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PRETTY LIES: UNMASKING GREENWASHING IN COSMETICS INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the widespread problem of "greenwashing" in the cosmetics and beauty sector, exposing the deliberate exploitation of intellectual property rights (IPR) to deceive customers via case studies. The study analyses how trademarks and copyrights are used to preserve and disseminate unfounded environmental claims, and it looks at how social media platforms utilise influencer marketing and user-generated content to reinforce greenwashing claims. Through an analysis of case studies of well-known businesses, such as the internationally renowned The Body Shop and India's Patanjali, the research seeks to reveal the complex strategies employed to provide a misleading picture of sustainability. The research aims to uncover recurrent patterns of greenwashing and the particular IPR mechanisms that support such activities by a thorough investigation of the marketing tactics and IPR portfolios of these businesses. In the end, this study advances our critical awareness of the problems that the beauty industry faces as a result of greenwashing, providing information that consumers, industry stakeholders, and governments may use to solve this urgent problem.

Keywords: greenwashing, beauty industry, cosmetics, ipr, trademarks, copyrights, social media, influencer marketing, consumer deception, sustainability, environmental claims, deceptive marketing

INTRODUCTION

Greenwashing occurs when companies deceitfully present themselves as environmentally responsible in order to capitalize on the increasing awareness of consumers regarding environmental issues. Many companies in sectors like FMCG and textiles assert their commitment to sustainable practices without offering proof, deceiving customers and increasing their profits by appearing environmentally conscious. For example, businesses could

give discounts for bringing back plastic containers in order to promote recycling, but this can lead to higher consumption and an increase in plastic garbage. In order to address greenwashing, businesses must disclose their recycling methods and the effects of their environmentally friendly projects.

The existing rules in India, such as those set by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), deal with misleading advertising but do not have precise regulations against greenwashing. Strong regulations on environmental ad claims would uphold consumer trust and ensure companies are held responsible. The beauty industry, especially the natural segment, lacks proper regulation, enabling brands to falsely advertise as "natural" or "organic." Although the shift towards sustainable consumption is encouraging, consumers must remain cautious of greenwashing strategies. Genuine organic products must have natural components cultivated without artificial chemicals, and packaging should be examined for the organic content percentage to verify legitimacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Greenwashing, a major problem in the cosmetics industry, occurs when companies inaccurately present themselves as eco-friendly. In its 2024 report, the Changing Markets Foundation exposes that top cosmetic companies like L'Oréal, P&G, and L'Occitane have faced backlash for deceptive sustainability assertions. Changing Markets Foundation, 2024, pointed out issues with P&G's Head & Shoulders using ocean-bound plastic in bottles and L'Oréal's claim of "100% recycled plastic" only applying to the bottle, not the cap.

The issue of packaging waste remains a critical problem, as conventional plastic packaging continues to cause major environmental pollution. According to reports, despite many brands switching to recycled or biodegradable materials, these options frequently do not effectively decrease the overall environmental footprint (Euromonitor, 2018). Challenges like the limited recyclability of materials such as flexible pouches undermine the efficiency of eco-friendly packaging (Changing Markets Foundation, 2024).

Cosmetic components are also a factor in environmental and health issues. Substances like parabens, phthalates, and artificial fragrances have been associated with health problems such as hormonal imbalances and allergies (Consumer Reports, 2021). Even though natural ingredients are seen as safer, they come with environmental consequences, often leading to

high resource consumption and ecological effects.

Consumer awareness and behavior towards sustainability in the cosmetics industry are changing. Consumers are now looking for products with reputable certifications and clear claims due to the growing attention on greenwashing. Yet, there are still differences in what consumers expect and what companies actually do for the environment, emphasizing the importance of stronger regulations (Nielsen, 2020; KPMG, 2021).

Certifications like Ecocert and COSMOS set guidelines for organic and sustainable methods, but issues in implementation and oversight hinder their ability to combat greenwashing effectively (Ecocert, 2023; International Organization for Standardization, 2022). This critique highlights the importance of increased transparency and accountability in the cosmetics sector to tackle the issues caused by greenwashing and ensure authentic sustainability.

ORGANIC VS NATURAL

Organic Organic beauty products are created using natural ingredients that are cultivated without artificial fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and synthetic chemicals. The products must not contain parabens, sulfates, artificial colors, or fragrances, and should be produced using sustainable land management methods. Nevertheless, items identified as "organic" may not genuinely be organic, as they simply require a limited portion of organic components to receive the designation. In order to verify authenticity, consumers must examine the amount of organic ingredients indicated on the product.

