ANALYZING THE ORIGINS AND IMPACT OF GREENHUSHING THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT LENS

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Abstract

In an era where the world is highly concerned about the environment, what happens if producers hide their sustainable activities? This study answers this very important question and explores an under-researched topic: greenhushing. The findings of the study are expected to be an eye-opener for all stakeholders of the environment. Many manufacturers/marketers are following the concept of greenhushing, but consumers hardly know whether producers are engaging in green practices or whether they are avoiding them. The researchers employed the semi-structured interview method on 40 young Indian consumers to determine their knowledge about greenhushing and what impact, if any, it has on consumer product selection. For the analysis, NVivo was used to generate word clouds and interpret the responses and suggestions given by the respondents. The analysis revealed various factors (hedonic value, utilitarian value, environmental concern, green labelling, and green trust) that need to be communicated mandatorily. Further, significant recommendations were made by thoroughly examining the existing literature and aligning it with the interview responses. The findings of the study highlight the relevance of proper and clear communication of product-related information, which may be a help for producers and policymakers, along with society in general.

Keywords: Greenhushing, Greenblushing, Greenwashing, Environmental Concern, Green Labelling, Signaling Theory, Legitimacy Theory

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1. INTRODUCTION

The global deterioration of the environmental ecosystem has raised the alarm for decision-makers to acknowledge that the buying behaviour of consumers may be one of the root causes for the catastrophe (Shah et al., 2023; Mohd Suki et al., 2021; Kumar & Tarkar, 2024). Environmental sustainability has become a global concern, and it has forced every stakeholder to work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 (Zang et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2025).

The United Nations (UN) Agenda 2030 is an agenda focused on people, planet, and prosperity, and the associated SDGs provide a unique framework for assessing the existing production and consumption system holistically, by shifting unsustainable consumption and production patterns to sustainable ones (UN General Assembly, 2015). Green consumption has emerged as a realistic and effective answer to serious environmental issues (Nguyen & Le, 2020; Mishra et al., 2023). It is the duty, not only of governments and producers but of every soul on the planet, to preserve and make optimum use of

available resources. Consumers play an important role in sustainability by widely accepting green products. One thing that has been observed is that manufacturers will only be able to produce green products if consumers are ready to pay for them and governments are willing to help manufacturers by, for example, subsidizing green products.

It is crucial to understand that a green product is not necessarily "green" in itself but may also be called green due to its lifecycle, from manufacturing to disposal (Nguyen & Le, 2020). It is imperative that consumers' preferences towards green consumption change with the changing environmental scenario, which will be ultimately helpful in generating favourable outcomes for society too (Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen, 2017). It has been suggested that, compared to conventional products, green products require promotional approaches to raise consumer awareness about the products and their benefits (Rizzi et al., 2022; Prakash et al., 2023; Agrawal et al., 2026). Several marketers have used green marketing techniques to gain a competitive edge and attract environmentally sensitive consumers (Szabo & Webster, 2020). One of the best approaches is advertising the product to make consumers aware of the environmentally friendly qualities of the product as well as the company's sustainable activities (Shin & Ki, 2019).

Marketers have better knowledge of consumers' communication requirements. Communication or promotion of any product should be balanced and should neither involve overcommunication nor under-communication (Figure 1). It has been found that some companies rarely do anything to reduce their carbon footprint, but they exaggerate the same through over-communication, in a process called "greenwashing" (Montero-Navarro et al., 2021). Though most people are aware of greenwashing, very few are aware of the practice of "greenhushing". Companies may remain silent about their sustainable processes because of the fear of being involved in greenwashing, which leads to greenhushing, the converse of greenwashing; also referred to as "greenblushing". Greenhushing is defined as under-communication of a company's environmental efforts or performance (Sonawala, 2023).

The term greenhushing was anecdotally coined by Jerry Stifelman in 2008, but it was first used in the academic literature by Font et al. (2017) to refer to the notion that contrasts with greenwashing (Ettinger et al., 2021). Both greenwashing and greenhushing are unfavourable for society and marketers, so they need proper attention. It has been found that marketers at times choose to hide companies' environmental efforts to reduce the gap between consumer expectations and companies' actual efforts concerning sustainability issues.

