

The Impact of Greenwashing in Marketing: A Bibliometric and Systematic Review (2015-2025)

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KEYWORDS

Bibliometric analysis,
green marketing,
greenwashing,
sustainable development,
systematic review.

ABSTRACT

This study presents a comprehensive bibliometric and systematic review of greenwashing in marketing, covering the period from 2015 to 2025. The research examines how greenwashing influences corporate marketing strategies, particularly in the context of the growing emphasis on sustainability. Data were extracted from 214 peer-reviewed articles in the Scopus database, using keywords related to greenwashing and sustainable marketing. A subset of 10 high-quality articles was selected for the systematic review to critically evaluate the evidence and synthesize key findings. Findings reveal that greenwashing undermines consumer trust and brand credibility, posing significant challenges for firms committed to ethical marketing. The study also highlights the evolution of green marketing strategies and the potential risks associated with misleading sustainability claims. Based on the analysis, the authors propose future research directions and managerial implications to help businesses recognize, address, and mitigate greenwashing behaviors, ultimately contributing to the development of transparent and sustainable marketing practices.

1. Introduction

Faced with growing global environmental challenges and the urgency of climate change, sustainable development has become a fundamental requirement rather than a mere strategic option for businesses. As consumers, investors, and other stakeholders increasingly demand corporate responsibility and adherence to environmental standards, many organizations have actively shaped their communication and marketing strategies to align with a “green” and eco-friendly image. However, not all commitments reflect authentic actions. Some enterprises have engaged in greenwashing—conveying misleading or deceptive environmental claims to gain a reputational advantage without undertaking substantial, sustainable efforts.

The term “greenwashing” was first coined by Jay Westerveld in 1986 and has since gained significant traction in academic discourse, civil society, and regulatory spheres. Delmas and Burbano (2011), Seele and Gatti (2017) agreed that greenwashing constitutes a symbolic communication strategy wherein companies intentionally distort public perception regarding the environmental performance of their products, services, or organizational practices. Over time, greenwashing has expanded beyond product-level messaging to encompass broader strategic dimensions, including supply chain management, corporate governance, and ESG disclosures. Once considered a marginal issue, greenwashing is now recognized as a serious ethical and legal challenge in modern business contexts.

Empirical evidence highlights several high-profile cases of greenwashing with far-reaching consequences.

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The Volkswagen “Dieselgate” scandal and H&M’s “Conscious” labeling illustrated how misleading environmental claims can lead to reputational damage and a loss of public trust. Prior studies have demonstrated that greenwashing undermines consumer purchase intentions, reduces the effectiveness of green word-of-mouth, and negatively impacts brand equity and stakeholder relationships (Chen & Chang, 2013; Zhang et al., 2018; Nyilasy et al., 2014). While greenwashing may yield short-term image gains, it poses long-term risks to organizational credibility and exposes firms to ethical and legal scrutiny.

Given the increasing frequency and complexity of greenwashing—especially amid the rising adoption of ESG reporting and sustainable branding—the need for a comprehensive and systematic investigation of this phenomenon is both timely and critical. Synthesizing existing scholarship, identifying emerging trends, and uncovering research gaps are essential for developing robust policy frameworks, evaluative criteria, and governance mechanisms to detect and mitigate deceptive green claims.

This study employs a bibliometric and systematic review approach to comprehensively understand greenwashing in marketing. Drawing on rigorously filtered academic publications from 2015 to mid-2025, it examines the evolution of the greenwashing concept, its impact on consumer behavior and brand communication, and highlights prominent research themes. In doing so, this paper contributes to the theoretical foundations of green marketing and provides managerial and policy-oriented insights to enhance transparency, legitimacy, and accountability in corporate sustainability communications.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Greenwashing concept

Greenwashing is the act of making misleading or unsubstantiated claims about the environmental benefits or performance of a product, service, or company, often with the intention of gaining a competitive advantage or improving public image (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). For a claim to be considered greenwashing, it typically involves a private sector organization promoting environmental performance that cannot be substantiated, is made with deceptive intent, and is used to market a product or service (Spaniol et al., 2024). Greenwashing can erode trust, damage brand reputation, and influence consumer behavior, often leading to skepticism about genuine sustainability efforts.

