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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Deceptive Sustainability: Analysing the Impact of Greenwashing on Consumer Behaviour in Social Media Marketing – Case study of the Fast Fashion Industry of China

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The purpose of this paper has been of analysing the impacts of greenwashing practices and related social media marketing activities on the consumer behaviour and to study these impacts, the study has focused on the contemporary fast fashion industry of China. The reason behind the selection of this industry is that fast fashion is a considerably wasteful industry and although a number of brands in the concerned industry are trying to shift towards sustainable production and other operations, there are also increasing incorporation of greenwashing activities by these businesses. Given that the fast fashion industry in China is considerably prospective and dynamic, the study has tried to assess the ways in which perceived greenwashing practices in this industry, impact on consumer behaviour. For this purpose, surveys have been conducted with 400 respondents who are current consumers in the concerned market. The findings highlight the presence of perceptions about greenwashing practices of fast fashion brands in China, among majority of the respondents. The study also highlights that these brands use social media marketing in different manners to practice greenwashing and simultaneously retain their reputation as sustainable and environment-friendly companies, to ensure competitive advantages in the concerned markets. However, the findings also highlight the presence of knowledge about greenwashing among the customers and in presence of such practices, the trust of the customers on the credibility these companies and thereby on their social media marketing is lost, which in turn, impacts negatively on the purchasing intentions of the consumers, especially from these greenwashing fast fashion brands in the country.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The global business environment has become increasingly competitive and prospective in the current period, and there are certain factors having substantial importance for businesses as well as for other stakeholders in the international business scenario. One such factor is the rising importance of sustainability and green operations among businesses in different industries and in different parts of the world. With increased awareness generation among the general population, about the importance of sustainability and environment preservation and also with stricter environmental regulations and standards, imposed by governments of different countries, the businesses in different industries, need to incorporate sustainability and environment-friendliness in their operations, productions and goods and services (Niinimäki et al., 2020). This is especially true in case of the fast fashion industry, given that this industry has been conventionally known for high churning rate for new designs and products and thereby high wastage creation.

However, while there are evidences of businesses incorporating sustainability measures, there is also increasing practice of ***greenwashing*** by businesses, especially in the industries, like the fast fashion industry, in the current period. Greenwashing practices, in business context, generally refer to the practice of promoting and spreading false or misleading information about environment-friendliness of products, services and production operations of companies. With rising awareness among the consumers, about greenwashing practices, there are also impacts on their brand perceptions and consumer behaviour (Alexa, Apetrei and Pîslaru, 2021). Keeping this into consideration, this study, focusses on analysing the impact of greenwashing on consumer, especially focusing on the contemporary fast fashion industry in China. The ways in which greenwashing is incorporated by the companies through social media marketing and the impacts of such practices on trust and purchase intentions of the consumers, in this market, have been studied.

2. BACKGROUND, RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The fashion industry in China is a highly prospective industry experiencing constant growth and global demand and currently the fashion industry of the country accounts for more than 60% of the world's clothing manufacturing (Says, 2021). The biggest segment of the fashion industry of the country, is fast fashion, with the market expected to experience an annual growth rate of 8.54% between 2023-2027, and also with an expected market valuation of 312.9 billion USD by 2027. The industry is dominated by local brands like Shein and also by international fast fashion leaders like Zara and H&M, and mainly caters to the fast-changing fashion needs of the young population in the concerned country (Daxue Consulting, 2023). However, with the rising demand for fast fashion in the country, China has also become responsible for throwing away more than 26 million tons of clothes annually, and there are also concerns regarding wages, working conditions and compliance to labour laws by these businesses, thereby indicating the need for the concerned industry and its consumers to be more sustainable (FreedomUnited.org, 2024). While there is a general trend of shift of these businesses towards sustainable practices, however, there is also rise in greenwashing practices of different sorts, by the fast fashion businesses in the country. Many brands in the fast fashion industry in China, resort to extensive social media marketing where they try to promote themselves as sustainable, through unsubstantial or partially true claims, by spreading information about minor initiatives and also by misleading green labelling of their products. There is also increasing awareness among the general consumer population, about these greenwashing practices (Alexa, Apetrei and Pîslaru, 2021).

Keeping this into consideration, it becomes important to analyse the ways in which the brands in the fast fashion industry in China, incorporate greenwashing practices, especially through extensive social media promotions and also the impacts of such practices on the consumer behaviour in this industry, in general. It is also important to understand the perceptions of the consumers in this industry, regarding greenwashing and how the same impacts on their trust on the businesses in the fast fashion industry, and thereby on their purchasing intentions, especially in the current period of increased awareness generation regarding the importance of sustainability. These research problems have been targeted in this study. The following research objectives have been addressed in the below sections of this paper:

- To analyse the perceptions of consumers in the fast fashion industry of China, regarding greenwashing practices
- To assess the ways in which social media marketing is used by the fast fashion brands for greenwashing
- To analyse the impacts of greenwashing practices on consumer behaviour
- To develop recommendations for sustainable and more effective operations of the fast fashion businesses in the country

3. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS LITERATURES

With the rising importance of sustainable and responsible behaviour of businesses and also with the increasing incidents of greenwashing in different industries across the world, there are different literary works which discuss the current greenwashing strategies incorporated by businesses, the roles played by social media marketing in this domain and also the impacts of perceived

greenwashing practices on the consumer behaviour, in light of theories and experiences. In this section, a comprehensive review of the previous literatures has been included which has not only facilitated preliminary insight development to carry out this study, but has also helped in identifying the gaps in the current literatures, which have been addressed in the following chapters of this study.