Natural Natural ingredients are derived from natural sources and are free from synthetic chemicals and GMOs, but may still undergo heavy processing.

Paraphrased: Ingredients that are natural come from natural sources and do not contain synthetic chemicals or GMOs, yet they may still be heavily processed. Many companies use the terms "natural" and "organic" loosely because there are no official definitions for them in the cosmetics industry. Certification organizations such as COSMOS and EcoCert establish requirements for natural and organic products, though their specifications differ. Consumers must examine brands and review ingredient lists to validate assertions.

GREEN MARKETING VS GREEN WASHING

Green marketing

Green marketing is authentic and transparent, with products and services from companies adhering to specific criteria.

- Constructed from materials that can be recycled or have already been recycled.
- Devoid of harmful or ozone-depleting substances;
- Made with eco-friendly materials;
- Produced without the necessity for extra packaging;
- Created with the intention of being fixed and utilized again instead of being discarded.

Businesses that are committed to sustainable development and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are more likely to engage in green marketing. An increasing number of companies are striving to adopt sustainable business practices. They realize that reducing costs related to packaging, shipping, energy consumption, water usage, and other aspects can enhance the attractiveness of their products to customers.

Green marketing should not be confused with greenwashing. It hinders sustainable development by focusing on promoting sustainability through increased efforts and funding, rather than implementing eco-friendly practices deliberately or unintentionally. Speaking without taking action is exactly that. Simply put, if greenwashing were genuine, it would be considered green marketing. Unfortunately, most products featuring green labels are, in fact, greenwashed.

Green Marketing is the promotion of products that highlight their eco-friendliness, like lower emissions during production or the use of recycled materials. Some corporations also give contributions to environmental projects. This strategy targets consumers who are environmentally aware.

Greenwashing

Greenwashing, also called "Green sheen," is a marketing tactic in which companies inaccurately present themselves as eco-friendly to deceive consumers. This habit leads consumers to think they are contributing to the environment, despite actually engaging in a form of deception like "whitewashing" that disguises unethical actions. Greenwashing takes

advantage of the absence of regulations within sectors such as beauty and sunscreen, creating challenges for consumers in identifying truly environmentally responsible brands versus those that employ deceptive marketing to appear sustainable.

Regulation Gaps: Due to their relative lack of regulation, the beauty and natural industries are more susceptible to greenwashing, or making false claims. In the UK, the Competition & Markets Authority (CMA) discovered that companies may be deceiving about up to 40% of their green claims. The integrity of the sector, the environment, and consumer protection are all at risk due to this lack of regulation.

Reasons behind Greenwashing:

1. **Increase Demand:** There is a growing market for environmentally friendly goods.
2. **Positive Corporate Image:** To boost sales, present the business as socially conscious.

Consumer Differentiation: The absence of clear regulatory standards for terminology like "natural" and "organic" in cosmetics makes it difficult to distinguish between real green marketing and greenwashing. Claims about eco-friendliness on misleading packaging can mislead customers. Consumers should check ingredient lists and seek out certificates to ensure authenticity claims

As examples, consider:

- **NATARUE Certification:** Purposes to uphold strict guidelines and foster the growth of organic and natural cosmetics.
- **PEFC Certification:** Verifies that wood products come from forests that are managed sustainably.

Legislation and rules that are more explicit about what qualifies as natural, organic, and bio goods are necessary as the prevalence of greenwashing increases. Customers need to be aware and on guard to prevent being duped by greenwashing techniques.

FORMS OF GREENWASHING

The Seven Sins of Greenwashing by Terra Choice:

An environmental marketing firm called Terra Choice¹ has created a classification called “the seven sins of greenwashing”.

¹ Published by TerraChoice, The Sins of Greenwashing Home and Family Edition, 2010, A report environmental claims made in North American consumer market, Last accessed on 03/08/2024.

