

SUSTAINABILITY AS STRATEGY: ASSESSING THE ROLE OF SUPPLIER PRACTICES AND ECO-CREDENTIALS IN SHAPING BRAND VALUE IN THE COSMETIC SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

The brands in the beauty industry sometimes practice many counterfeit products so as to meet the demand of its consumers. On the other hand, suppliers practice numerous credentials to gain the competitive advantage and preference in the market. This study is a thematic analysis of the papers and articles of the theme supporting the research area. Environmentally and sustainability conscious consumer is now challenging the industry to deliver the products that are not at all harmful to themselves as well as society. Profit driven companies have been caught off guard as the dynamics are now focusing on more advanced and innovative productions and deliveries. The study has addressed many themes that can support the analysis and has analysed the research papers from the year 2009 to 2025. Ethics in branding and greenwashing is a major concern of today's dynamics. This study underlines that the ethically driven brands have an edge in building the goodwill than the companies focusing just on profits.

Keywords: Sustainability, Ethics, Influencers, Beauty, CSR.

Introduction

For this decade, it won't be wide of the mark to state that the consumers have been lately so much into the ingredients of the products they are consuming. This consciousness has become a nightmare for the companies that offer greenwashed products especially in the beauty industry. Women, for instance are becoming self-aware about the products they directly apply to their skin and are becoming eco-friendly and sustainability conscious. The Companies need to focus on sustainability in order to sustain in the competition. Management research has been done into this specific topic only as it includes unsustainable and dirty industry. The businesses need to be fully incorporated in order to survive and expand. [1]

More than half of the percentage of the consumers are demanding the same, be it male or female consumers, even their purchasing standards have gone upmarket. The east beauty industry covering countries Japan, South Korea, China and Singapore has become a hub of beauty industry having biggest cosmetic surgery market after the covid period. [62]

With an approximation of 70 percent of the customer force wants to have advanced and personalised experience while they use the products especially try on as it directly hit the mindset of consumer and can impact a profit on sales.

Not only offline and online stores but social media and social influencers also play a vital role in helping the companies to reach out to their desired customer base. And beauty products are one of the top things they buy directly on social media, second only to clothing. Nowadays the beauty industry is not just limited to female customer force but today's men have also become self-aware and beauty conscious, especially the influential power from the east beauty industry. Men require younger looking skin, removing dullness, blemishes and clearer skin. For this, they have pretty much indulged into the beauty, self-care and cosmetic industry.

In order to maintain the requirements of these consumers, the companies now have turned their focus on selling more authentic, organic and sustainable products in the market. The trend of becoming vegan has also been into run and is taking a boom in the global context. Many of the online platform influencers and celebrities have been promoting their audience to become vegan and live their life into a cruelty free environment. And many have successfully attained a great audience for the same. [17]

Artificial Intelligence has now become a reality we live in and not only that but the companies have been taking a great advantage of the smart intelligence for promotion, branding, product building and what not. As the competition has become very peaked up and thriving, the companies use many techniques like smart packaging, virtual reality, try on, chat bots and what not.

Influencers are now having a major role in building and breaking the cosmetic and beauty industry market in the online platform. The companies have also been using the influencers having high end interactive followers. [65]

Trends Adopted by the Beauty Industry

- The consumer not only demands good product but also a good packaging that too it being an environmentally sustainable and not at all harmful.
- Choosing a bunch of toxic material and chemicals and claiming to be free from those specific toxins.
- Segmenting the products into more simplified way is the technique used by the major retailers of the world.
- The brands make an environment in the society by starting a trend and making a belief of lacking behind if not being a part of that trend.

Govt Role

Government has a major role in each and every country of the world and in every country, there has been certain rules and regulations imposed on each cosmetic brand like regulating the misleading eco-claims with the words like "organic" or "cruelty-free.", Banning Animal Testing, Complaint Redressal Systems etc for monitoring misleading claims.