3.1 Greenwashing: meaning, elements and reasons

Different scholars have put forward different definitions and understanding of the concept of greenwashing, especially in the context of the contemporary business practices. Yang et a;. (2020), in this context, comprehensively define this practice as an act often incorporated by businesses to mislead their customers and other stakeholders regarding their environmental practices and also regarding sustainability and environment-friendliness of their products and services. de Freitas Netto et al. (2020), highlight that greenwashing practices often involve claims about products and services that are vague, selectively false or completely false and the types of claim deceptiveness, in greenwashing practices of businesses. According to the scholarly work of Kurpierz and Smith (2020), there are different forms of greenwashing, as can be observed in the contemporary global business environment. However, the most common form of greenwashing practices is that of the development of marketing and promotional contents about products and services of different businesses, where false or misleading information about the sustainability and positive environmental impacts about their products and services are discussed. This helps the brands to convince customers about their seriousness regarding sustainability, even though in reality, that may not be the case.

There are different reasons behind the increasing evidences of greenwashing activities across different industries and by different businesses and various scholars have tried to put forward and discuss these reasons and contributing factors. As per the assertions of Liu et al. (2023), one of the primary and major driving factors behind greenwashing tendencies of most of the businesses, across the globe, is the rising awareness among the consumers and other stakeholders, regarding the importance of sustainable and green products and services for protecting the environment and the welfare of the current and the future generations. With increasing inclination of customers towards sustainable companies, and also with stricter regulations and environmental standards implemented by the governments across the globe, it has become crucial for businesses to appear to be sustainable and environment-friendly, to retain their market positioning and competitive advantages. On the other hand, as highlighted by Gregory (2023), actual sustainable operations and production changes as well as compliance to the stricter environmental standards can be considerably costly, thereby affecting the profitability of businesses, which also leads to more incentives for greenwashing for businesses, even if that increases their risks of penalties or fines, if they are exposed.

3.2 Greenwashing strategies and roles of social media marketing

There are different greenwashing strategies that are currently observed to be commonly implemented in the global business environment. Pimonenko et al. (2020), highlight the most common ones being irrelevant and unachievable claims about the environmental impacts of the operations and products of different businesses and also promotion of false or misleading information about their sustainability initiatives. Providing vague information about the materials used for production, the production process and certifications of the companies, and also highlighting only ethical and sustainable aspects of their products and services, in an effort to hide the environmentally detrimental elements, can also be considered as common greenwashing practices in the business environment (Kurnaz, 2021). According to Saukko (2024), ***greenhushing and green crowding*** have also become common practices for greenwashing products and operations by different businesses across the globe. While the first term indicates the practice of under-reporting of sustainability performance and initiatives of businesses to avoid critical evaluation and scrutiny of the same, on part of the investors, the second one is a practice where a company aligns itself with the least ambitious sustainability goals, thereby crowding out the negative aspects of greenwashing by being a part of a group striving for sustainable and responsible operations. In this context, Blesserholt (2021), highlights that different fast fashion businesses often use misleading labels and terms like "eco-friendly", "cruelty-free" and others to make their products appear sustainable and they also take selective discourse, where they highlight only the sustainable aspects of their products and hide the harmful ones, as part of their greenwashing strategies.

Different authors have highlighted the roles that are played by social media marketing in facilitating greenwashing practices of businesses. As put forward by Kwon et al. (2024), in the era of increased importance of social media marketing and direct interactions with the customers, these platforms are being increasingly used by companies to promote their products and services and have thus, become a medium which can be used for spreading misleading or false information about how companies are incorporating sustainability in their productions, operations and in their contributions to the society and the global environment. Ktisti, Hatzithomas and Boutsouki (2022), highlight that due to the lack of scopes for verification of the claims by companies on social media platforms, their greenwashing practices gain impetus as often they succeed in creating a brand image for themselves, as sustainable companies, through extensive social media promotions of manipulated facts, thereby creating false narratives. According to Pabon (2023), businesses in different industries, and especially those in the contemporary fast fashion industry, often rope in popular social media influencers, through paid partnerships, and these influencers create contents and spread partially or completely untrue information about sustainability of the products and the brands. The author have also highlighted that it is a common practice for fast fashion brands to develop different campaigns on social media which create perceptions among their customers that these brands actually incorporate sustainability in their products, production processes and other operations. All these scholarly insights, thus, indicate that social media marketing has become a useful medium for facilitating greenwashing practices among businesses.