This study examines the perception of consumers towards any brand they believe is environmentally friendly, but which marketers rarely promote using green claims. Few companies engage in greenhushing because they view climate action as a niche concern. They believe that consumers prioritize personal benefits over environmental initiatives and fear that focusing on sustainability may compromise their brand image (Greenhalgh, 2022). Companies must understand, however, that a lack of communication about sustainability, as a manifestation of strategic inactivity, restricts the dissemination of socially and ecologically acceptable activities, stifling advances in the sustainability movement and prosocial behaviour (Carlos & Lewis, 2018). It is crucial that both the manufacturers and consumers are made aware of greenhushing. To shed light on this topic, the researchers conducted an exploratory study to examine the extant literature on greenhushing or greenblushing, but could find very few works related to the problem. In fact, most research available on greenhushing was found to be done in the tourism sector (Coles et al., 2017; Ettinger et al., 2021; Font et al., 2017).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the significance of greenhushing, this study employed qualitative research techniques and an interpretive approach to achieve the intended objectives (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Since there has been limited discussion of greenhushing in the existing literature, a semi-structured interview approach was adopted. Open-ended questions were used to gather information and to offer the participants ample opportunity to share their perspectives extensively. At the beginning of the interview, the researchers acknowledged that there are no right or wrong responses but only different opinions. For the sake of participants' comfort in discussing their viewpoints, the researchers opted for the interview method, as it has been observed that, at times, respondents look for socially acceptable responses. The method for conducting interviews in a structured phenomenological approach involves asking questions that centre on the themes of understanding experiences within their context, grasping the phenomenon itself, and providing further clarification (Bevan, 2014). It is important to keep in mind that the phenomenological method is a comprehensive approach, which involves immersion from the beginning rather than just during data analysis. The study focused on the signaling theory. The significance of promoting environmental claims by emphasizing the signaling theory is supported by the literature. This theory focuses on how signals affect the choices we make every day. It talks about times when signalers provide signals that give accurate information. When decision-makers do not have all the information they need, signals can assist them in making better choices. One of the main goals of this idea is to make information identical. This study shows how important it is to send unambiguous signals to stakeholders with actual green labelling. The study is expected to help various stakeholders understand the impact of greenhushing on buying behavior.

The study provides the following research objectives:
1) to understand the impact of greenhushing;
2) to evaluate the perception of consumers towards the criteria they follow while buying green products;
3) to explore the factors considered by consumers when they buy any product;
4) to give insights to different stakeholders in making decisions for promoting the green claims of the products.

The study found that hedonic value, utilitarian value, environmental concern, green labelling, and green trust play an important role in buying green products. Thus, it can be said that if marketers hide their green practices, then consumers will shift to other brands.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 analyses the research methodology. Section 4 deals with the results of data analysis. Section 5 discusses the results. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many recent studies have examined how apprehensive consumers are about environmental claims, with a focus on the significance of being transparent (Ulusoy & Barretta, 2016). The research reveals that clear and believable environmental statements, backed by real certifications, may increase trust and enhance the brand experience (Kovač et al., 2025). Thus, the literature supports the importance of promoting environmental claims by emphasizing the Signaling theory. This theory emphasizes the role of signals in making daily life decisions. It talks about situations in which signalers deliver signals that provide reliable information. Signals can help decision-makers make better choices when they lack all the necessary knowledge (Connelly et al., 2025). One of the primary objectives of this theory is to equalize information (Taj, 2016). In the context of the current study, it highlights the importance of conveying clear signals to stakeholders through genuine labels. So that if producers are not communicating the environmental claims, signals may communicate the required information to the final decision-makers.

Figure 1. Level of communication about green products
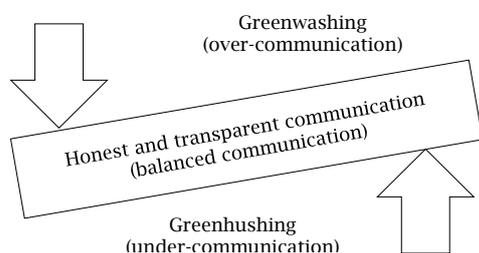
Source: Researchers' elaboration.

Marketers modify their sustainability messages and enhance their effectiveness based on assessments of the market's potential response (Smith & Font, 2015). Font et al. (2017) illustrate the classification of firms based on two criteria: communication and environmental performance. Vocal green firms (VGF) and silent brown firms (SBF) are balanced communicators. VGF perform well in environmental terms and communicates those efforts, while SBF is a bad performer and communicates nothing. There are, however, firms that perform well with respect to sustainable activities but are poor at communicating them. In other words, the real sustainability of the product is high in greenhushing/silent green firms, but green marketing is very low (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Rather than promoting their environmental credentials, greenhushing businesses usually under-communicate their performance or may be hesitant to publicize their sustainable initiatives for fear of being trapped by false accusations of greenwashing (Sonawala, 2023). It is good to walk the talk, but above all, it is necessary to talk the walk (Amores-

Salvadó et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2024). However, Legitimacy theory suggests that companies, under stakeholder pressure, utilize environmental information disclosure as a communication tactic to validate the legitimacy of their environmental policies (Xu & Lyu, 2025). But due to the fear of legitimacy, companies often engage in greenwashing. In contrast, this theory recommends promoting environmental activities and thus claims accordingly.