The customer today has become more sustainability prone and has now been questioning every single product authenticity. As the beauty brands claim to be green and cruelty free, still they are under the consumers surveillance. [3]

Literature Review

The Impact of Communicating Sustainability and Ethical Behaviour of the Cosmetic Producers: Evidence from Thailand, 2022 [9]

This study has done a data analysis on two companies of Thailand basically one being national brand and other being the international brand. The companies are of beauty industry and are cosmetic brands in nature. The researcher used Structural Equation Modelling to analyse the sample data set of two companies. The data sample collected were of 800 focusing on the three factors that affect the industry and that are- quality of the product, behaviour of the company towards its consumers and the after sales services and communication sustainability the company holds.

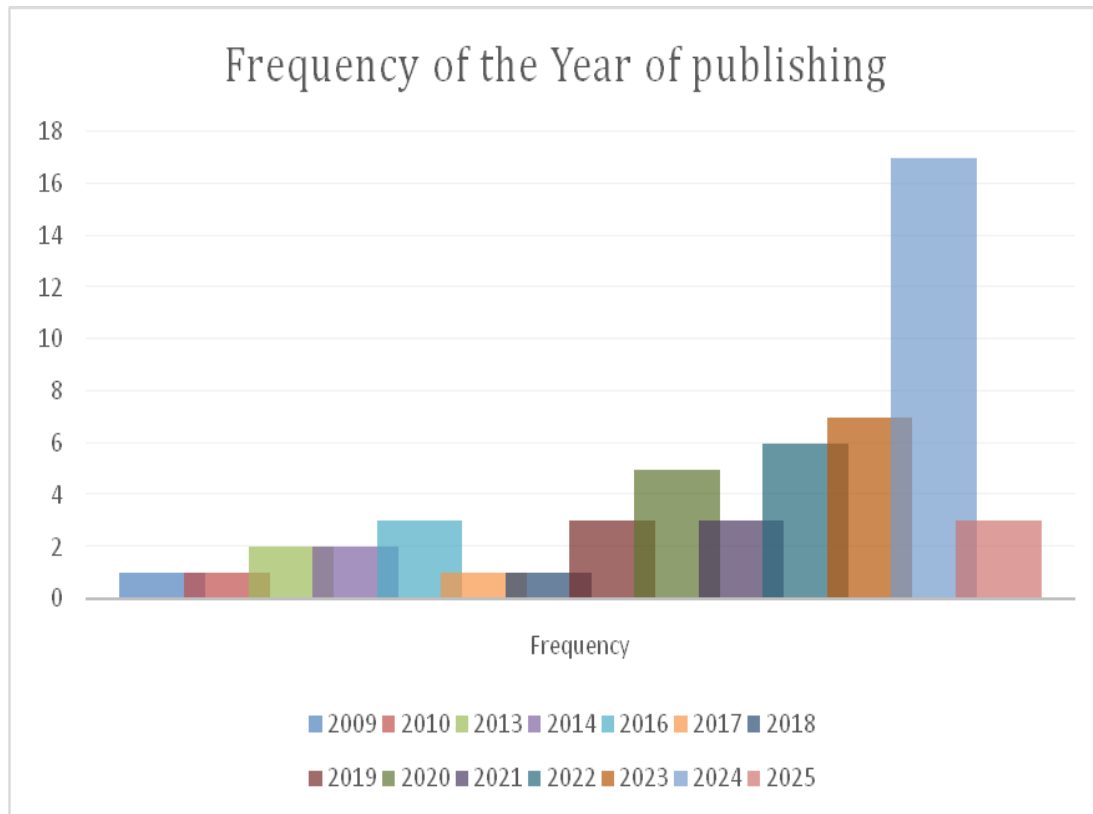


Figure 2: Figure showing the year and frequency of occurrence for the given research papers

The above figure (Figure 2) represents the distribution of publications across various years. It indicates the number of research papers published each year, ranging from 2009 to 2025. There are 65 articles overall, with significant peaks in 2022 that indicate the fluctuations in the amount of research produced over the years.