3.3 Impacts of greenwashing practices on consumer behaviour

Wang, Ma and Bai (2020), highlight that in the age of increased social media interactions and more access and exposure to information, consumers are becoming increasingly aware of greenwashing practices by different companies, including clothing and fast fashion companies. Using the ***Theory of Planned Behaviour***, Shabani Shojaei et al. (2023), suggest that the presence of perceived greenwashing practices of brands and the perceived risks of such activities have considerably negative impacts on the purchase intentions of not only general products, but also those products that are claimed by their producers to be eco-friendly. As highlighted by Hung and Chang (2024), as current consumers are more inclined towards businesses that are sustainable and eco-friendly, the presence of perceived greenwashing by different companies, reduces their trusts on the credibility of the concerned brands, to a considerably extent and this in turn, results in fall in demand for the products and services of the concerned brand. Paassilta (2021), in this context, highlight that even if a company rectifies its past mistakes of greenwashing and non-sustainable behaviour and advertises these changes, due to the presence of high scepticism among the consumers, due to the previous activities of the company, prevents them to trust or purchase from the concerned company. The concerned author also argues that negative word-of-mouth of the consumers on social media platforms, due to the perceived greenwashing practices of different brands, also affects the purchasing intentions and behaviours of other consumers.

3.4 Literature gap

The existing literatures in the concerned domain of interest, do not focus extensively on the fast fashion industry of China, and also lack evidences regarding how the consumers in this industry perceive greenwashing and how the brands use social media marketing for greenwashing practices. The existing literary works also lack evidences regarding the impacts of such greenwashing practices among the fast fashion brands in China, on the consumer behaviour and the ways in which the adverse impacts can be reduced through effective sustainability measures and also how the brands can efficiently and credibly address their greenwashing issues, thereby positively influencing consumer behaviours. These gaps and the overall lack of customer perspectives in the existing literary evidences, have been addressed in this study.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

The purpose of the study has been of assessing the impacts of greenwashing practices on the consumer behaviour in the contemporary fast fashion industry of China. The specific objective has been to capture the customer perspectives in this aspect and for this purpose the study has relied on primary data sources, specifically customers in the concerned industry. Also, for developing definite

insights about the exact ways in which perceived greenwashing practices of the fast fashion brands influence the consumer behaviours, a quantitative method has been selected in this study, the details of which have been discussed in this section of the paper (Davidavičienė, 2018).

4.1 Data types and data collection method

To capture the customer perspectives regarding greenwashing practices, roles of social media marketing and their impacts on their behaviour, the study has considered primary information sources, that is, the direct customers in the contemporary fast fashion market of China. This has helped in ensuring collection of direct and credible insights, thereby contributing to the authenticity and relevance of the inferences derived in this study. A sample of 400 customers of the fast fashion market of China, has been selected for this study, with the help of the purposive sampling method, where the criteria for selection of the respondents have been that they buy from different fast fashion companies in China (Davidavičienė, 2018). Statistically measurable data has been collected from these study respondents with the help of surveys conducted with them, using a structured survey questionnaire with close-ended questions, where answer options have been provided for the respondents (Refer to Appendix for the questionnaire).

Using the questionnaire, data has been collected regarding the demographic attributes of the study respondents, their perceptions regarding greenwashing practices and current greenwashing activities of fast fashion brands and also regarding the ways in which social media marketing strategies facilitate greenwashing activities of these companies. Data on the impacts of such perceived greenwashing practices, on different aspects of consumer behaviours, from the perspectives of the consumers, has also been collected using the concerned survey questionnaire (Nayak and Singh, 2021). A Five-Point Likert Scale has been used to collect most of the perceptions regarding greenwashing and its impacts on consumer behaviour, with the scale being shown as follows:

Table 1: Five-point likert scale

1	Strongly Agree
2	Agree
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree
4	Disagree
5	Strongly Disagree

The usage of the above scale has helped in ensuring uniformity in the response collection, which has facilitated statistical analysis and interpretation of the data collected. To ensure integrity and confidentiality of the study respondents, their identities have not been revealed in the study and it has been also ensured that there is no intentional bias in respondents' selection for this study.

4.2 Data analysis technique

The data obtained from the surveys conducted with the customers in the contemporary fast fashion industry in China, has been analysed using the statistical software MS Excel. The demographic attributes and also the perceptions of the respondents regarding different aspects of greenwashing practices, usage of social media marketing for these purposes and also the impacts of greenwashing by fast fashion brands, on the consumer behaviour, have been organized and put forward in the form of relevant graphs and charts for insightful understanding on part of the audience for the study (Mohajan, 2020). On the other hand, keeping into consideration the main objectives of the study, regression analysis has also been conducted using MS Excel, to test the following null hypotheses:

H01: Greenwashing practices and usage of social media marketing to facilitate greenwashing have no impact on the trust of the consumers on the concerned brands, in the fast fashion industry of China.

H02: Lack of trust on greenwashing fast fashion brands has no impact on purchase intentions of the consumers of the concerned brands in China.

The results of the data analysis and regression analysis have been put forward in the following section and a discussion chapter has also been incorporated where the unique insights developed from this study, have been put forward, in a coherent and comprehensive manner, addressing all the

research objectives (Mohajan, 2020). Recommendations based on the study findings, for more efficient and sustainable operations and promotions by fast fashion companies in China, have been provided in the final chapter of the study.

5. FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

Based on the information collected from the selected 400 respondents as mentioned above, using the survey questionnaire formed for this study, the findings from the study, in terms of the demographic and other attributes of the respondents, their perceptions regarding greenwashing practices and social media marketing and also the impacts of such greenwashing practices on consumer behaviour, have been put forward in this chapter. Additionally, the results of the hypotheses-testing done with the help of regression analysis, have also been put forward and interpreted in this chapter of the concerned study.

5.1 Attributes of the study respondents
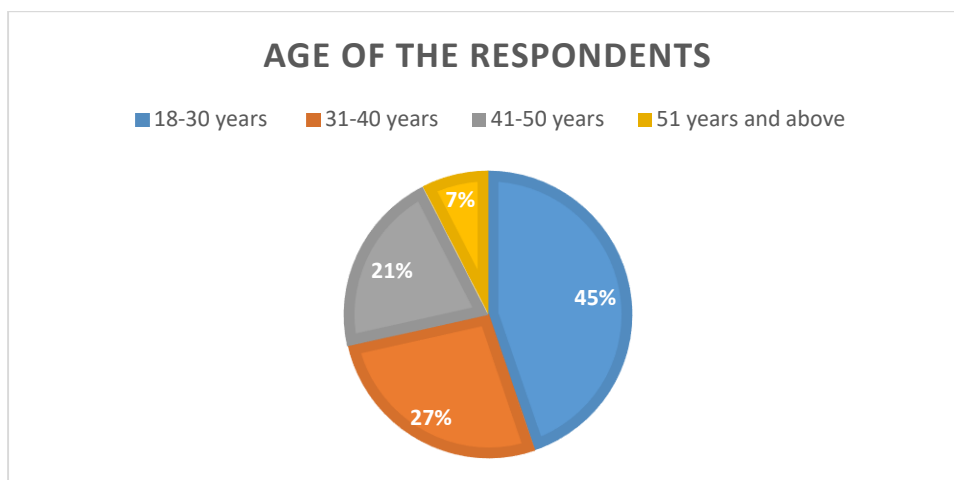
a. Age of the respondents

Figure 1: Age distribution of the respondents

A significant share of the population (45%), belongs in the age-group of 18-30 years, while another 27% belong to the age-group of 31-40 years. The rest belong to the age-group of 41 years and above. This indicates towards the fact that major sections of the population of consumers for fast-fashion brands in China, belong to the younger generations.
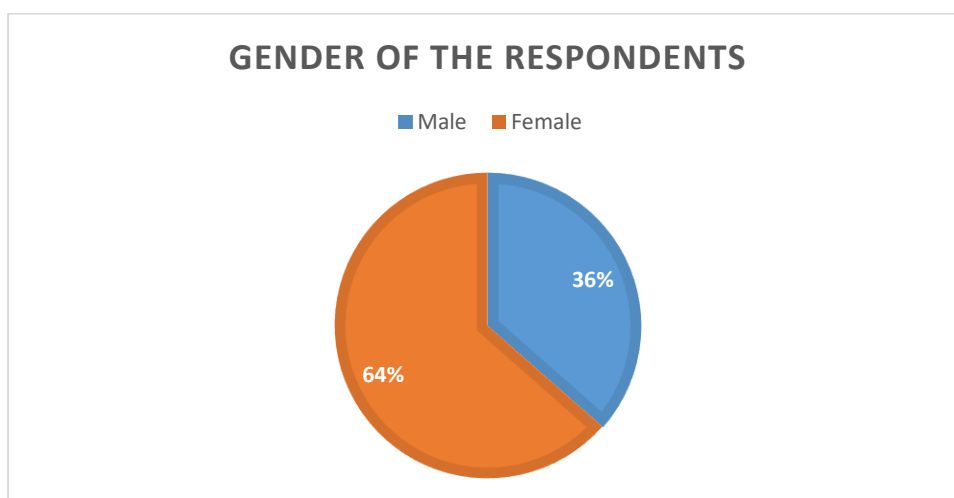
b. Gender of the respondents

Figure 2: Gender distribution of the study sample

A significant majority of the study sample (64%) are female respondents while the others are male, which indicates towards a female inclination in the population of consumers in the fast fashion industry in China in the current period.