In an era when few companies are engaging in greenwashing due to the fear of legitimacy theory, on the contrary, there exist companies that engage in greenhushing due to the fear of false accusations of green claims. Thus, the study explores the factors that influence consumers' decisions to buy green products.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Taking a cue from the extant literature, a qualitative research technique was considered for studying the phenomenon since it is at an early stage. This technique has the potential to provide a deep and comprehensive knowledge of the topic (Turkcu & Tura, 2023). The qualitative research method aims to study the settings in which individuals or groups make decisions and demonstrate distinctive actions while simultaneously seeking to understand the underlying phenomena (Aboelazm et al., 2025). The essence of qualitative research, as demonstrated by its capacity to provide thorough explanations for observable phenomena, rests on the open-ended nature of discussions during interviews. Employing semi-structured interviews allowed for a rigorous and purpose-driven data collection, tailored to align with the stated research objectives.

The literature indicates that partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) and regression analysis are the predominant data analysis methods employed in the realm of green consumption. Subsequent researchers may incorporate contemporary statistical tools such as machine learning algorithms and big data analytics to discern patterns and insights that are difficult to detect with traditional methodologies. Further researchers may explore alternative qualitative methodologies, such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, which can yield rich, detailed data that quantitative approaches may overlook (Irfan & Bryła, 2025).

This interview method is particularly effective for addressing crucial research questions, while also providing the opportunity to thoroughly investigate specific themes, which helps future researchers to study the topic using further tools. It helps the researchers influence conversations, ensuring focus on relevant subjects and maintaining the conversation relevant to the study objectives. Such flexibility is considered crucial for capturing a full view of the area under study (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022).

3.1. Data collection

Data was collected through structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions. The researchers conducted interviews with consumers of different occupations who showed willingness to buy green products in the age group of 25–40 years. This age group is often referred to as millennials, who are

individuals born during the period 1981–1997 (Dimock, 2019; Kurz et al., 2019). Millennials were considered for the study because they are economically strong and tend to have the highest willingness to pay extra for sustainable offerings (Ahmad et al., 2024; Naderi & Van Steenburg, 2018; Sharma et al., 2025).

3.2. Sample characteristics

Researchers were able to interview 40 consumers. The demographic profile of the respondents is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent demographics

| Variable	Frequency
Gender	
Male	24
Female	16
Age	
25–30	26
31–35	9
36–40	5
Educational qualification	
Graduate	18
Post-graduate	12
Research scholar	5
Ph.D.	3
Other	2
Occupation	
Working professional	29
Self-employed	9
Homemaker	2

Source: Interview transcripts collected by the researchers.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data collected from the interviews were analysed keeping the study objectives in mind. When the respondents were asked about the last time that they had purchased any green product and their reason for doing so, the responses varied, but the time range was around 1–2 weeks. Additionally, the study employed a documentary strategy, evaluating secondary materials to derive significant conclusions. The major reasons behind the purchase included environmental concern, health concerns, and quality. This suggests that consumers prefer to buy products that are good for their health as well as for the environment. There were a few respondents who did not remember their last purchase, and, interestingly, there was only one respondent who mentioned financial concern: "*I haven't bought or preferred any green/ environmentally friendly product deliberately as far as I remember. Being financially economical is always the utmost priority for me while buying any product*" (personal communication, June 10, 2023). Since the environment-friendly products tend to be a bit costlier compared to conventional products, there appear to be consumers who opt for non-green products out of financial concern.

The next question was about the number of green products usually purchased per month to gauge behaviour towards green products (Figure 2). Most respondents had bought at least one green product per month, while three respondents stated that they always purchased environmentally friendly products.

Figure 2. Monthly green product purchasing habits
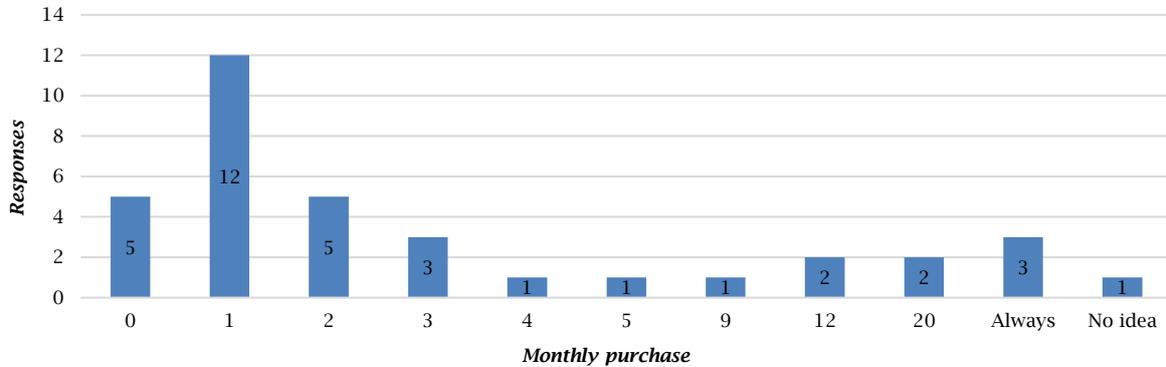
Source: Interview transcripts collected by the researchers.