2.2. Green marketing concept

Green marketing, also known as sustainable marketing, is an integrated strategy that promotes

environmentally responsible products, services, and operations while embedding social and environmental responsibility values throughout the organization (Qayyum et al., 2023). Contemporary green marketing extends beyond basic environmental claims, requiring transparency, verifiable actions, and behavioral influence toward sustainable lifestyles. From a strategic perspective, Papadas et al. (2020) viewed sustainable marketing as a balanced approach that integrates environmental, economic, and social objectives. In summary, green marketing has evolved from a product-focused promotional tool (Peattie & Crane, 2005) into a comprehensive strategy embedded in consumer marketing, B2B relationships, and sustainability-driven behavior change (Qayyum et al., 2023; Vangeli et al., 2023; Azazz et al., 2024; Papadas et al., 2020). Recent studies emphasize that green marketing must be grounded in authenticity and systemic transformation, reflecting the increasing pressure for environmental accountability in a globalized economy.

3. Methodology

3.1. Bibliometric method

Bibliometrics is a quantitative method that applies mathematical and statistical techniques to study academic publications, synthesize and analyze research trends, and monitor the development of academic topics (Donthu et al., 2021). Initially developed for library science and productivity assessment, it has evolved into a strategic tool for mapping scientific influence and guiding interdisciplinary collaboration.

While early use focused on metrics such as publication and citation counts, the method now incorporates network analysis and theme clustering to visualize the evolution of research. Donthu et al. (2021) emphasized the growing importance of bibliometrics in producing objective, visual insights using tools such as VOSviewer and databases like Scopus and Web of Science. Bibliometric analysis is particularly valuable for identifying thematic convergence and mapping knowledge structures in the fields of green marketing and greenwashing.

Data Collection and Processing Procedure

The research data were collected from the Scopus database (from 2015 to June 2025). The search strategy used two sets of keywords: one focused on greenwashing (“greenwashing”, “ecolabel fraud”) and the other focused on sustainable and ethical marketing (e.g., “CSR”, “green marketing”, “marketing ethics”). A total of 438 records were collected. Next, the dataset was filtered according to the following criteria: subject area (Business, Social Sciences, Economics), document type (article), source type (journal), publication stage (final), and language (English). As a result, 214 articles were extracted from Scopus. The authors then

standardized the article keywords (singular/plural, abbreviations, etc.) to ensure consistency and accuracy for the bibliometric analysis.

3.2. Systematic review method

A systematic review is a method that evaluates and synthesizes the articles on the same topic to provide a systematic and comprehensive view. Moher et al. (2009) defined a systematic review as a scientific process undertaken to “systematically and transparently collect and synthesize evidence” using qualitative and quantitative methods. Snyder (2019) noted that general procedures, such as PRISMA, play a crucial role in enhancing the reliability and transparency of research.

Several recent studies have begun to use literature reviews to draw out theoretical implications, identify emerging themes, and research gaps (Paul et al., 2021). For example, using systematic review methods, Vangeli et al. (2023) examined B2B greenwashing behavior.

This study's systematic review supports the consolidation of fragmented findings on greenwashing and contributes to the development of more coherent, evidence-based frameworks in sustainable marketing.

4. Results

4.1. Bibliometric analysis

4.1.1. Growth in the number of research publications

The statistical results in Figure 1 indicate a significant increase in the number of publications related to "greenwashing" in marketing, particularly since 2021, demonstrating considerable interest in this topic within the academic community. Specifically, in 2015, only three articles were recorded; however, in the first six months of 2025, there have already been 42 publications.

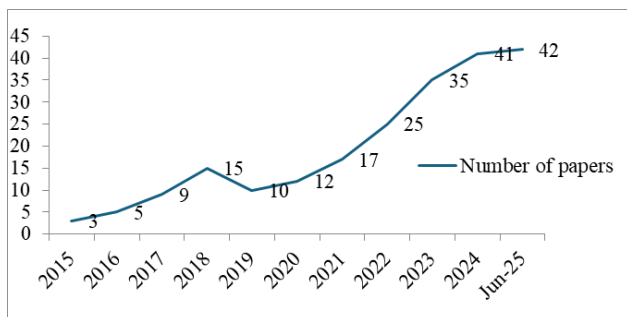


Figure 1. Number of research publications on “greenwashing” from 2015 to 2025

Figure 1 reflects a clear shift in global research priorities, with business ethics, sustainable development, and corporate social responsibility

(CSR) being seen as top concerns. It can be explained that, under increasing pressure from legal regulations, ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) standards, and growing transparency requirements, green marketing has evolved from a voluntary choice to a comprehensive, long-term strategy that supports policy-making and enhances sustainable brand management capacity.