c. Frequency of purchasing fast fashion in last few years

FREQUENCY OF PURCHASE IN LAST FEW YEARS

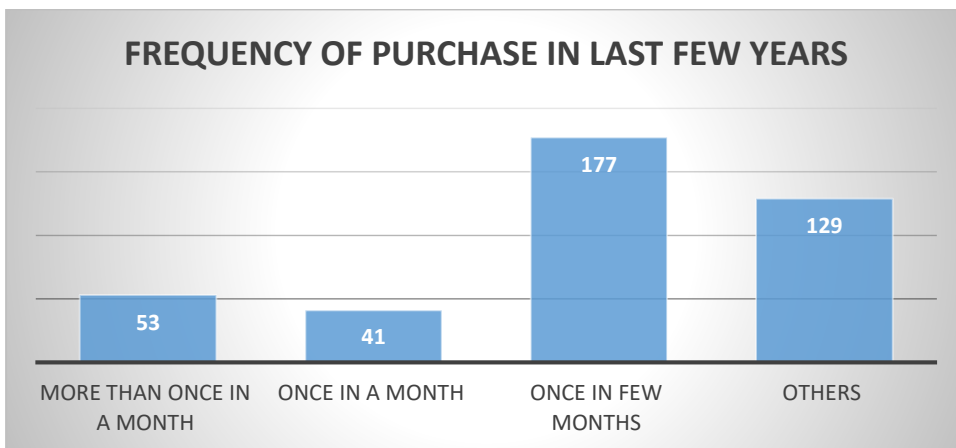|			
53	41	177	129
MORE THAN ONCE IN A MONTH	ONCE IN A MONTH	ONCE IN FEW MONTHS	OTHERS

Figure 3: Frequency of purchase from fast fashion companies

More than 300 out of the 400 study respondents highlighted that they purchase from different fast fashion brands either once in few months or less frequently than the same. However, while 53 respondents can be seen to purchase from these brands more than once in a month, another 41 respondents tend to buy such products once in a month. Overall, this indicates the presence of moderate frequency of purchasing of fast fashion products among the consumers in China, in the current period.

d. Presence of knowledge about greenwashing

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT GREENWASHING
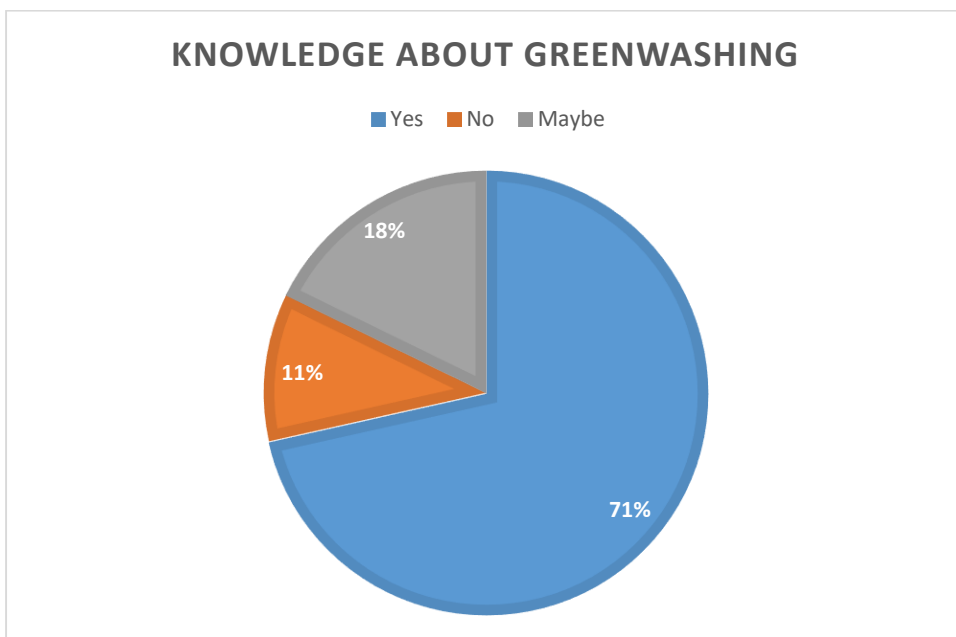
■ Yes ■ No ■ Maybe

18%
11%
71%

Figure 4: Presence of knowledge about greenwashing

Around 71% of the study respondents can be seen to have perceived knowledge about greenwashing in the current period, in the fast fashion industry, while another 11% do not have knowledge about greenwashing. The other respondents can be seen to be indecisive about their perceptions about the aspects and concepts of greenwashing.

5.2 Perceptions about greenwashing and social media marketing

In this section of the paper, the insights obtained about the perceptions of study participants regarding greenwashing and role of social media marketing, in the fast fashion industry, have been put forward and interpreted.

a. Presence of greenwashing practices among fast fashion brands

PRESENCE OF GREENWASHING ACTIVITIES AMONG FAST FASHION BRANDS

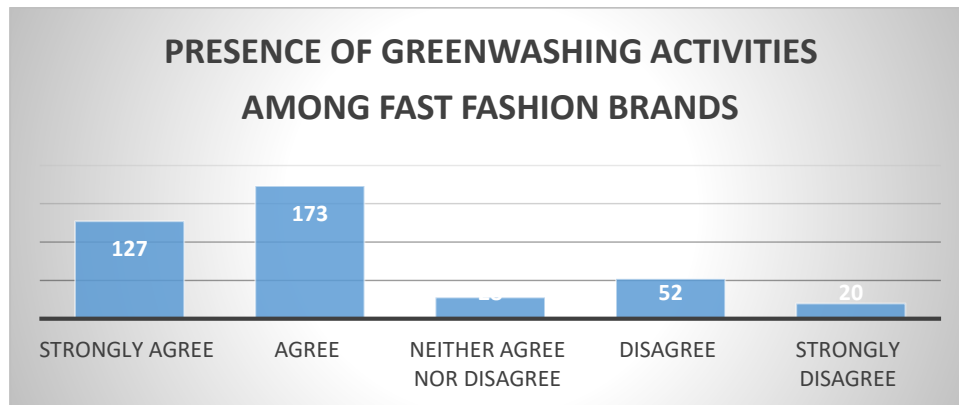|				
127	173		52	20
STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE

Figure 5: Perceptions regarding greenwashing by fast fashion companies

32% of the study participants strongly agreed while another 43% agreed regarding the presence of greenwashing practices among the fast fashion brands in China, in the current period. While, 7% could not provide any definite opinions regarding the same, 18% can be seen to have negative perceptions regarding the presence of such activities among the contemporary fast fashion brands.

b. Types of activities under greenwashing practices

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING GREENWASHING

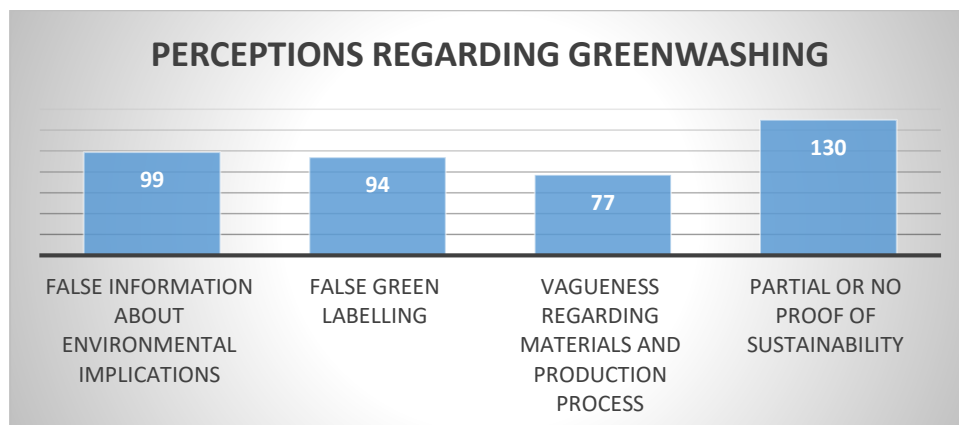|			
99	94	77	130
FALSE INFORMATION ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS	FALSE GREEN LABELLING	VAGUENESS REGARDING MATERIALS AND PRODUCTION PROCESS	PARTIAL OR NO PROOF OF SUSTAINABILITY

Figure 6: Perceptions regarding greenwashing strategies and practices

As evident from the above figure, a vast majority perceives greenwashing of fast fashion brands to be associated with the provision of no or partial proof of their sustainability initiatives and standards and also spreading of false and misleading information about the environmental implications of their products and operations. A significant share also perceives the presence of false green labelling of products and vagueness of information regarding the materials used and the production processes as common greenwashing strategies for fast fashion businesses.

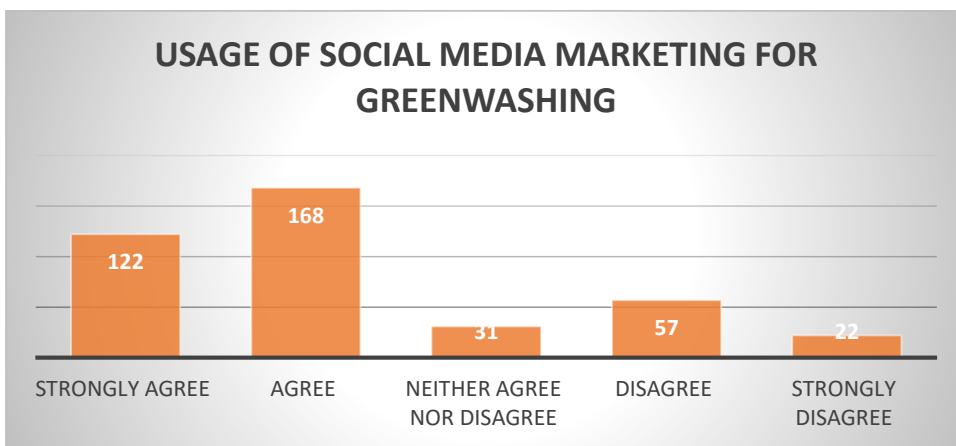### c. Usage of social media marketing for greenwashing

Figure 7: Perceptions regarding usage of social media marketing for greenwashing practices

According to 72% of the people participating in this study, the contemporary fast fashion brands in China, extensively use social media marketing for greenwashing and 20% of the respondents do not think that social media marketing strategies of the concerned businesses are facilitators of their greenwashing efforts. The rest 8% neither agreed nor disagreed to this assertion.