The next question pertained to the criteria they considered when purchasing green and non-green products (Table 2). Various themes appeared, including hedonic value, utilitarian value, environmental concern, green labelling, and green trust (Figure 3). However, two participants identified a distinct criterion that diverged from the other themes and prioritized over various criteria.

Although there was one particular criterion — functionality and quality — that marketers should take note of, as consumers prioritized them above everything else. They explicitly stated their willingness to forego green products if the products failed to meet expectations. This insight is a valuable reminder for marketers seeking to capture consumer interest in an increasingly green market.

Table 2. Summary for themes

Themes	Criteria considered to purchase products
Hedonic value	Quality and price, affordability, cashbacks/exchange offers/discounts, or referral rewards
Utilitarian value	Cost-effectiveness of product, durability, usability, beneficial, economical, natural, long-lasting, easy availability, should have the same functionality as its non-green counterparts, i.e., should not compromise on functionality, locally sourced, non-toxic, healthier.
Environmental concern	Eco-friendly ingredients, reusable, recyclable product, low carbon emissions, save nature, better climate, and increase human life, environment-friendly, reusable, sustainable, and environmental impact, help to save nature, reusable, and does not harm the environment, quality, cruelty-free, recycled raw materials, no plastic should be used.
Green labelling	Must be ISI & eco-marked, must be labelled, and must be the goods of a registered company. Certified, with a minimum of plastic wrapping (if required); otherwise, avoidance is the best option, with a low carbon footprint in packaging materials and recyclable packaging.
Green trust	Reliable, trustworthy service, extended warranty, and environmental claims.

Source: Interview transcripts collected by the researchers.

4.1. Hedonic value

Hedonic value focuses on the joy and satisfaction of the consumer instead of only completion of the task or fulfilment of a need (Babin et al., 1994). It is subjective and inclines more towards status symbols (Lin et al., 2018). Few researchers have mentioned that when shopping through any platform, whether offline or online, hedonic value and utilitarian value play a key role in choosing a product (Ahmad et al., 2017; Ryu et al., 2010). Hedonic value includes social and monetary value (i.e., the pleasure of looking for discounts, bargains, or any monetary incentives), brand trust, and adventure, among other aspects (To et al., 2007). With the interpretation of responses, the researchers came across various criteria mentioned by respondents, such as the "*need for the product, no harm to society, brand trust, suitable for home, cashbacks/exchange offers/discounts, or referral rewards motivating them to buy green products*". A few respondents mentioned that they would prefer high-value green products as status symbols. Thus, the findings of this study are in line with previous studies that hedonic value, which consists of financial rewards or monetary incentives, along with brand trust and green attributes, plays a crucial role in the product selection process (Kim et al., 2023; Maduku & Thusi, 2023; Mohammad, 2016).

Figure 3. Themes and sub-themes of criteria for buying products (green or non-green)
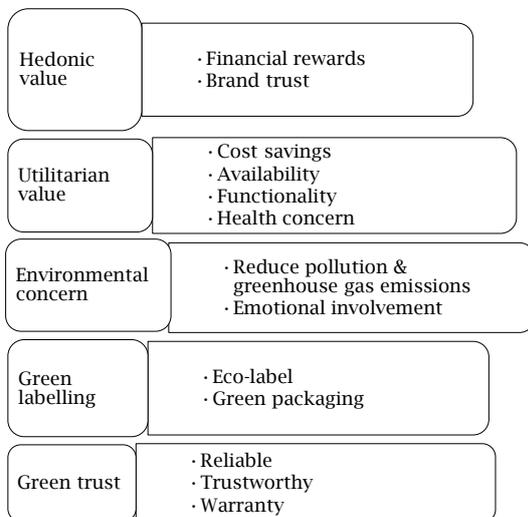
Source: Interview transcripts collected by the researchers.

4.2. Utilitarian value

Utilitarian value is linked to the tangible and functional values of a product (Lin et al., 2018). It is a cognitive value that helps the consumer in making rational decisions, and these values motivate consumers for repeat purchases (Ahmad et al., 2017; Chiu et al., 2014). According to researchers, utilitarian value is a key factor for consumers when selecting any product; it includes cost savings, convenience, quality, functionality, and so forth (To et al., 2007; Vergura et al., 2020). The respondents in this study also mentioned different criteria, such as "*cost saving, availability of products, functionality, usability, long-lasting, economical, reliable and health concern*" as some of the criteria they consider when buying products. The respondents were also very much in favour of utilitarian aspects of products, which is in line with the findings of several different researchers (Chiu et al., 2014; Etemad-Sajadi & Ghachem, 2015; Lin et al., 2018; To et al., 2007; Vergura et al., 2020).