4.1.2. Leading academic journals on the topic of greenwashing

An analysis of publication sources reveals that several leading academic journals play a pivotal role in disseminating knowledge on greenwashing within the marketing domain. The five journals with the highest number of publications on the topic during the study period are as follows:

Table 1. Journals with the highest number of publications on greenwashing (2015–2025)

No.	Journal	Number of publications
1	Sustainability (Switzerland)	24
2	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	14
3	Business Strategy and the Environment	11
4	Journal of Business Ethics	9
5	Journal of Cleaner Production	6

Although *Sustainability (Switzerland)* accounts for the largest share of articles related to greenwashing in the dataset, this may partially reflect the journal’s open-access model and its broad interdisciplinary scope. Accordingly, in evaluating the knowledge landscape on greenwashing, this study not only considers publication volume but also triangulates findings with journals that possess higher impact factors and more stable citation performance, such as the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Business Strategy and the Environment*, and *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, in order to ensure the reliability of insights.

Overall, the bibliometric analysis suggests that greenwashing is becoming a topic of increasing academic interest within marketing and across related disciplines, including corporate governance, environmental management, business ethics, and public policy. The increasing presence of this topic in reputable academic journals underscores the rising importance of understanding and addressing deceptive communication practices in the era of sustainable development.

4.1.3. Keyword co-occurrence analysis

A keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted based on 214 peer-reviewed articles to clarify the research directions within the greenwashing domain. During data preprocessing, synonymous terms were standardized for consistency (e.g., “green wash” was consolidated as “greenwashing”). Only keywords that appeared in at least five publications were included in the analysis. Of 920 unique keywords, 36 met the threshold and were identified as core terms related to greenwashing in marketing. The keyword “greenwashing” appeared with the highest frequency, underscoring its central role in the knowledge structure of sustainable marketing. Content analysis revealed that research primarily focuses on the impacts of greenwashing on consumer trust, brand credibility, corporate social responsibility (CSR), green marketing strategies, and the role of communication in mitigating deceptive practices.

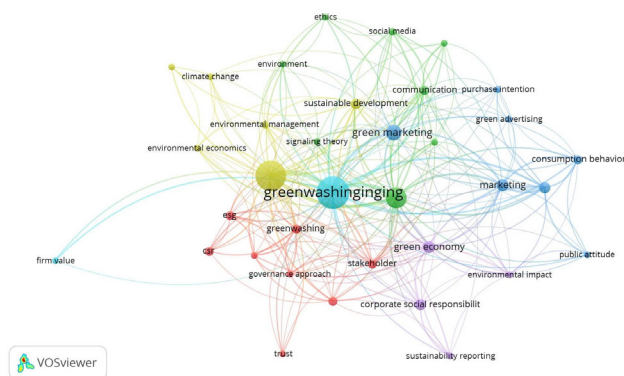


Figure 2. Keyword co-occurrence analysis

The keyword co-occurrence visualization (Figure 2) identified four major research streams currently dominating the greenwashing literature.

Cluster 1 – CSR and Greenwashing Governance (Red Cluster)

The Red cluster focuses on corporate greenwashing behavior from the perspective of business ethics, CSR, and organizational governance. Representative authors, such as Li W. (2019), Ahmad I. (2025), and Ahmadi S. (2025), analyze the use of CSR reporting as a tool for achieving symbolic legitimacy and the consequences of such practices on stakeholder trust. These results reflect a growing concern about transparency and moral responsibility in green brand communication.

Cluster 2 – Sustainability and ESG (Green Cluster)

The main idea in this cluster is the relationship between greenwashing and sustainability performance, particularly through ESG indicators and SDG commitments. Studies by Agarwal A. (2024) and

Argila-Irurita A. (2024) emphasize that companies are increasingly required not only to “look green” but also to substantiate actual sustainable outcomes. The findings reflect a transition from symbolic to substantive sustainability assessments in academic and regulatory contexts.

