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Exploring the Consequences: Corporate Greenwashing's Effect on Society

B. Rathnapriya

*Assistant Professor of Commerce
Karpagam Academy of Higher Education, Coimbatore*

M. Gayathiri

*Assistant Professor of Commerce
Karpagam Academy of Higher Education, Coimbatore*

Abstract

The purpose of the abstract is to examine the social effects of corporate greenwashing. The dishonest practice of falsely promoting environmental projects or benefits, or "greenwashing," has significant ramifications for many facets of society. This research explores the many facets of the effects of greenwashing, such as how it affects consumer-company trust, how it obstructs real sustainability initiatives, how it feeds unsustainable consumption patterns, and how it affects policy dynamics. Through elucidating these ramifications, the study aims to offer perspectives on the intricacies of greenwashing and furnish tactics for advocating openness, cultivating authentic sustainability, and augmenting corporate responsibility in the community.

Keywords: Corporate Green Washing, Effect on Society, Dishonest Practice, Consumer Protection, Corporate Ethics

Introduction

In recent years, the phenomenon of corporate greenwashing has become a significant concern within the realms of environmental sustainability, consumer advocacy, and corporate ethics. Greenwashing refers to the deceptive practice wherein companies misleadingly portray their environmental initiatives or the environmental benefits of their products or services. This deceptive practice has far-reaching consequences that extend beyond the corporate sphere, impacting various aspects of society. This introduction sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of the consequences of corporate greenwashing on society, delving into its effects on trust, sustainability efforts, consumer behaviour, and policy dynamics. By unveiling the complexities of corporate greenwashing and its broader societal implications, this study aims to shed light on the need for increased transparency, genuine sustainability efforts, and enhanced corporate accountability within society.

Greenwashing is on the rise in India as businesses try to take advantage of the growing consumer demand for eco-friendly products. Many businesses mislead consumers into believing that their products are ecologically benign when in fact they are not by employing dishonest marketing techniques. Additionally, some

businesses present their products as environmentally friendly even when the products may be hazardous to the environment by using green packaging and labelling.

In India, green washing has grown to be a serious issue as people become more conscious of the environmental effect of the products they buy. Because there are no regulations in the nation, businesses can make exaggerated promises about their products without worrying about the consequences. Nonetheless, a few organisations and consumer advocacy groups are striving to raise awareness of green washing and make businesses responsible for their deeds. All things considered, before making a purchase, customers must do their homework and be cautious of green washing techniques. Customers in India may support the promotion of truly environmentally friendly products and sustainable supply chain methods by making educated decisions.

Objectives

To Study the Corporate Greenwashing’s Effect on Society

Methodology

A methodical approach is used in the methodology to investigate, using secondary data, how corporate greenwashing affects society. The first step will involve a comprehensive search across several channels, such as government publications, academic databases, and reliable reports, in order to gather pertinent material on corporate greenwashing and its effects on society. To guarantee thorough coverage of the subject, a set of keywords and criteria will direct this search. The gathered secondary data will then be thoroughly reviewed and analysed, with an emphasis on finding important themes, trends, and patterns pertaining to the effects of greenwashing on society.

Corporate Greenwashing – Overview

The phrase “greenwashing” was coined in 1986 by environmentalist Jay Westerveld to denounce the hotel industry’s widespread practice of endorsing towel reuse as an environmentally friendly measure. This was actually a cost-cutting strategy that disregarded the operations’ larger environmental impact. A marketing gimmick known as “greenwashing” is when businesses portray their goods as ecologically friendly or environmentally conscientious when in fact they are not. Businesses may engage in a variety of forms of greenwashing, whether on purpose or accidentally. A prevalent form of greenwashing entails making ambiguous or deceptive claims. Businesses may refer to their products as “natural” or “organic” without offering any supporting data. For example, a cleaning product labelled “natural” can nevertheless contain dangerous chemicals, while a food package labelled “organic” might not adhere to the regulations. The use of erroneous or irrelevant certificates and designations is another form of greenwashing. For instance, a product might bear the title “certified green” from some unidentified or fictitious group. On the other hand, a business might highlight the environmental advantages of a product with minimal environmental impact, such a vehicle that uses marginally less fuel than its rivals. Businesses may also highlight pointless sustainability initiatives, a practice known as “greenwashing.” A fashion firm can, for instance, brag about using recycled materials while denying that it uses excessive amounts of water or engages in unethical labour practices elsewhere in the production process.

To promote openness on green practices, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) (Link) released Dos and Don’ts guidelines for issuers of green debt securities in February 2023. “Green debt security” is defined as debt security that is issued to provide capital for one or more of the following categories: clean mobility; clean energy, including bioenergy and renewable and sustainable energy sources like wind and solar power; clean transportation; and climate change adaptation Energy-efficient and environmentally friendly buildings; recycling, waste-to-energy, and waste-efficient disposal of waste; sustainable forestry and agriculture; biodiversity preservation;

pollution prevention and control; products adapted to the circular economy, such as the design and introduction of reusable, recyclable, and refurbished materials; blue bonds for sustainable water management; yellow bonds for solar energy generation; transition bonds for shifting to a more sustainable form of operations, etc.

Laws in India

In addition to overseeing advertising practices, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has some regulatory authority over claims of greenwashing. It has been developing standards for sustainability and green claims (Link). The Consumer Protection Act of 2019 states that consumers have the right to information regarding the standard, potency, purity, quantity, quality, standard, and cost of goods and services. They are shielded from any unfair trading practices by this. Customers who witness any trader or service provider participating in unfair trade practices are entitled to register a complaint. The Act lists a number of unfair commercial practices, such as giving misleading information about the necessity or utility of any goods or services, or making false claims about the standard, quality, quantity, grade, composition, style, or model of goods or services. False product or service descriptions or statements made explicitly or subtly by the seller, manufacturer, or service provider that might amount to an unfair trade practice are examples of misleading advertisements. These commercials are thought to be dishonest and have the potential to mislead viewers. In addition, supplementary hand is extended by the Green Rating Project (GRP), the National Green Tribunal Act, the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, and the Bureau of Indian Standards.