1. **The sin of the hidden trade-off:** A statement that implies a product is "green" without taking into account other significant environmental challenges, based on a limited set of criteria. For example, just because paper is derived from a forest that is responsibly harvested does not mean that it is better for the environment. Other significant environmental problems associated with the production of paper, including greenhouse gas emissions or the usage of chlorine in bleaching, might be just as significant.
2. **The sin of no proof:** an environmental statement that isn't supported by easily obtainable information or a trustworthy third-party certification. Products like face or toilet tissues that make claims about the proportion of post-consumer recycled content without offering supporting data are common instances.
3. **The sin of vagueness:** A claim that lacks specifics and is either excessively broad or poorly defined, making it likely that the consumer will misinterpret what it really means. A Formaldehyde, uranium, mercury, and arsenic are all hazardous substances found in nature. 'All natural' isn't necessarily 'green'.²
4. **The sin of worshipping false labels:** A product that deceives customers into believing it has undergone a genuine green certification procedure by using a deceptive suggestion or certification-like picture. One such product is a paper towel that claims to "fight global warming" on its box, complete with an illustration resembling a certificate.
5. **The sin of irrelevance:** a truthful environmental claim that is either irrelevant or of little use to customers looking for products that are better for the environment. One typical example is the claim that a product is "CFC-free," regardless of this is banned by law.
6. **The sin of lesser of two evils:** Within the product category, this claim might be accurate, but it runs the danger of drawing the consumer's attention away from the category's overall bigger environmental implications. Sustainably produced smokes and fuel-efficient sport utility vehicles are two possible examples of this sin.
7. **The sin of fibbing:** Environmental statements that are merely untrue. The most frequent instances were goods making fraudulent claims to be Energy Star registered or certified.

² ibid

FIRM-LEVEL AND PRODUCT/SERVICE LEVEL GREENWASHING

Delmas and Burbano³ classifies greenwashing into firm-level and product/service level greenwashing. Product/service level greenwashing refers to a product or service's **environmental benefits**, whereas firm-level greenwashing is the act of deceiving customers about an organization's **environmental practices**.

The "Ecomagination" campaign by General Electric, which promoted the company's environmental initiatives while simultaneously advocating against new clean air EPA regulations, is an illustration of firm-level greenwashing. The LG refrigerators that are mis-certified as Energy Star are an example of greenwashing at the product level. The eco-label claimed energy efficiency. After more investigation, it was discovered that the 10 LG refrigerator models did not satisfy the energy efficiency requirements needed to be certified. Claim greenwashing and Executional greenwashing are the two subcategories of methods that emerge when examining firm- or product-level greenwashing more closely. Claim greenwashing refers to the employment of textual arguments that make false environmental claims while making references, either directly or indirectly, to the ecological or environmental benefits of using a product or service.

Typically, you'll see these three categories of claim greenwashing:

1. those employing false claims;
2. those omitting important information that could help evaluate the claim sincerity, and
3. those employing vague or ambiguous term, which could simply be just straight up lying.⁴

On the other hand, executional greenwashing makes no use of any textual assertions. This tactic incorporates aspects of nature, such organic colors and sounds, into their packaging and marketing. A well-executed greenwashing campaign can be seen in the backgrounds of ads or products with a natural theme, images of endangered animals, or images of renewable energy sources. These components can influence a consumer's impression by using natural images and triggering positive associations, leading them to assume that a certain company or/and their

³ Magali A. Delmas and Vanessa Cuerel Burbano, University of California, The Drivers of Greenwashing, on October 1st, 2011, last accessed on 03/08/2024.

⁴ Beatrice Parguel, Florence Benoit- Moreau and Cristel Antonia Russel, Research gate, Can Evoking Nature in Advertising Mislead Consumers? The Power of 'Executional Greenwashing', on 26th November 2014, last accessed on 04/08/2024.

goods (services) are environmentally friendly.⁵

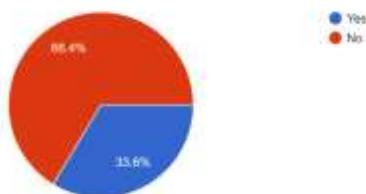
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- a. **Primary Data:** Primary data was gathered through a Google Forms survey distributed to a diverse sample of respondents. The survey aimed to capture consumer attitudes and awareness regarding greenwashing in cosmetics, as well as their perceptions of sustainability claims. The questionnaire included both quantitative and qualitative questions to gather comprehensive insights into consumer behavior and opinions.
- b. **Secondary Data:** Data was collected from a range of online sources, including academic journals, industry reports, and reputable websites. This data provided a foundational understanding of greenwashing practices, environmental impacts, and consumer perceptions within the cosmetics industry. Key sources included Changing Markets Foundation reports, Euromonitor studies, and Environmental Working Group analyses.