Publication Screening and Selection

Table 1: Search Strategy (Keywords, Databases, and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria)

A – KEYWORDS (KW)	KW1- SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS+ BRANDING
	KW2- SOCIAL INFLUENCE+ IMPACT ON CONSUMERS
	KW 3- ETHICAL BRANDING+ CONSUMER REACTION
	KW 4- ETHICS IN BUSINESS+ INTERNATIONAL MARKET
	KW 5- BEAUTY INDUSTRY+ GREENWASHING
B – SEARCH ENGINES/DATABASES (DB)	DB1 – Google Scholar
	DB2 - ERIC
C1 – EXCLUSION CRITERIA (EC)	EC1 – any of the selected keywords not appeared in the title, abstract, keywords, full text
	EC2 – Books, conference preceding, editorials, Thesis research paper
	EC3 – Not in English
C2 – INCLUSION CRITERIA (IC)	IC1 – any of the selected keywords appeared in the title, abstract, keywords, full text
	IC2 – Texts in the English language

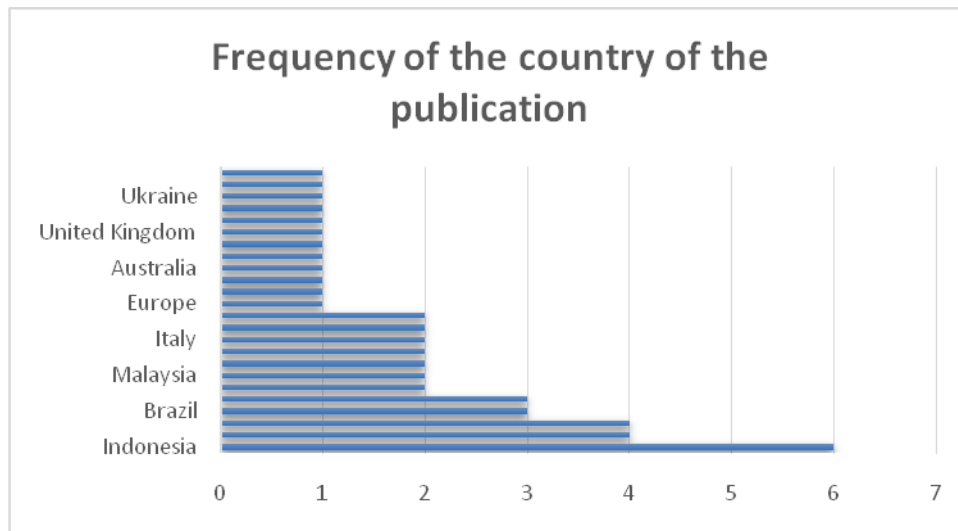


Figure 3: The Designated Country of Authors

The above-mentioned Figure 3 represents the country from where the research has been done on the topic related to ethics and sustainability on the cosmetic industry from the year 2009 to year 2025. The graph represents that Indonesia was the country having the most relevant related study.