Effects of Corporate Green Washing on Society

The effects of corporate greenwashing on society are multifaceted and can have far-reaching consequences across various domains. Some of the key effects include:

Erosion of Trust: Customers' and enterprises' trust may be eroded as a result of corporate greenwashing. When businesses exaggerate their accomplishments or environmental efforts, customers could feel duped and lose faith in the veracity of corporate sustainability statements. The deterioration of trust has the potential to damage stakeholder relationships and impede cooperative efforts to tackle environmental issues.

Distraction from Sincere Sustainability Efforts: Greenwashing takes funds and attention away from sincere sustainability projects. Businesses risk delaying the adoption of more effective sustainability practices and impeding the march towards substantial environmental change by endorsing insignificant or token gestures as noteworthy environmental activities.

Sustaining Unsustainable Consumption Patterns: Greenwashing has the potential to sustain unsustainable consumption patterns by deceiving customers into thinking they are choosing products that are ecologically friendly when they are not. This may result in sustained backing for businesses that put profit ahead of environmental stewardship, perpetuating a destructive cycle of consumerism.

Impact on Policy Dynamics: Corporate greenwashing has the potential to affect regulatory frameworks and policy choices. Businesses that successfully use "greenwashing" to present themselves as ecologically conscious may have an impact on regulatory procedures, which could undermine attempts to implement strong environmental laws and policies.

Addressing Society's Challenges with Corporate Greenwashing Requires a Multifaceted Approach

Generally speaking, the societal repercussions of corporate greenwashing emphasize how important transparency, accountability, and a real commitment to sustainability are. Increased

consumer awareness, a closer examination of corporate environmental claims, and tighter laws encouraging accountability and openness in company operations are all necessary to lessen these effects.

Corporate greenwashing's negative effects on society need for an all-encompassing strategy involving a range of players and tactics.

- **Enhanced Enforcement and Regulation:** To stop misleading green marketing tactics, governments should impose stricter rules. This entails defining phrases like “sustainable” and “eco-friendly” precisely and enforcing severe sanctions against businesses that are discovered to have engaged in greenwashing. To hold businesses accountable, regulatory bodies must to step up their enforcement and monitoring activities.
- **Transparency and Certification Programs:** Put in place clear certification processes and labeling schemes that substantiate business environmental claims. Companies’ sustainability initiatives may be evaluated and verified by independent certification bodies, giving customers trustworthy information to help them make wise purchase decisions.
- **Consumer Education and Awareness:** Start educational initiatives to tell people about greenwashing techniques and how to recognize them. Instruct customers to assess environmental claims seriously and look for reliable information from reliable sources prior to making purchases.
- **Corporate Accountability and Reporting:** Promote open and honest reporting procedures among businesses about their sustainability and environmental effect. Make it mandatory for businesses to reveal pertinent information about their resource usage, waste handling, and carbon emissions in order to show that they are committed to environmental stewardship.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration:** To create industry standards and best practices for environmental marketing, encourage cooperation between companies, governmental bodies, nonprofits, and consumers. Involve stakeholders in discussions and decision-making procedures to guarantee that a range of viewpoints are taken into account and that all options are explored.
- **Media Oversight and Accountability:** Make sure media organizations are held responsible for encouraging truthful and impartial reporting on environmental problems and business sustainability. To reveal cases of greenwashing and increase public understanding of the significance of holding businesses responsible for their environmental promises, support investigative journalism.
- **Company Social Responsibility (CSR) Promises:** Press businesses to include true environmental sustainability into their CSR campaigns. Instead of just using greenwashing as a marketing gimmick, businesses should incorporate environmental concerns into their operations, supplier networks, and business plans.
- **8. Encouragement of Ethical and Sustainable Brands:** Showcase and back companies who genuinely care about sustainability and openness. Customers have the option to go with businesses that have a solid environmental reputation and shun those that use deceptive green marketing techniques.
- **Investigate your Legal Options:** In order to hold businesses responsible for making inaccurate or deceptive environmental claims. In addition to encouraging corporate responsibility, class-action lawsuits, consumer protection legislation, and regulatory enforcement measures can operate as deterrents to greenwashing.
- **Ongoing Assessment and Improvement:** Evaluate how well-working current laws and regulations are at combating greenwashing on a regular basis. To guarantee continued progress in the fight against corporate greenwashing, methods should be adjusted and improved in light of new technology, emerging trends, and changing consumer preferences. Together, we can put these solutions into reality to combat the widespread issue of corporate greenwashing and encourage true environmental stewardship and sustainability in company operations.

Conclusion

In summary, corporate greenwashing has a large and wide-ranging impact on society. This dishonest approach erodes consumer and company trust, impeding cooperative efforts to tackle environmental issues. Greenwashing obstructs the advancement of significant environmental change by drawing focus and funds away from real sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, it maintains unsustainable habits of consumption, which feeds back into a vicious circle of environmental damage. Furthermore, policy dynamics might be impacted by corporate greenwashing, which could undermine attempts to pass strict environmental rules. In order to mitigate these impacts, it is imperative to advance accountability, openness, and a sincere dedication to sustainability in business operations. Steps to lessen the effects of greenwashing and promote a more sustainable future for society include raising consumer knowledge, scrutinising corporate environmental claims, and bolstering regulatory safeguards.

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