RESULTS OF GOOGLE FORM

We sent the survey to individuals and received approximately 110 responses. Among these, 76% were from respondents aged 16-25, while the remaining were aged 25 and above. Of the total responses, 83% were female. Additionally, 61% of the respondents were students, while the rest were working professionals or housewives.

Are you aware of the concept called "Greenwashing" in the context of cosmetic industry?
107 responses

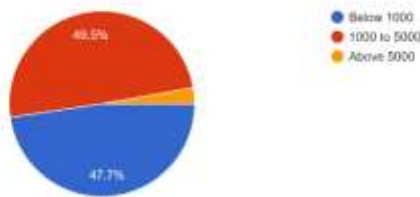


Many people were not aware of the term green washing even if they know something like this existed.

⁵ P Hartmann and V Apolaza-Ibáñez, Research gate, Green Branding Effects on Attitude: Functional Versus Emotional Positioning Strategies, on 1st January 2005, last accessed on 04/08/2024.

How much on an average do you spend on cosmetics (including shampoo, deodorant, perfumes etc.)

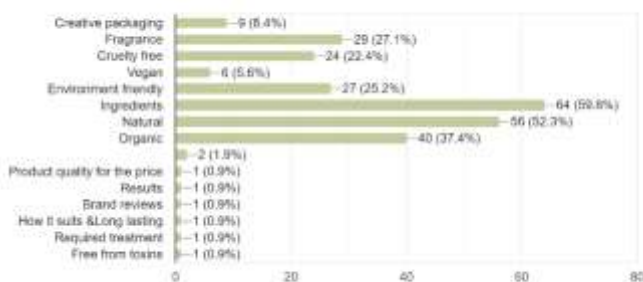
107 responses



With the response of the people we found out students spend upto rs 5000 on average for skincare, haircare and cosmetics

Your choice of beauty products depends on

107 responses



With the response we came to know most of the people buy products based on the ingredients present in it.

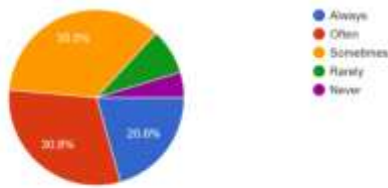
Are you aware of any sustainable beauty brands

107 responses

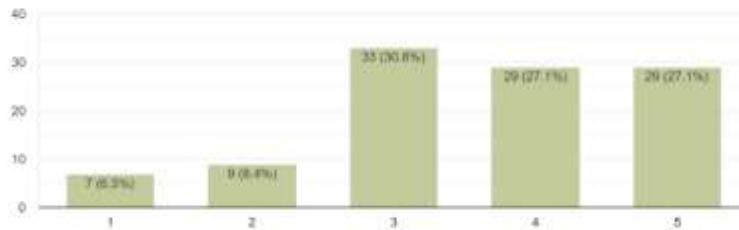


With this we got to know a more than half of the ratio of people were aware of sustainable cosmetic products

How often do you consider environmental claims (eco-friendly, natural, organic etc.) of brands when purchasing cosmetics
107 responses

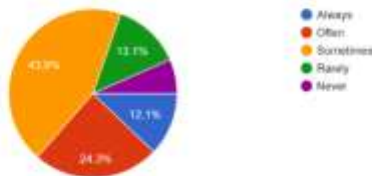


When purchasing cosmetics how important is environmental claims to you
107 responses



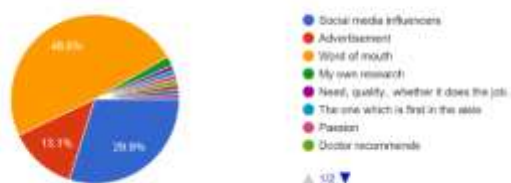
With response from both the questions combined we found out 20-30% of people always look for sustainable products and then it gradually reduces to people not always looking for sustainable products.

