers (youngsters in this case) were aware about the malpractices that companies do under the veil of greenwashing.

Companies make their products seem eco-friendly and sustainable, when in reality it is not so.
157 responses
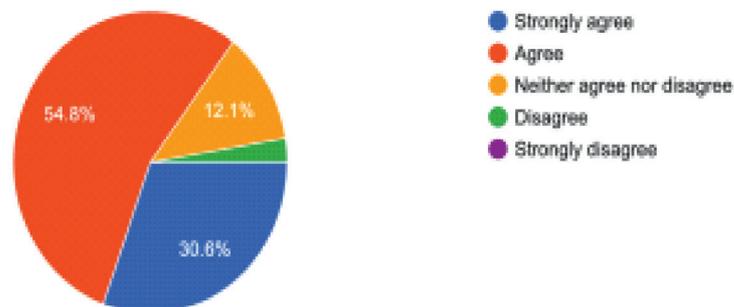
30.6% of people "strongly agree" that companies make their products seem eco-friendly and sustainable, when in reality it is not so. This shows that a part of the consumers knows and agree that brands often portray their products to be sustainable and eco-friendly. Combined with this, it is also seen that almost 55% of youngsters "agree" about this practice. That makes almost 85% of the consumers being aware of the dark reality of products marketed as "sustainable", "recyclable", "eco-friendly" actually not being that. This awareness is largely driven by global media, which amplifies consumer voices and exposes corporate malpractices, thereby shaping consumer culture and purchasing behaviour.

The next question was aimed at assessing the knowledge of the consumers with respect to their consumption pattern and the impact it has on the environment.

Do you agree that consumption pattern has an impact on the environment?
157 responses
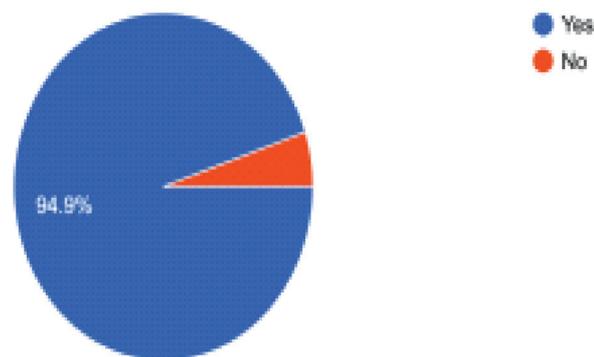
Almost 95% of the respondents, that is roughly 149 people agree that their consumption

pattern has an impact on the environment. Through this question it can be seen that youngsters are aware of the fact that their purchases impact the environment in some or the other way. This awareness is further reinforced by global media, which frequently highlights the environmental consequences of consumer behaviour, thereby influencing consumer culture and encouraging more sustainable purchasing decisions.

According to 60.5% youngsters, greenwashing affects the environment "to some extent". From this it can be inferred that although a considerable number of people think that greenwashing impacts the environment, 60% of those people think of it to some extent. It is also seen that almost 34% people think that greenwashing affects

Do you think greenwashing impacts the environment in a negative manner?
157 responses
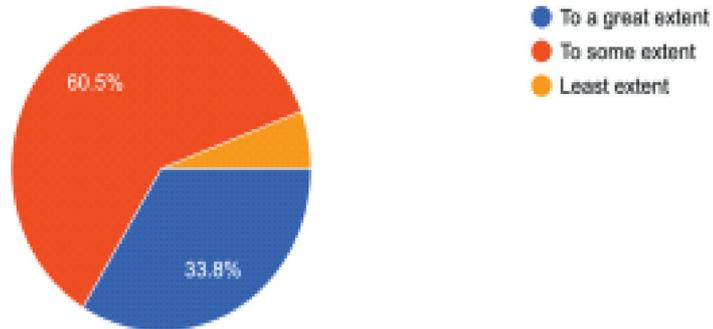
the environment "to a great extent". However, it is important to note that 26% of the youngsters think that greenwashing only affects the environment to a "least extent". Here also it is a fact that the crucial role of global media cannot be ignored where these perceptions are shaped thereby influencing the consumer behaviours.

If you knew a brand was greenwashing, would you still purchase its products?
157 responses
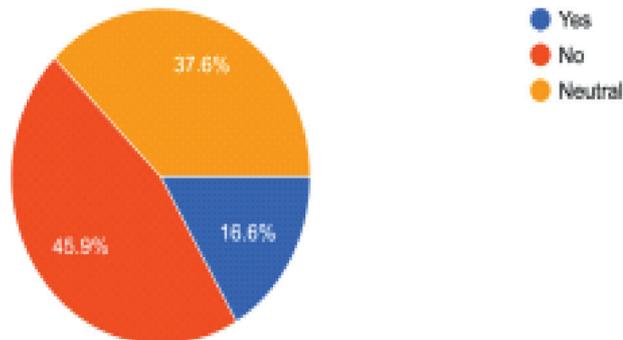
Out of the 157 respondents, 72 of them would not purchase a product if they knew that the products from that brand are greenwashed. But, 59 people would remain neutral i.e. the brand indulging in greenwashing would not affect their purchases. This could be due to multiple reasons. For example, years of purchasing from a brand creates a trust about the quality and the brand as a whole, and so it is hard for consumers to make a change in their purchases. Another 26 respondents selected "No" as their choice, meaning that even if a brand was greenwashing their products they would still

purchase from it. Now, a perception like this could be due to a variety of reasons. For example, if a brand makes affordable products for consumers, in this case youngsters, it is economical for them to purchase these products. The status of the brand in terms of greenwashing and the environment would not affect the consumer's consumption pattern, simply because they themselves choose to buy from it. Global media, however has the power to shift these perceptions by exposing greenwashing practices and encouraging consumers to make more informed and sustained purchasing decisions.