d. Ways in which social media marketing facilitates greenwashing of fast fashion brands
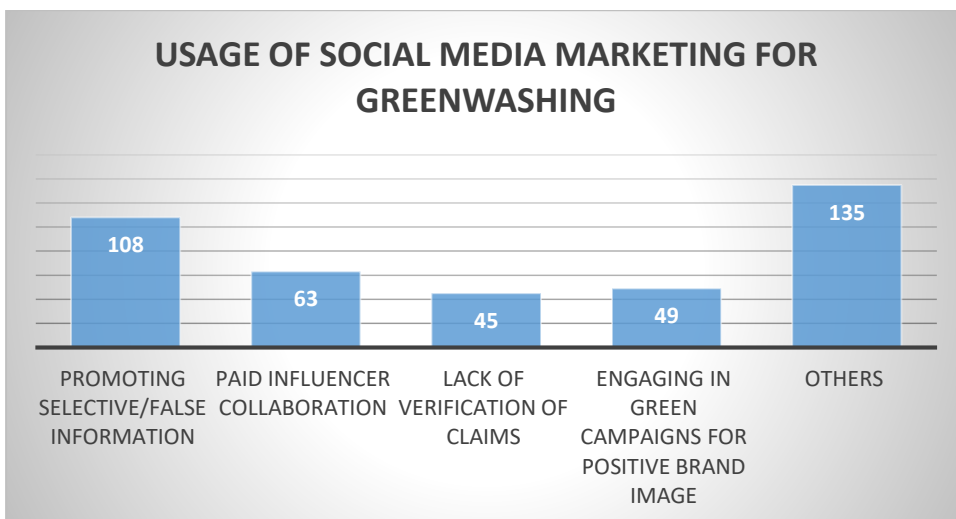

Figure 8: Perceptions regarding greenwashing through social media marketing

As evident from the figure above, a major section of the study participants perceive that the fast fashion businesses use social media for promoting and spreading selectively true or false information regarding their sustainability efforts, to hide their greenwashing practices and the also have paid influencer collaboration, whom they pay to promote their products as sustainable and green and positively contributing to the environment, without actual verifications of the same. There are also other ways in which social media marketing is being used for greenwashing by the fast fashion companies in China, as perceived by the consumers.

5.3 Impacts of greenwashing on consumer behaviour

The respondents participating in this study, have also put forward their perceptions about the impacts of greenwashing activities of the fast fashion companies on their consumer behaviour and these are discussed in this section.

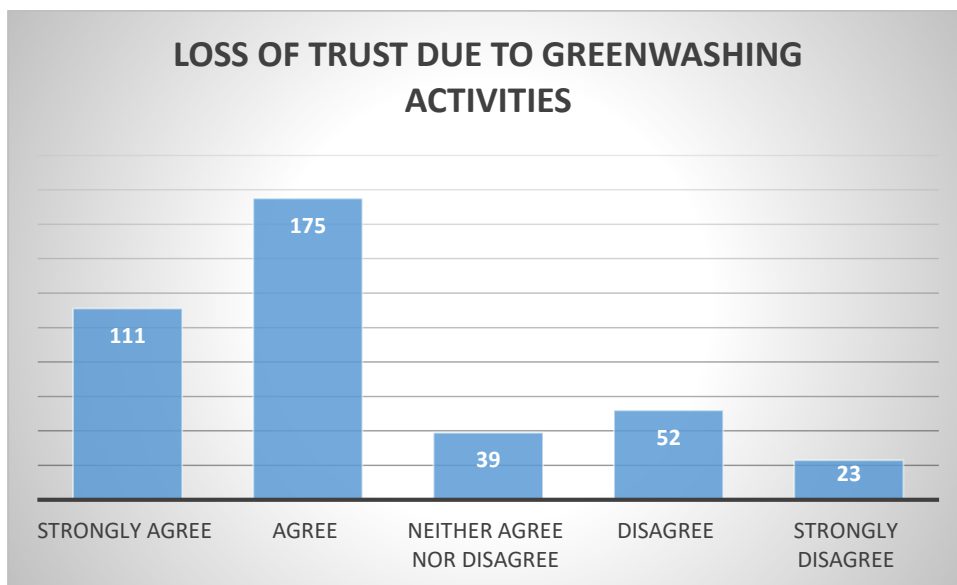**a. Impacts of greenwashing activities on trust on the brands**

Figure 9: loss of trust due to perceived greenwashing practices

44% of the study respondents strongly agreed and another 27% agreed to the assertion that the presence of perceptions among them, regarding greenwashing practices of the fast fashion brands in the country, leads to loss of trust, on part of the consumers, on the concerned brands. However, while 10% remained neutral in this aspect, 19% of the respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed to this assertion, indicating that these perceptions do not lead to their loss of trust on the brands.

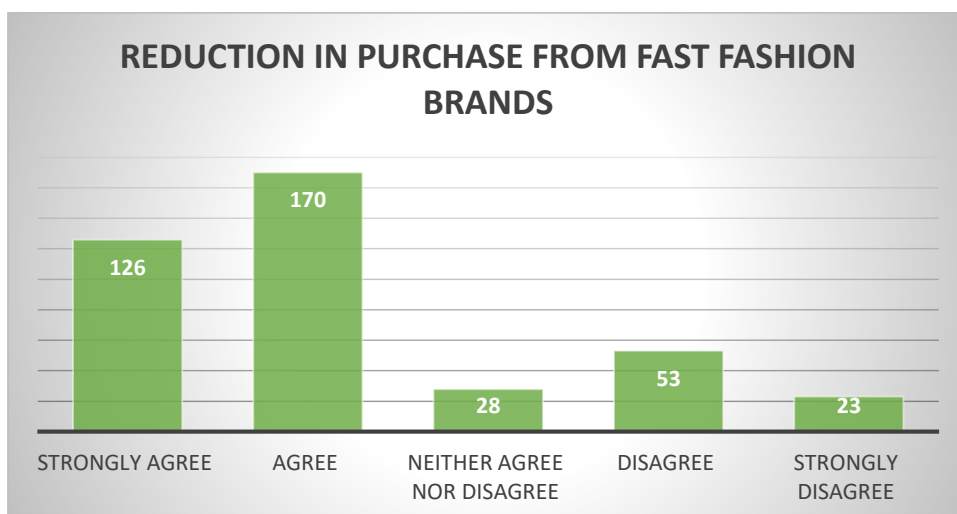**b. Reduction of purchase intentions from fast fashion brands**