How often do you actively seek out information on brand's environmental practices before making a purchase decision
107 responses



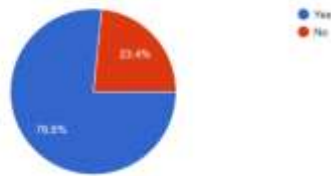
With the response from the above question we found that most of the people only sometimes seek out for information on brands environmental practice before buying from them

What influences your cosmetic choice
107 responses

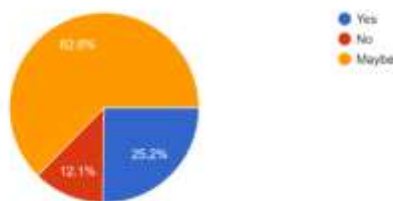


It was very clear that, most of the people make a purchase because of word of mouth then influencers and lastly ads

Are you interested in brands that are committed to and can demonstrate that are making sustainability a priority.
107 responses



Are you willing to pay more for environmentally friendly cosmetic products
107 responses



It was to our surprise to find that the response from the above two questions that around 60-70% of people are interested in purchasing from sustainable brands and to also pay more for it.

GREENWASHING, PURCHASE INTENT, AND BRAND IMAGE

purchasing Intent and Brand Image: A consumer's impression of a brand's image has a significant impact on their purchasing intentions. Customers are more likely to trust a brand that is strong and positive, which increases sales and loyalty. Brands need to have a strong green image in order to stand out as consumer knowledge and environmental concerns rise.

Effect of Greenwashing: Even if they are unfamiliar with the word, consumers are growing more conscious of greenwashing. Greenwashing can seriously harm a company's reputation and credibility. Customers may feel misled and lose faith in a business if it is shown to be engaging in greenwashing, which would reduce sales and loyalty. Even if a product seems eco-friendly or if a corporation seems dedicated to sustainability, this can nonetheless occur.

The fallout from greenwashing

- **Consumer deception:** People may select items they think are environmentally beneficial, even while they are not.
- **Environmental Damage:** In an effort to save money, businesses may compromise sustainability, which depletes resources and contributes to pollution.

- **Erosion of Trust:** When customers learn that a company engages in greenwashing, they may feel deceived and have less faith in the brand and its offerings.

Greenwashing hurts the entire industry in addition to the implicated brand. It may result in a broad drop in customer confidence, which would make it more difficult for firms that are truly sustainable to win people over. In order to stand out from competitors who use greenwashing tactics, sustainable firms need to put in more effort into correctly and clearly communicating their environmental initiatives and sincerity.

GREENWASHING THROUGH INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR) IN THE COSMETIC INDUSTRY:

The cosmetic industry is characterized by rapid innovation and intense competition, increasingly leveraging Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) to protect products and processes. However, the rising allure of sustainability and environmental consciousness has led to a surge in "green" cosmetic products, accompanied by the deceptive practice of greenwashing. Greenwashing involves marketing products as environmentally friendly without substantive evidence, often intersecting with IPR, including trademarks, patents, and packaging designs.

GREENWASHING MECHANISM IPR

1. Trademarks:

Businesses imply sustainability with words like "natural," "eco," or "green" in their brand names, logos, and taglines.

Even if the items don't adhere to the suggested environmental criteria, it might be challenging to challenge these trademarks because they are protected by IPR rules.

2. Patents:

Businesses claim minimal environmental advantages from small product improvements that they receive patents for.

Through deceptive marketing, patents enhance the company's eco-friendly image by providing a façade of innovation and sustainability.

2. Design of Packaging

Eco-friendly packaging designs are intended to convey the idea of a generally sustainable product. These designs are shielded by trade dress and design patents. This tactic deceives customers by associating environmentally friendly packaging with environmentally friendly products.

3. Labels and Marks of Certification:

While some businesses design their own certification marks to resemble legitimate eco-labels, they don't follow strict verification procedures.

These IPR-protected trademarks may deceive customers into thinking that a product's environmental claims have been independently evaluated.

4. Consequences for the Environment and Customers:

- Misled consumers frequently pay more for products that fall short of their environmental claims.
- When unsustainable methods persist under the pretence of green marketing, the environment suffers.
- Dishonest business practices can result in a decline in customer confidence, a drop in revenue, a rise in client turnover, harm to one's reputation, and more regulatory attention

Consumer and Regulatory Actions:

- **Tighter Rules and Implementation:**

In order to make sure that environmentally friendly patents, trademarks, and design rights actually assist the environment, regulatory agencies must carefully examine them.

Strict regulations and openness can reduce the abuse of intellectual property rights in the continuation of greenwashing.