4.3. Environmental concern

Environmental concern refers to an overall pro-environmental focus or favourable attitude towards ecologically sensitive behaviour (Chuah et al., 2020; Garg et al., 2023). It attempts to raise environmental awareness so people are emotionally attached to protecting the environment and preventing greenhouse gas emissions, and lowering pollution (Jian et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2023). The responses in the present study align with the extant literature, as the respondents mentioned that "*to buy any product they inspect whether products are organic, reusable, long-lasting, toxins free, less chemical and environment friendly, cruelty-free, no plastic should be used, less wastage should be there*". One of the respondents mentioned that "*buying durable products, protecting the environment, purchase and use of environment friendly products are of personal importance to me and my family for their health and our love for environment*" (personal communication, June 6, 2023), which clarifies the intention of consumers to buy products that are environment friendly, as well as their emotional involvement in buying goods.

4.4. Green labelling

Green labelling or eco-labelling helps in communicating the environmental benefits of

the product to the consumer (Di Martino et al., 2019). It has also been found to help in building long-term retention of product knowledge, as well as making other consumers aware (Sörqvist et al., 2016). Consumers' preferences for purchasing ecologically friendly items may be increased by providing them with relevant information via eco-labels (Cai et al., 2017). By offering information about the ingredients as well as the manufacturing process, eco-labelling helps consumers choose a product so that they always pick the least harmful one (Di Martino et al., 2019). This helps the consumer understand the benefits of the product, such as environmentally friendly packaging, which may be reused or recycled (Ghazali et al., 2023). An eco-label with government certification, rather than a self-declaration, makes it a trustworthy source of information for the customer. One respondent explained their intentions regarding green labelling: "*I am an online buyer, when I buy anything, I ensure that the packaging of the ordered items must be eco-friendly. I used to avoid purchases if the packaging of the items is not eco-friendly*" (personal communication, June 3, 2023).

This respondent also provided us with the packaging for dairy products received online, which had a quick response (QR) code on it with instructions to scan the code for more information. The researchers found that the QR code linked to various information, including the reasons behind the use of compostable plastics, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and Central Institute of Petrochemicals Engineering & Technology certificates, frequently asked questions, ways to recycle bioplastic, and advertisements for various environmentally friendly products. The bag also clearly stated: "I'm not a plastic bag 100% compostable" with a CPCB Certificate number. The respondent mentioned that this declaration prompted him to buy goods from that specific platform. The researchers then wondered, what would be the outcome if the same company followed greenhushing? Environmental declarations are important. A few respondents mentioned that criteria such as "*recyclable or reusable packaging, green ingredients, eco-label, cost-effective, manufacturing & expiry, efficiency, must be ISI marked/green certified, minimum plastic wrapping*" were important aspects of their concern for green labelling.
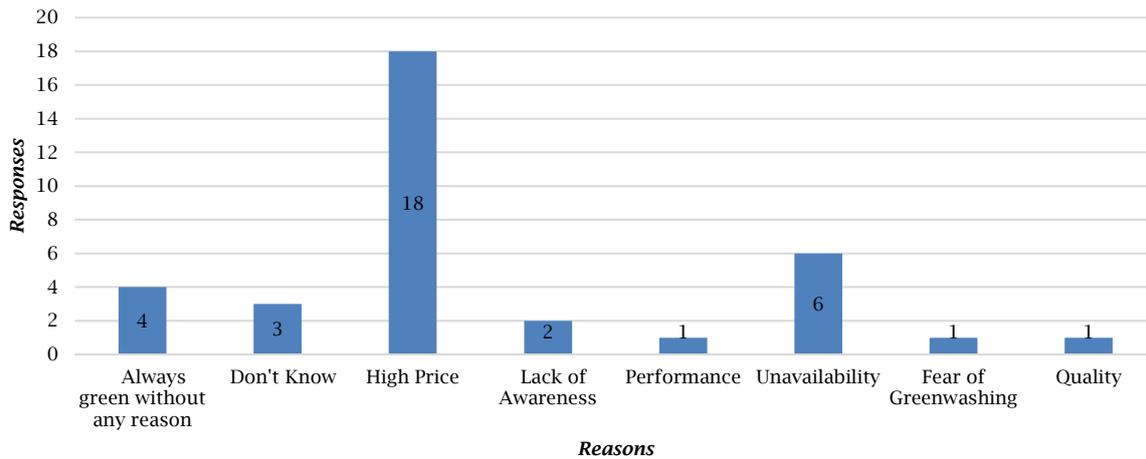
4.5. Green trust

Trust is the basis of any long-term relationship and is thus a core characteristic of long-term consumer and product relationships that leads to loyalty (Kang & Hur, 2012). Green trust is defined as consumers'

readiness to rely on the product or claims made by a company based on their belief or expectation that it is credible, kind, and environmentally responsible (Wei et al., 2017). The extant literature has measured green trust with different items, such as consumers' belief that environmental claims made by producers are reliable and trustworthy (Chen & Chang, 2012; Gil & Jacob, 2018), and consumers' feeling that the environmental functions of a product are generally reliable, dependable, trustworthy, and commitment-oriented (Chen, 2013). Consumers tend to believe that green traits contribute to higher quality, less harm to the environment, and higher overall satisfaction (Aprianti et al., 2021). The in-depth analysis of the responses generated through the interviews revealed that the major criteria of consumers for buying product(s) are "product quality, reliability, service, trustworthy, dependable, positive reviews/rating", which highlights the importance of green trust while buying products.