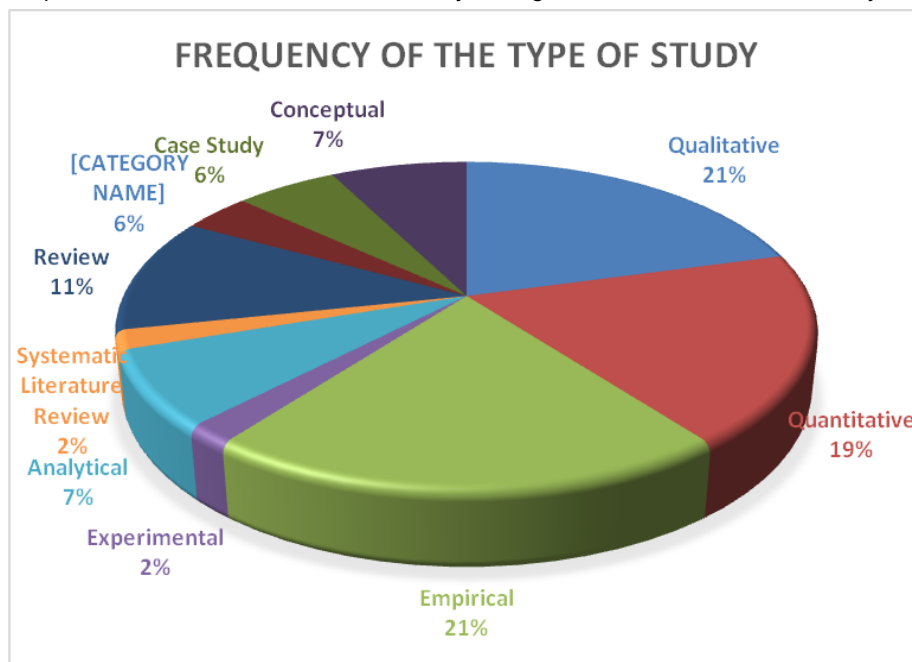


Figure 4: Types of Studies

The different study types that were part of the analysis are broken down in Fig 4. Approximation of 20 % of the research can be seen in the three areas of Quantitative, Qualitative and Empirical suggesting literature places in-depth investigation and phenomena. Additionally, the data represents that review papers were of approx. 11%, analytical and conceptual study being in the 7%, case study and comparative being 6% and SLR and experimental being 2%.

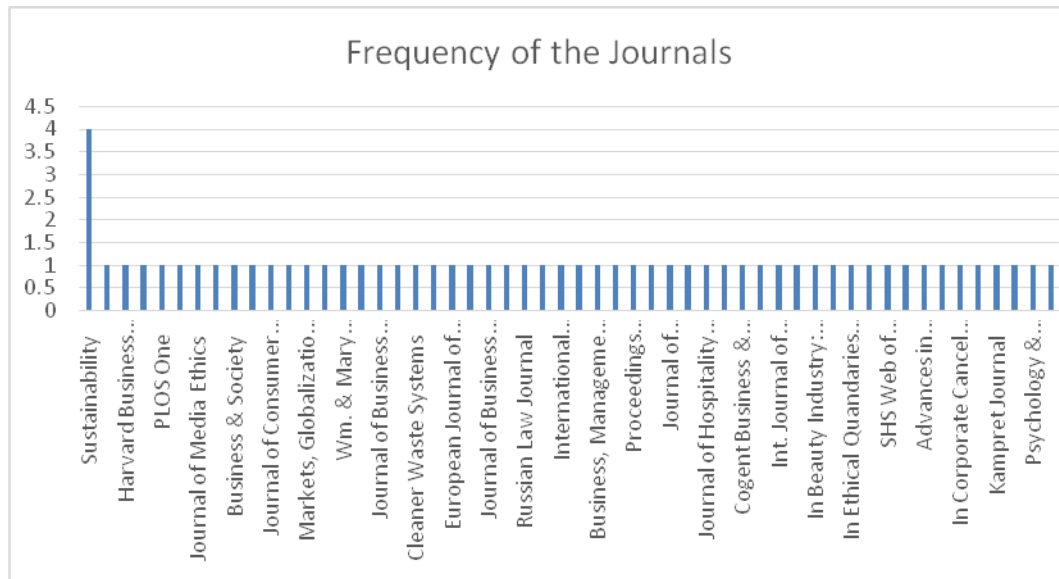


Figure 4: Journals Supporting the Research

The above-mentioned Figure 4 graph shows the frequency and the number of the Journals in which the papers related to the topic were published. The most relevant Journal being Sustainability and remaining showing approximately equal publications.