The next question aimed at judging the criteria for a purchase made by the consumers.

What is your criteria for selecting a product while shopping?
157 responses
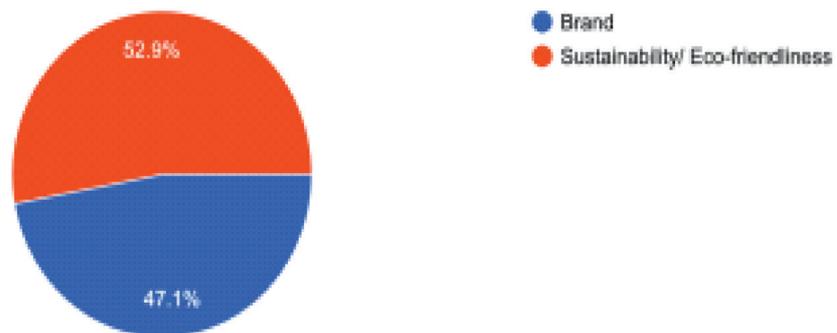
Almost 53% of respondents i.e. 83 people said that the sustainability or the eco-friendliness of the product determines their purchase. The eco-friendliness of a product can be judged by the tags or labels put on it such as "Made of Recycled Cloth", "Eco-Friendly", "Ethical", etc. However, the main issue here is due to the greenwashing done by brands, these tags are more often than not, false and misleading. Now although the consumers want to be sustainable and make informed purchases, they are unable to do so because of brands greenwashing their products. 73 respondents which made 46.5% of the total respondents chose the brand over sustainability and eco-friendliness. These consumers, while making a purchase only look at the brand and that is what the deciding factor is. This could be due to several reasons such as affordability, brand trust, less options etc. Here we can mention that Global media play a crucial role in addressing this issue by promoting transparency and accountability in corporate environmental claims, thereby influencing consumer culture and encouraging more sustainable purchasing behaviour.

The next question aimed at ascertaining the opinion of the consumers regarding the environmental impact of greenwashing.

How do you think greenwashing impacts the environment?
157 responses
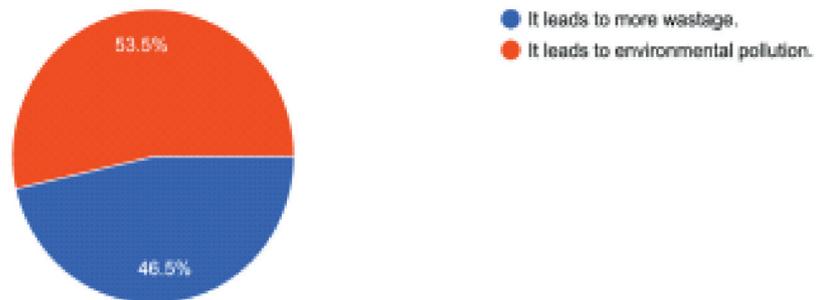
According to 53.5% of the respondents which makes 84 of the respondents, greenwashing leads to environmental production. This is true since brands market that their products are eco-friendly, in reality they are not, which leads to more pollution when these products are discarded. 46.5% of the respondents said that according to them greenwashing leads to more wastage. This could be due to the fact that consumers tend to purchase from the brand when they market their products as eco-friendly and sustainable, because it creates an impression of a healthy and informed purchase in the mind of the consumer.

Conclusion

Greenwashing is a widespread issue that, over time, can significantly harm efforts to mitigate climate change. Greenwashing is a relatively recent phenomenon that has an impact on every aspect of the green market. Consumer doubt and unfavourable perceptions about green products will grow as the amount of greenwashing does as well. It is clear from the collection of studies looked at in the literature review how greenwashing is connected to poor consumer perception, which in turn affects consumers' intentions to make green purchases. The literature review suggests that consumers may not be as aware of greenwashing as the survey result indicates, so the empirical study's findings do not entirely concur with the body of existing literature. The study's small sample size is the cause of this. On the other hand, according to the literature review, young adults with a high level of education are more aware of the environment, which is consistent with the findings of the empirical study. Considering that the sample size was primarily

made up of young adults with advanced degrees. Greenwashing fosters unfavourable perceptions of green goods and services by betraying consumer trust and post-purchase perceptions. The results of the empirical study are supported by existing studies that were looked at in the literature review. According to the literature review, greenwashing has a big impact on how consumers perceive products. Greenwashing has a negative impact on the trust and scepticism of green consumers, which frequently has an impact on consumers' intentions to make green purchases. The findings of the empirical study supported the idea that consumers' intentions to make green purchases are negatively impacted by their knowledge of greenwashing. In order to recognise the significant new types of cases that involve crucial green technologies and the commercial consumers who purchase, deploy, and operate them, a new greenwashing paradigm is necessary.

The new paradigm views greenwashing broadly to include both legal actions brought by or on behalf of these clean tech commercial consumers as well as false or misleading representations made to green commercial consumers. We can identify these green commercial consumer cases for what they are—greenwashing cases—by applying the new greenwashing paradigm. According to the results of the empirical study and the literature review, greenwashing has a negative impact on consumers' perceptions of green goods and services. The results also strongly suggest that consumer awareness of greenwashing may have a negative impact on their intentions to make green purchases. By enlightening and educating consumers about greenwashing, this study's findings may contribute to positive social change. This research may also be helpful when developing a green marketing plan.

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