- **Encouragement of Conscientious Knowledge Transfer (KT):**

Ensuring, in order to stop the dissemination of false information, that businesses purchasing or licensing green technologies are fully aware of their environmental repercussions.

- **Educated Consumer Decisions:**

In order to make educated judgements, consumers should demand responsibility and openness from brands and look for reliable third-party certifications.

IPR laws are crucial for safeguarding inventions and brand identities, but they can also be abused to encourage greenwashing in the cosmetics sector. To address this issue and promote a truly sustainable industry, strong regulatory frameworks, strict enforcement, transparent certification procedures, and educated consumer choices are necessary.

GREENWASHING INFLUENCER MARKETING

Influencer marketing makes use of social media influencers' credibility and reach to market items by taking advantage of their power to influence consumer perceptions. Influencers are essential in the cosmetics market as they promote items by stressing their features and advantages. However, when influencers advocate items with incorrect or deceptive environmental claims, this potent instrument can also contribute to the practice of "greenwashing."

Greenwashing in Beauty Products: Greenwashing is the term for when businesses give false information about sustainable practices, overstate the environmental benefits of their packaging, or exaggerate the use of natural ingredients in their products. Such claims can spread widely and frequently go undetected since there are no uniform laws or certification requirements.

THE INFLUENCER MARKETING -GREENWASHING NEXUS

When influencers promote products with questionable environmental credentials, their large followings and perceived sincerity can magnify the messaging associated with greenwashing. Influencers may unintentionally (or intentionally) contribute to the greenwashing narrative by endorsing items that aren't actually sustainable if they promote them using unsubstantiated claims or deceptive marketing collateral.

An influencer might, for instance, support a skincare brand that makes the claim to be "100% natural and eco-friendly" without doing any research on the subject. The influencer's support may give the items a false sense of sustainability if they are not supported by clear data or if they have dangerous chemicals

Taking Action: Several steps are necessary to stop greenwashing through influencer marketing.
Accountability and Transparency: Influencers have an obligation to confirm the claims made by the companies they endorse, particularly with regard to sustainability.

- **Tighter Regulations:** To guarantee that all statements are accurate and supported by evidence, regulatory organisations should impose strict rules on endorsements and advertising.
- **Consumer Education:** It's important to motivate customers to do independent product research and look for third-party certifications that support sustainability promises.

IMPACT OF GREENWASHING IN COSMETIC-INGREDIENTS IN SUSTAINABILITY

- 1. Packaging:** The trash from the cosmetics industry's packaging greatly adds to the depletion of resources and worldwide pollution from plastic. For example, approximately 7.9 billion units of cosmetic trash were created in the United States in 2018, and this debris frequently ends up in landfills, generating greenhouse gases. Many products are still packaged in non-biodegradable materials, even though other brands employ environmentally friendly materials like glass and recycled plastics. Marine life is also endangered by the microbeads included in exfoliants. Packaging that is bio-based and compostable promotes a circular economy and reduces waste, making it a more environmentally friendly choice.
- 2. Fragrance:** Dangerous compounds like formaldehyde and toluene are frequently found in contemporary scents, which are created from both synthetic and natural elements. Both environmental damage and health problems may result from these compounds. Some perfumes contain elements produced from animals, which raises ethical questions. Glass packaging, in general, can take millions of years to break down and release volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that have an effect on the quality of the air. As an example
 - Ambergris: derived from sperm and pygmy whale intestinal secretions from the bile duct. It smells like the sea and is waxy and firm.
 - Civet: the glandular secretion of small African and Asian mammals known as viverrids. In order to gather the secretion, viverrids are raised and housed in cages. The delicate yellow substance is blended with a pleasant scent.
 - Castorum: the anal glands, or the beaver castor sac. produces an animalistic, leathery smell.
 - Honey: the nectar that bees gather and keep in a honeycomb. smells flowery and pleasant.
 - Musk: the musk deer's glandular secretion. To obtain musk, deer are killed in the wild. It smells complex, woody and earthy.
- 3. Makeup:** Both natural and synthetic ingredients are used in the manufacturing of makeup, however the latter is occasionally connected to health and environmental concerns. Compounds like parabens and lead linger in landfills and can seep into the ground and water, harming ecosystems and wildlife. Even while some businesses are

switching to biodegradable packaging, a large number of products still wind up in the trash. Programs for recycling and donations do exist, however they are not always implemented.