The researchers also inquired about the respondents' familiarity with green products. The answers provided by the respondents were quite impressive. One of them replied that green products are "*those that take care of environmental issues while satisfying individuals' need*" (personal communication, June 6, 2023), while another mentioned that they were products "*which do not harm the environment and it is made from sustainable products*" (personal communication, June 10, 2023). One respondent replied eloquently, "*Something that … one, … has been produced involving processes having low carbon emission, low impact on forest/vegetation, low fossil fuel consumption, low waste products, and overall making better impact on environment than its counterparts; two, … is likely to have all the above characteristics throughout its lifespan of usage; three, … when needed to be discarded shall show all the above characteristics, including being reusable or recyclable*".

All the related responses were analysed in NVivo 12 software through the creation of a word cloud to determine the most-used words for green products. Word clouds are a visual representation of word frequency in a corpus of texts, such as interview responses (Stanca et al., 2023). Here, various words were used to define green products, and the words with the highest frequency appear larger than the less frequently used smaller words. The findings suggest that the words used by interviewees, from most to least frequent, are environment-friendly products, green, recycled, sustainable, certified, and so on (Figure 4). Many consumers appear to consider green products as environmentally friendly.

Figure 4. Words used to explain green products

Source: Interview transcripts collected by the researchers.

When questioned about greenhushing, 75% of the respondents had no prior knowledge about the subject; however, the remaining 25% were able to provide a clear explanation with accompanying examples. Some participants mistakenly associated it with greenwashing. Additionally, an unaware consumer mentioned it in a conversation about the interviewer's statement: "*Never heard of this term before now. Going by the interviewer's definition, I think greenhushing is defined as detrimental to every living thing on this planet. However, as a personal opinion, I wouldn't also like a company to showcase its products, giving major focus to its green/sustainable characteristics and leaving the actual functionalities out of the spotlight*" (personal communication, June 10, 2023).

The respondent's main request for the manufacturers is to prioritize their functionality instead of emphasizing their green features, which indicates their concern about the current prevalence of greenwashing (Ding et al., 2024), which makes them sceptical. Consumers' responses to greenhushing reveal their lack of knowledge about companies' actions and the process of greenhushing. Indeed, it is evident that consumers perceive products as environmentally friendly or green only if manufacturers claim so. During the interviews, the respondents raised a relevant question of why anyone would conceal their positive efforts. One interviewee also pointed out that if greenwashing is seen as negative, then greenhushing is no better. During the conversation with participants, it was discovered that only one respondent supported greenhushing after understanding its meaning. All other participants advised companies against concealing their sustainable efforts as they believed that raising awareness about these initiatives would assist consumers in making more informed choices while selecting products.

When participants were asked about their product preferences, they were given two options: 1) a product with green labelling, or 2) any product that they believed was better for the environment but not marketed as green. The responses varied, but the majority expressed a preference for the product with green labelling. Given that millennials are very much concerned about the environment, it is crucial that they are aware of the eco-friendly features of products. One respondent even raised concerns about how consumers would be able to ascertain green attributes if companies engage in greenhushing. One study found that external cues play a crucial role when a buyer has insufficient understanding about a product (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014), especially when it is difficult to evaluate a product based on internal features (as in online shopping).

Greenhushing is also not good for a company's positioning. To communicate its sustainability efforts, the company may use that is, a voluntary assertion that a product has a lower adverse environmental effect (Vazifehdoust et al., 2013). Eco-labels are an example of green accreditation, and they also add value to the product. They simultaneously help consumers to choose a more environmentally friendly option (Bilynets et al., 2023). However, it is important to note that companies should adopt a well-rounded and efficient communication approach because consumers can become sceptical when differentiating between greenwashing tactics and genuinely eco-friendly products.

Figure 5. Reasons for not consuming green products

The interviewers also inquired about the factors that hinder individuals from using eco-friendly products. Some respondents expressed wholehearted support for environmentally friendly goods, asserting that no reason would deter them from consuming green products. Most people prioritized price over availability, however, and had little concern for quality, greenwashing, performance, and awareness (Figure 5).