Cluster 3 – Green Marketing and Consumer Reactions (Blue Cluster)

Studies in this group applied a consumer behavior perspective, focusing on cognitive responses, beliefs, and attitudes toward green marketing claims. Research by Andreoli T.P. (2020) and Bharti M. (2025) suggests that perceptions of greenwashing can reduce brand trust and purchase intentions, as well as lead to adverse word-of-mouth effects. Businesses must be cautious in controlling and preventing deceptive practices related to the green friendliness of their products and services, whether intentional or unintentional, to thrive in the current context.

Cluster 4 – Environmental Economics and Corporate Impact (Yellow Cluster)

The final cluster is characterized by a more quantitative orientation, examining how greenwashing affects corporate value, financial performance, and long-term sustainability metrics. Authors such as Chen P. (2023) and Gull A.A. (2023) employ empirical models to measure the impact of greenwashing on firm valuation and non-financial disclosures. The presence of this cluster reflects a growing effort to evaluate transparency and environmental responsibility using measurable indicators, amid increasing public scrutiny.

The analysis of keyword weights in the co-word network reveals key concepts in the context of greenwashing and green marketing. High-weight keywords such as “greenwashing”, “sustainability”, “trust”, “green marketing”, and “CSR” are central, reflecting their strong connection to the core themes of environmental misconduct, consumer trust, and corporate responsibility. These keywords demonstrate how greenwashing undermines genuine sustainability efforts and impacts consumer perception. Medium-weight keywords, such as “ethics”, “green economy”, and “ESG”, demonstrate the indirect impact of greenwashing on global sustainability policies and responsible investment practices, underscoring its broader implications for business and environmental objectives.

4.1.4. Analysis of research trends

An analysis of the average year of keyword occurrence reveals a clear evolution in the scholarly exploration of greenwashing (Figure 3). In the early period (2015–2018), studies primarily focused on foundational concepts such as “sustainable development,” “green marketing,” “CSR communication,” “ethics,” and “environment,” reflecting early interest in how firms

4.2. Systematic review analysis

Based on the results of the bibliometric analysis, the authors conducted a systematic review of 93 open-access articles (out of 214 articles retrieved from the Scopus database) to synthesize existing assessments of the impact of greenwashing in green marketing. A preliminary screening process was then conducted, where the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the articles were examined to identify studies addressing the concepts of greenwashing and its impact on marketing and consumer behavior. This screening phase resulted in 41 relevant articles. Subsequently, the authors evaluated the quality of the selected studies to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the information. Priority was given to articles published by reputable publishers and indexed in Q1 or Q2 journals. The selection criteria for the articles were as follows: (i) the articles must be published in reputable Q1 or Q2 journals, (ii) they must be peer-reviewed, and (iii) the articles must have clear research methods aligned with the research objectives on greenwashing. Ultimately, ten high-quality studies were identified for in-depth analysis.

4.2.1. Conceptual perspectives on greenwashing

Greenwashing is a complex concept that involves deceptive practices, where companies make vague or misleading environmental claims, often to appeal to eco-conscious consumers. Researchers have explored greenwashing from various perspectives:

Green Marketing: Companies may use ambiguous terms like “eco-friendly” without evidence, such as altering packaging to appear greener without real benefits (Qayyum et al., 2023). Vangeli et al. (2023) describe it in a B2B context, where firms manipulate perceptions to address stakeholder pressures.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Greenwashing projects a positive image while diverting attention from harmful practices, serving as a reputational shield in high-risk industries (Mu & Lee, 2023).

Product Innovation: This occurs when companies exaggerate the environmental benefits of new products, resulting in a gap between claims and reality, which can damage reputations (Janz et al., 2025).

Green Demarketing: Firms may promote reduced consumption of harmful products, but lack transparency about their true motives. Inconsistencies between messages and actions indicate hypocrisy (Azazz et al., 2024).

Overall, greenwashing entails a disparity between stated environmental commitments and actual practices, posing risks to stakeholder trust and brand value.

4.2.2. Common greenwashing strategies

Greenwashing involves deceptive practices that create an illusion of sustainability without genuine

environmental performance. Based on a systematic review, four key strategies are identified:

Vague or Unsubstantiated Claims: Companies use broad terms like “eco-friendly” without evidence, appealing to environmentally conscious consumers yet avoiding accountability. This tactic risks long-term credibility.

