

Greenwashing and Social Media: An Examination of Consumer Responses on Twitter: An Abstract

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ABSTRACT

In light of the growing public concern for sustainability, businesses are facing heightened scrutiny from consumers regarding their environmental assertions. This study examines how consumers react to greenwashing in social media, particularly on Twitter (X). Greenwashing is a form of marketing practice involving deceptive or exaggerated environmental statements to mislead consumers (e.g., Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Using a topic modeling technique, this study analyzes a dataset of tweets containing the hashtag greenwashing and conducts a content and sentiment analysis of a large sample of tweets to understand consumers' sentiments and responses to greenwashing. The findings suggest consumers are highly skeptical of greenwashing and often express fear and sadness in their tweets. Consumers strongly desire corrective actions and are highly receptive to new information. Moreover, Twitter serves as a platform for consumers to share information, educate others, and hold companies accountable for their environmental claims.

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the most discussed topics around greenwashing on Twitter?

RQ2: How do consumers respond to different types of greenwashing messages on Twitter?

RQ3: What types of sentiments underlie consumers' responses to greenwashing messages on Twitter?

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on greenwashing in marketing whereby most research has relied on survey, experimental, and archival data. So far, the research has indicated that greenwashing can negatively affect consumers, brands, and firms whether directly or indirectly (Santos et al., 2023). This research builds on the theory of marketplace sentiments proposed by Gopaldas (2014), characterizing sentiments as collective emotions with the capacity to transform markets. Understanding how consumers react to greenwashing on Twitter can aid companies in devising improved communication strategies, resulting in enhanced transparency and credibility of environmental marketing endeavors. Moreover, the study will help managers and policymakers develop effective policies to protect consumers from the negative consequences of greenwashing practices.

Keywords: Greenwashing, Social media, Marketplace sentiments, Sustainability, Consumer behavior

References Available Upon Request