4. Nail Products: Toxic chemicals like formaldehyde and toluene found in nail paints and removers can be harmful to the environment and human health. Polish glitter adds to the pollution caused by microplastics. Many nail products are still not biodegradable and can harm the environment if not disposed of correctly, even if there are increasingly environmentally friendly solutions.

5. Sunscreen: Mineral-based sunscreens that contain zinc oxide have lower environmental impact. Certifications like "Reef Safe" aid in identifying products that are less toxic, but reducing environmental impact requires customer understanding.

6. Cosmetic ingredients

Consumer ignorance of the many chemicals used in cosmetics is a prevalent issue in the cosmetics industry. It's possible that we are unaware of the multitude of chemicals that are included in cosmetics and their various purposes. A few of these substances may be hazardous to the environment and human health.

One often utilised substance is parabens, a preservative that stops mould and germs from growing in cosmetic goods. Nonetheless, a few studies have connected parabens to various health problems including hormone imbalances.

Phthalates are another class of chemicals that are frequently found in cosmetics; they are employed as a solvent in scents and to give polymers more pliability. Certain phthalates have been connected to problems with reproduction and development.

Another ingredient that's present in a lot of cosmetics is sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS). Commonly included in shampoos and body washes, this foaming agent can irritate skin and eyes, particularly in those with sensitive skin.

Certain cosmetic goods, such nail paint and hair straightening treatments, contain formaldehyde as a preservative. It can irritate skin, though, and is a recognised carcinogen.

Cosmetics frequently contain synthetic perfumes to give them a nice aroma. They might,

however, include a variety of potentially dangerous substances and result in allergic responses or skin irritation.

Even if not all chemicals in cosmetics are dangerous, it's still crucial to know what's in the products we use and to stick to natural or organic ingredients when possible. By educating ourselves about the chemicals commonly used in cosmetics, we can make informed choices about the products we use and take steps to protect our health and the environment.

Certifications

It can be challenging to distinguish between businesses that are genuinely good and those that are merely claiming to be good in light of the abundance of greenwashing and corporate opaqueness. Fortunately, a few certifications exist that have requirements that businesses must fulfil in order to get certified. These are a handful:

- **Ecocert:** Organic and biobased cosmetics are certified by an independent certifying authority. Products with the Ecocert certification are guaranteed to be free of dangerous chemicals, to be produced using eco-friendly practices, and to support fair trade.
- **COSMOS:** A worldwide accreditation for cosmetics made of organic and biobased materials. It is an alliance of five European certifying agencies that establishes guidelines for the use of organic and natural components, ecologically sustainable production, and ethical sourcing raw material.
- **Leaping Bunny:** Cosmetics with this accreditation have not undergone animal testing. The Leaping Bunny accreditation guarantees that no animals were used in the testing of the products or their ingredients during any part of the production process.
- **Forest Stewardship Council (FSC):** Cosmetics with packaging composed of wood or paper products supplied responsibly are certified by the FSC. The FSC accreditation guarantees that the paper or wood used in packaging originates from responsibly managed and sustainable forests.

CASE STUDY

Background:⁶ Procter & Gamble (P&G), L'Occitane, and L'Oréal are just a few of the well-known beauty brands that the Changing Markets Foundation has accused of greenwashing

⁶ Published by cosmetic business, Julia wray, L'Oréal, P&G and L'Occitane accused of greenwashing in new findings on 30 june, 2022 accessed on 3 august 2024

through its website, greenwash.com. These businesses were listed in the "hall of shame" among other well-known brands including Tesco, Nike, and Coca-Cola.

1. Head and Shoulders of P&G:

Ocean Plastic Bottles: The use of marine plastic in these bottles has drawn criticism because it doesn't considerably lessen the amount of plastics that enter the ecosystem. The bottles' 2017 UN Momentum for Change award notwithstanding, using marine plastic has no effect.

Refillable Bottles and Pouches: Due to their questionable environmental benefits, P&G's refillable aluminium bottle system and pouches were closely examined. Only one bottle refill is possible with each refill bag, and the flexible Unlike regular HDPE or PET plastic bottles, pouches are not commonly recyclable.

Response from P&G:

P&G highlights that all Head & Shoulders bottles are composed of 55% less virgin plastic and are recyclable in the UK. As part of their sustainability initiatives, they have launched innovative paper packaging and aluminium bottles. The business does admit that they are still striving for all-encompassing answers.