Exaggeration of Benefits: Firms often overstate their environmental performance, such as claiming products are “carbon neutral” based on minimal reductions in emissions. Discrepancies can lead to reputational damage and loss of consumer trust.

Green Imagery and Packaging: Many companies utilize green colors and nature-related images on their packaging to convey sustainability, despite often lacking supportive product attributes. This may confuse consumers and hinder their ability to make informed choices.

Concealing Negative Impacts: Some firms promote CSR initiatives to distract from their harmful practices, such as pollution. While this may temporarily improve the brand image, revealing contradictions can damage consumer and investor confidence.

In summary, these strategies show how companies misrepresent sustainability across various communications, ultimately undermining long-term trust and brand equity. Regulatory oversight and standardized verification of claims are crucial in countering greenwashing.

4.2.3. Impact of greenwashing on consumers

Greenwashing has a detrimental impact on consumer perceptions, behaviors, and trust in sustainable brands. Misleading green claims and eco-packaging can create confusion, leading to skepticism about a product’s environmental value and eroding trust, ultimately diminishing brand credibility, particularly in sensitive sectors such as food and retail (Qayyum et al., 2023). Furthermore, discovering misleading claims damages the perception of a brand’s environmental integrity, harming brand loyalty and purchase intent (Qayyum et al., 2023; Janz et al., 2025). Additionally, suspicion toward green claims can influence consumers’ purchase decisions, as they may choose to avoid such products in favor of more trustworthy alternatives, ultimately affecting sales (Azazz et al., 2024).

4.2.4. Impact of greenwashing on enterprises

Greenwashing can damage a company’s external reputation and impact its internal operations and long-term competitiveness. Unsubstantiated green claims, once exposed, severely erode green brand equity and competitive positioning, leading firms to lose market share and incur substantial costs for crisis communication and image restoration (Qayyum et

al., 2023; Janz et al., 2025). Moreover, greenwashing undermines internal trust, particularly when CSR initiatives mask unsustainable practices, thereby weakening employee identification, lowering morale, and increasing turnover, especially in organizations that depend on a strong internal culture (Mu & Lee, 2023). Additionally, misleading green claims may trigger legal risks, such as regulatory investigations or backlash from environmental groups, leading to lawsuits, fines, or public scrutiny, which can divert resources from core operations and damage long-term legitimacy. Financially, greenwashing leads to indirect losses by reducing access to markets, contracts, or funding. Firms focusing on greenwashing rather than sustainability innovation may miss opportunities for long-term competitive advantage and strategic partnerships (Janz et al., 2025; Qayyum et al., 2023). In B2B contexts, misleading green claims can fracture supply chain relationships, as partners may disengage if green standards are not met, resulting in disruptions and reputational damage across the entire value chain (Vangeli et al., 2023). Ultimately, companies engaged in greenwashing may struggle to attract investment, particularly from ESG-focused funds, as a lack of transparency can deter investors due to concerns about reputational and compliance risks, thereby limiting access to capital and hindering innovation.

4.2.5. *Impact of greenwashing on social*

Greenwashing has broader implications for public trust and the sustainability movement. Misleading environmental claims erode public confidence in sustainability initiatives, as consumers become skeptical of all environmental messaging when firms exaggerate or falsify their green efforts. As Lyon and Montgomery (2015) note, this weakens collective motivation to support genuine sustainability. Additionally, the increased awareness of greenwashing has led to stronger responses from environmental activists and regulatory bodies. As Vangeli et al. (2023) highlight, unclear or deceptive claims have intensified calls for corporate transparency, contributing to the development of stricter sustainability disclosure regulations. This shift imposes additional compliance burdens on firms and reshapes the broader business landscape.

5. Conclusion and Implications

5.1. *Conclusion*

This study comprehensively examines the greenwashing phenomenon in marketing by integrating bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review, covering publications from 2015 to June 2025. The findings reveal that greenwashing has become a focal

topic in sustainability research, especially since 2021, with substantial contributions from countries such as the United States, China, and the United Kingdom. Keyword mapping and country-level trends suggest that greenwashing research has expanded beyond environmental concerns to encompass broader ESG dimensions, particularly corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainable marketing, and stakeholder responses.