Table 2: Thematic Analysis

Theme	Key study references	Paper No.	Findings
Sustainability	Bergquist et al., Kolling et al., Rocca et al., De Belez et al., Joosse et al., Cervellon et al., Bom et al., Martins et al., Rantatalo et al.	1, 32, 52, 16, 26, 11, 9, 38, 50	An all-inclusivity towards sustainability has been covering all proportions. The consumer is now very much expert and well aware about the environment so instead of fooling them, companies must actually adopt the environmentally friendly products and must adhere to what they promote. Companies also must acknowledge the issues that occur and must address them accordingly. CSR activities have been mandated to all the companies especially the ones having a brand label and its operations only improve the goodwill of the companies.
Social media	Jaini et al., Shen et al., Hassan et al., Wellman et al., Pop et al., Nugroho et al., Dos Santos et al., Yunita Nidiah Indah et al., Sanny et al., Pandey et al., Agyekum et al., Ying et al.	55, 23, 58, 45, 41, 17, 65, 53, 43, 7, 62	Influencers, social media marketing and virtual promotions have been a booster for the trending products or to make a product trending. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube etc have been widely used by the companies involved in cosmetic branding fostering consumer interactions and improving brand loyalty. The newer generation is more likely hard to impress.
Ethical branding and consumer	Choi et al., Jham et al., Oe et al., Chun et al., Kim et al., Cavusoglu et	13, 25, 42, 14, 61, 10, 29, 15, 27,	There are numerous factors that affect the buying behaviour of any consumer. Like acknowledging greenwashing methods,

Purchase behaviour	al., Kang et al., Confetto et al., Junejo et al., Rawof et al., Escadas et al., Lin et al., Gentina et al., Goncalves et al., Adanyin et al., Agu et al.	51, 19, 34, 20, 21, 4, 6	ethical practices followed by the company, and problem-solving ability of the company. Authenticity of the brand helps the consumer a lot to shape the perception among female who prioritize cruelty-free practices.
Global marketing strategies and ethics	Pawar et al., Yücel et al., Murphy et al., Yücel et al., Al-Khatib et al., Qizwini et al.	44, 64, 40, 63, 8, 47, 48, 46	The goodwill and brand image of any company depends on the factors with which company gets the ability to maintain the brand image and for that they do all the tactful techniques needed. If a brand wants to thrive in any industry, they need to do market research, Making innovations, good PR and a good marketing technique. There were many case studies focusing on these many aspects to prove a point and to navigate these ethical dilemmas.
Beauty industry and false branding	Abu-Rahme et al., Chmiel., Acharya et al., Sharma.,Tsoulou Vasilopoulou et al., Kaur et al., Kang., Sigdel., Ye., Wulandari., Gupta et al., Adil et al., Moreira	2, 12, 3, 54, 57, 31, 28, 56, 60, 59, 22, 5, 39	When the company choose to mislead with false branding and greenwashing, it loses its customer base to a very large extent but not only that but it loses its brand image and goodwill forever in the market. Even the celebrity and influencer get the backlash from the wrong endorsements, which often lack authenticity.
Influencers image and ethical branding	Listiawati et al., Kauffmann et al., Rachmawati ., Ekinci et al.	35, 30, 49, 18	There is a direct relation of the image and reach of the influencer and the brand that they are endorsing. The type of audience they have, the content they share, reactions they receive and the image they have in the society always create a impact on the brand image as they get chosen to be the face and public figure of the brand. If chosen correctly the influencer market can gain many benefits when combined with the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Conclusion

The brands that have or are considering to become sustainable and environmentally viable are the ones that are thriving and leading the market or industry. It is considered to be a powerful lever for uplifting the brands in local as well as global market.

To gain consumers' confidence, components transparency, avoiding greenwashing, understanding the purchase intentions, ethical brand ambassadors and fulfilling CSR are some of the factors to be followed. Superficial promises only will lead to unfavourable reviews by the consumers and it might tarnish the image of the brand.

The research papers, case studies and articles in this area has led to an analysis that there is a direct relationship of social media and influencers on the brand image and goodwill the company created into the society. Ethical branding with the power of sustainable products is the key to becoming a global brand today and sustain in the market for the longer run as false branding automatically leads to

progressive shrinking of the consumer hold. The future study holds the analysis of brands maintaining the sustainable product practice and factors affecting it.

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