2. L'Occitane

Flexible Packaging Pouches: L'Occitane has been under fire for using flexible refillable pouches that are not recyclable and only last for a few refills before needing to be replaced. The advantages of their partially recyclable bottles in terms of sustainability are compromised by this strategy.

o **In-Store Refill Stations:** Six UK stores have tested refill stations for the company, however this is viewed as inadequate in comparison to the scale of their global operations.

L'Occitane Response:

o While L'Occitane has received praise for their attempts to test refill stations, they are currently under fire for using non-recyclable packaging materials.

3. L'Oréal

o **Recycled Plastic Claims:** Elvive brand bottles from L'Oréal assert that they are composed entirely of recycled plastic. Nevertheless, this assertion just pertains to the bottle and not the cap, giving rise to allegations of deceiving customers regarding the sustainability of the product.

Response from L'Oréal:

Although the corporation is praised for its efforts in the sustainability department, it has come under fire for not fully disclosing the extent of its claims regarding recycled materials.

According to research by the Changing Markets Foundation, a number of well-known cosmetic businesses are guilty of greenwashing, especially when it comes to their use of recyclable materials and refillable solutions. The main points of contention are the exaggerated statements and scant environmental advantages of their purportedly sustainable practices. The case study underscores the need for greater transparency and genuine commitment to sustainability in the beauty industry.

CONCLUSION

Despite its reputation for innovation and rapid global expansion, the cosmetics sector still has a long way to go before it can effectively combat greenwashing, which subverts real sustainability initiatives. Even with the industry's advances in sustainable products and eco-friendly packaging, many businesses still engage in greenwashing, tricking customers with flimsy or false environmental claims.

The Changing Markets Foundation's examination of well-known brands like L'Oréal, P&G, and L'Occitane brings to light how commonplace greenwashing is in the business. The disconnect between claimed sustainability and real environmental impact is best illustrated by the use of plastics that end up in the ocean and refill options that aren't very recyclable. Comparably, false statements on the effectiveness of sustainable packaging solutions and the recyclability of materials highlight the need for increased accountability and transparency.

It takes a multifaceted strategy to solve these problems. Improved regulatory frameworks must be put in place to guarantee that sustainability claims are supported by transparent, comprehensible data. Informed decision-making is greatly aided by consumer education, which helps people distinguish between true sustainability and greenwashing. In order to support their sustainability claims, businesses must also adhere to strict certification requirements and standards, like Ecocert, COSMOS, and Leaping Bunny.

SUGGESTIONS

- 1. Strengthen Regulatory Measures:** Stricter rules and regulations pertaining to environmental claims in cosmetics should be developed and implemented by governments and industry associations. One way to achieve this is by mandating third-party certifications and standardising the meaning of phrases like "natural," "organic," and "sustainable."
- 2. Promote Transparency:** Companies should implement transparent procedures, such as providing a thorough explanation of the origin of ingredients, the production methods used, and the environmental effect of packaging. Complete disclosure and clear labelling can assist customers in making better judgements.
- 3. Encourage Independent Verification:** To audit and confirm sustainability claims, promote the use of independent verification services. Reputable organisations' certifications can contribute to consumers' confidence that products fulfil authentic environmental criteria.
- 4. Encourage Consumer Education:** Create educational initiatives to increase public knowledge of greenwashing and the effects that cosmetics have on the environment. Giving customers the tools to investigate and validate product claims can enable them to make more environmentally friendly decisions.
- 5. Promote sector Collaboration:** To exchange best practices and create standards for the whole sector, promote cooperation between regulators, environmental organisations, and brands. Working together can accelerate the process of minimising greenwashing and improving sustainability.
- 6. Invest in Innovation:** Encourage financial support for cutting-edge, environmentally friendly products and technology. In order to improve the environmental performance of the sector, encourage research and development for substitutes for hazardous substances and non-recyclable packaging.
- 7. Expand Programs for Recycling and Refilling:** Promote the growth of recyclable and re-usable packaging options. Companies should concentrate on creating procedures that guarantee packaging is efficiently composted or recycled, cutting down on waste and lessening its negative effects on the environment.

By taking care of these issues, the cosmetics sector can go towards a more sustainable future, reducing the prevalence of greenwashing and fostering genuine environmental stewardship.

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