This study identified four main strategies in greenwashing, differing from previous studies, such as Nyilasy et al. (2014), which primarily focused on sustainable marketing strategies without a detailed analysis of specific greenwashing tactics. Four common greenwashing strategies were identified: (1) vague or unverifiable claims, (2) exaggeration of environmental benefits, (3) misleading use of green imagery or packaging, and (4) masking unsustainable practices through CSR.

The systematic review of research results indicates four common greenwashing strategies that are commonly used, including: (1) making vague or unverifiable claims, (2) exaggerating environmental benefits, (3) using misleading green packaging or images, and (4) hiding unsustainable practices through CSR. Greenwashing causes a negative impact on consumer trust, brand equity, and sustainable development.

These findings from the systematic review align with the trends observed in the bibliometric analysis, reinforcing that greenwashing is not merely a marketing issue but a significant challenge with wide-ranging implications for corporate reputation, consumer trust, and sustainability efforts. The systematic review, focusing on high-quality articles, critically synthesizes the evidence and highlights the negative impact of these greenwashing strategies. For example, vague claims and exaggeration of environmental benefits are often employed in response to external pressures from consumers and regulations demanding greater sustainability. However, these strategies can backfire, as consumers and regulators increasingly demand transparency and authenticity in environmental claims.

Greenwashing causes a negative impact on consumer trust, brand equity, and sustainable development. Both the bibliometric analysis and the systematic review underscore the long-term risks that greenwashing poses to companies. While the bibliometric analysis highlights the growing academic interest and the spread of research across various ESG dimensions, the systematic review emphasizes the practical consequences of greenwashing, including eroded consumer trust, diminished brand value, and potential legal repercussions.

Overall, the research underscores that greenwashing is not merely an ethical concern, but a strategic and managerial challenge in the era of sustainability. To

maintain stakeholder trust and achieve a long-term competitive advantage, organizations must restructure their marketing and communication strategies to prioritize greater transparency, authenticity, and accountability.

5.2. Theoretical and practical implications

This study contributes to the theoretical advancement of greenwashing research by offering an integrated synthesis of key developments from 2015 to 2025. The findings position greenwashing as a multifaceted phenomenon that intersects with marketing ethics, CSR, governance, and consumer behavior. This study enhances conceptual clarity by categorizing greenwashing strategies, such as vague claims, image manipulation, and CSR-based misrepresentation. It provides a foundation for further theoretical development in areas such as stakeholder theory, legitimacy theory, and institutional theory. Furthermore, the analysis expands the discourse beyond environmental deception to include broader implications for social responsibility and corporate accountability within the ESG framework.

From a practical perspective, the study offers actionable recommendations for firms seeking to avoid greenwashing and foster sustainable brand strategies:

Enhance Transparency: Provide detailed, verifiable environmental information—such as third-party ESG certification and transparent reporting—to build stakeholder trust.

Invest in Substantive Improvements: Prioritize genuine sustainability actions (e.g., emissions reduction, circular production models) to ensure consistency between communication and reality.

Strengthen Internal Awareness: Train marketing and communication teams on sustainability principles to ensure accurate messaging and align internal practices with external claims.

Collaborate with Credible Institutions: Partner with NGOs or regulators to validate environmental initiatives, enhancing legitimacy and reducing legal exposure.

Engage Public Feedback: Proactively respond to consumer and civil society concerns to preempt reputational risks and improve green marketing strategies.

In summary, these insights bridge the gap between theory and practice by framing greenwashing as an ethical failure and a strategic misalignment that poses a threat to long-term competitiveness. Addressing greenwashing requires organizations to embed sustainability into messaging and core operations, supported by governance mechanisms that ensure consistency, accountability, and transparency.

5.3. Future Research Directions

As greenwashing becomes more complex, future research should address its evolving impact on sustainable marketing and stakeholder trust. Key directions include:

First, the analysis should be expanded beyond 2015–2025 to capture long-term shifts in greenwashing strategies, particularly in relation to consumer trust and brand equity. Second, using additional databases (e.g., Web of Science, Google Scholar) to enhance data diversity, especially from underrepresented and developing regions. Third, examining how technologies such as blockchain, AI, and big data can enhance transparency and detect deceptive green claims. Finally, the effectiveness of new regulatory frameworks (e.g., the EU Anti-Greenwashing Law) should be evaluated to inform policies that strike a balance between green innovation and accountability.

These directions will support the development of a more transparent and resilient marketing landscape aligned with global sustainability goals.

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