Upon grasping the underlying motive, the next question sought to reveal what inspired them to adopt a green consumption pattern (Figure 5). The analysis revealed that the surge in environmental concern served as the primary impetus for altering their consumption habits in favour of green products. Many respondents also mentioned their friends, family, peer groups, and society (which were coded as subjective norms), as well as environmental awareness through education, and advertisement through newspaper articles, social media influencers, or online platforms. Other sources included the availability of the product, government policies, sufficient income, and health concerns.

At the conclusion of the interview, the researchers asked the participants to provide suggestions for companies engaged in pro-environmental activities that do not actively promote their environmentally friendly efforts. Some individuals were not able to provide suggestions, but most respondents recommended that companies promote their products in a positive manner, which would allow both consumers and producers to become aware of the sustainable features of the products. One respondent mentioned, "*They need to work on this issue … Because if they won't do this, then they will be kicked out of the market as the others will capture market share by promoting eco-friendly products*" (personal communication, June 3, 2023). Thus, it is evident that greenhushing is detrimental to company success. Another respondent mentioned, "*Transparency is key when it comes to communicating environmental initiatives. Therefore, the company should be more transparent about its sustainability efforts by providing information on its website, social media channels, or through other communication channels. It is necessary to educate and engage*

consumers" (personal communication, June 3, 2023). One of the respondents also highlighted that companies should market their products to encourage other companies to follow suit. Another respondent mentioned: "*Companies need to promote its green initiatives, even if it's a small label on the packing or maybe just a simple link or QR code on the packaging that refers me to maybe a website that explains what efforts the company has made to its green initiative. Not promoting green when something is green is detrimental, like an opportunity cost that the environment has to pay. One might have chosen that product over another if it was promoted green*" (personal communication, June 10, 2023).

Another respondent added, "*Make yourself visible in this fake world of greenwashing. Get maximum customer reviews. Sell trust!*" (personal communication, June 5, 2023).

Consumer awareness of and concern about environmental issues are evident in these suggestions. The respondents offered recommendations to support sustainability efforts and provided compelling reasons for their ideas. Their concerns encompassed price, quality, functionality, and a healthy scepticism towards greenwashing. To address these diverse consumer concerns effectively, companies must develop strategies that can address them comprehensively.

5. DISCUSSION

The current study adds to the existing body of knowledge on greenhushing, which is a topic that has received little attention in academia but warrants further investigation. To assist companies in understanding consumers' views on products that are environmentally friendly but are not labelled as such by the company, this study revealed that many consumers regularly purchase products that prioritize environmental sustainability, health, and quality. However, a few consumers are also deeply concerned about their financial situation when making purchases. They explicitly stated that they would not opt for more expensive products regardless of whether or not they are environmentally friendly. One possible solution to this issue is for the government to provide

subsidies to manufacturers who produce green products. To increase sales, companies focusing on environmental sustainability need to communicate information about the environment, health concerns, and product quality effectively throughout the entire production and disposal process. The analysis also revealed that only 12.5% of the respondents do not purchase any green products at all. The remaining respondents (81.5%) buy at least one green product per month, which is a positive indication of the movement towards a green and environmentally conscious society. This particular finding underscores the importance of signaling theory in informing decisions about product choice. A study found that when consumers are unclear about green claims, it may reduce the credibility of the product (Huh & Kim, 2024). If consumers have a clear idea of the benefits of the product to different stakeholders, the chances of buying the product tend to increase.

When producing and promoting their products, marketers should pay close attention to several important factors. Consumers are particularly interested in hedonic and utilitarian values, as well as the environmental concerns, green labelling, and green trust associated with a product when making a purchase decision. Hedonic and utilitarian values are strongly connected with consumer behaviour and the psychological effects of buying behaviour (Fang & Yang, 2025). The findings of the present study are in line with those of previous researchers (Ahmad et al., 2017; Chiu et al., 2014; Ryu et al., 2010; Vergura et al., 2020), who have mentioned that hedonic and utilitarian values play a crucial role in product selection.

Given that consumers have expressed the significance of these factors, it is imperative to convey them effectively through promotional initiatives or any credible medium. The participants in this research also strongly supported environmental preservation as a means to decrease carbon emissions and mitigate the detrimental effects on our planet. To inform consumers about the environmental attributes of a product, effective communication of its benefits to both consumers and society is essential. Alongside the three factors previously mentioned, consumers identified green labelling and green trust as significant criteria. It is thus imperative to establish reliable and trustworthy eco-labelling that provides consumers with information on certification, ingredients, and recyclable or reusable packaging. This information should be reliable, creating a sense of green trust among consumers, as it demonstrates organizational legitimacy. To be legitimate as an organization, it must demonstrate that it produces goods and services that are beneficial to society and adhere to social standards.

Marketers can gain valuable insights from this study on the significance of effectively communicating key factors such as hedonic value, utilitarian value, environmental concern, green labelling, and green trust. Producers need to prioritize quality and functionality when promoting green products. Some consumers have stated that they would opt for non-green alternatives if the quality does not meet their expectations or if the product fails to serve its intended purpose. This highlights the importance of ensuring that green products not only meet environmental standards but also deliver on performance and functionality. The findings indicate that while consumers are concerned about eco-friendly products, they prioritize quality and functionality above everything else. It is thus imperative for businesses to address the challenges concerning poor quality and necessary functionalities. When questioned about eco-friendly merchandise, most participants acknowledged being acquainted with the attributes of green products, while some commented on environmentally friendly items that do not cause harm to nature, have minimal carbon emissions, and exhibit reduced negative effects during consumption. These responses indicate their consciousness of green products, but when confronted with the concept of greenhushing, 75% of respondents were unfamiliar with it, and a few even added their surprise at its existence: "*Why would any company hide their positivity while some companies, as we know, are involved in greenwashing?*" It thus appears that consumers are not likely to consider a product eco-friendly if the company conceals the information, which highlights the importance of communication.

According to the findings of the study, promotional efforts play an important role in grabbing attention for green products. Balanced communication is immensely beneficial for companies, despite the considerable effort required. Indeed, consumers had a negative reaction towards greenhushing because its hidden communication conceals the potential benefits to society that could be gained through transparent communication. Effective communication plays a crucial role in benefiting various stakeholders, including consumers, producers, the government, and society as a whole. When consumers have access to accurate information, they are empowered to make environmentally friendly choices that align with their values and concerns. Producers are responsible for promoting their products by providing accurate information about quality and functionality. Doing this not only helps them gain a larger market share but also encourages positive word-of-mouth and recommendations. By implementing sustainable practices, producers can contribute to the government's meeting of SDGs targets while reducing the overall effort required. Ultimately, through correct positioning and effective communication strategies, we can create an environment where people lead a sustainable life.

6. CONCLUSION

This study, based on the in-depth interview method, sought to explore the behaviour of consumers towards green products. The results of the study reveal a complex decision-making process, shaped by a blend of ethical considerations, pragmatic needs, and a growing scepticism towards corporate environmental claims. The findings offer significant insights into consumer motivations, the critical role of product attributes, and the profound implications of communication strategies like greenwashing. Also, the concept of greenhushing was met with near-universal disapproval from informed participants who could not believe that a company would deliberately conceal its pro-environmental efforts. Respondents argued that transparency is

essential not only for their own informed decision-making but also for fostering broader market transformation by encouraging competitors to adopt sustainable practices. Consumers want to support genuinely sustainable companies, but they can only do so if those efforts are communicated effectively and honestly.

Looking at consumer preferences, producers must consider more than just the quality and functionality of their products. Price, availability, awareness, and fear of greenwashing also play a significant role. While consumers generally have environmental concerns, not all consumers are willing to pay extra for them. This presents an opportunity for policymakers to shape policies and provide subsidies to encourage the production of eco-friendly goods. Such subsidies would benefit producers financially and also help reduce prices. To increase awareness and convenience for consumers, companies could consider locating stores that sell environmentally friendly products near regular shopping outlets. Consumers could thus gain easy access to these items without spending extra energy or time. When seeking feedback from consumers on how to promote green products effectively, most respondents suggested emphasizing their environmentally friendly characteristics. By doing so, companies can encourage more individuals to purchase these products and contribute towards making our planet a better place to live. Companies must be transparent in their communication about their products' sustainability features, which are not sufficient to promote green goods effectively on their own.

While this study provides significant value to the literature and various stakeholders, it is important to acknowledge that it has some limitations too. The study is exploratory in nature and provides in-depth exploration rather than broad generalizability. The sample size and specific demographic/geographic context of the respondents may have influenced the results. Also, the study gathered responses using the interview method, which may have its inherent lacunas; thus, future studies may consider focus group discussions for more insights by including experts in the area. This study was primarily based on responses from Millennials (Gen Y) aged 25–40, but future researchers could study other generations, such as Gen X and Gen Z, to gain new insights. This study is based entirely on a qualitative approach, and future research could employ a quantitative or mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. To apply quantitative methods, the themes revealed above could be used as variables to gain a better understanding of the factors that affect greenhushing. This would enable the development of a model that could provide valuable insights into this phenomenon. It could also help to clarify the consumer perspective in greater detail and simultaneously help other stakeholders in giving new directions. The themes developed in the present study could thus serve as a basis for the formulation of new hypotheses for future research. Future research could build upon these findings through quantitative surveys to measure the prevalence of these attitudes in a larger population. Furthermore, experimental studies could be designed to test the impact of different communication strategies on consumer trust and purchase intention. To sum it up, the modern consumer is increasingly sophisticated and is willing to reward genuine environmental effort. For businesses, it is important to create high-quality, sustainable products and communicate their efforts with clarity, honesty, and transparency.

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