Figure 10: Loss of purchasing intentions from fast fashion brands

As evident from the figure above, for 74% of the study respondents, there has been a reduction in the purchasing intentions of fast fashion products in the current period, while 19% highlights that there has not been any reduction in their purchasing intentions and the rest of the respondents remain neutral, in this context. This in turn, indicates towards an overall fall in the demands for fast fashion products among the general population in China, in the current period.

5.4 Regression analysis for hypotheses testing

As discussed in the methodology section, the study has also resorted to linear regression analysis, to analyse the impacts of greenwashing practices on trust of the customers on the fast fashion brands and thereby the impacts of the loss of trust on their purchasing intentions. These hypotheses are tested as follows:

a. Impacts of greenwashing practices on loss of trust of the consumers

To analyse whether the presence of greenwashing practices and greenwashing through social media marketing, by fast fashion brands lead to loss of trust of the consumers on the concerned brands, the following variables have been considered:

- **Dependent variable** – Loss of trust on fast fashion brands
- **Independent variable** – Presence of greenwashing practices, social media marketing practices aiding greenwashing

The results of the analysis are shown in the following table:

Table 2: Regression analysis for impacts of greenwashing on trust of consumers

SUMMARY OUTPUT								
Regression Statistics								
Multiple R	0.89864 6149							
R Square	0.80756 4901							
Adjusted R Square	0.80659 5454							
Standard Error	0.51137 7492							
Observations	400							
ANOVA								
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F			
Regression	2	435.6 79245 1	217.8 39622 5	833.0 166	8.5E-143			
Residual	397	103.8 18254 9	0.261 50693 9					
Total	399	539.4 975						
	Coefficie nts	Stand ard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lowe r 95.0 %	Upp er 95.0 %
Intercept	0.28540 4856	0.055 12149 6	5.177 74149 7	3.58E-07	0.1770 38	0.3937 71	0.177 038	0.39 377 1
Engagement of fast fashion companies in greenwashing activities	0.03959 7897	0.061 13418 3	0.647 72105 3	0.517 54	-0.0805 9	0.1597 85	-0.080 59	0.15 978 5
Social media marketing facilitates greenwashing	0.84655 3292	0.059 65348 5	14.19 11791 5	2.92E-37	0.7292 77	0.9638 3	0.729 277	0.96 383

The adjusted R-Square for this regression analysis is 0.81, which implies 81% of the dynamics in the loss of trust of consumers on fast fashion brands in China, can be attributed to the engagement of these brands in greenwashing activities and development of social media marketing activities aiding greenwashing for such companies (Gunst and Mason, 2018). From the above regression analysis, the following equation can be derived:

Loss of trust on fast fashion brands = 0.28 + 0.04*(Engagement in greenwashing activities) + 0.85*(Social media marketing facilitating greenwashing practices)

This implies that both the independent variables have positive relations with loss of trust of the consumers but the p-value is significant (less than 0.05) for the relationship between greenwashing-facilitating social media marketing and loss of consumer faith. This in turn, indicates:

Presence of social media marketing that are perceived by the consumers, to be aiding greenwashing practices, leads to statistically significant loss of faith of the consumers, on the concerned fast fashion brands in China.

This leads to the partial rejection of H01, since one of the two independent variables have statistically significant impacts on the dependent variable, in this case.

b. Impacts of loss of faith due to greenwashing on purchasing intentions

To analyse whether the loss of trust of the consumers on greenwashing fast fashion brands impacts on their purchasing intentions from the concerned brands, a regression analysis has been conducted, using the following variables:

- **Dependent variable** – Reduction in purchase intentions for fast fashion products
- **Independent variable** – Loss of trust due to greenwashing practices of fast fashion brands

The results are shown in the following table:

Table 3: Regression analysis of impacts of loss of trust on greenwashing brands on purchasing intentions

SUMMARY OUTPUT								
Regression Statistics								
Multiple R	0.870252							
R Square	0.757338							
Adjusted R Square	0.756728							
Standard Error	0.583372							
Observations	400							
ANOVA								
	df	*SS*	*MS*	*F*	*Significance F*			
Regression	1	422.7289	422.7289	1242.139	1.9E-124			
Residual	398	135.4486	0.340323					
Total	399	558.1775						
	Coefficients	*Standard Error*	*t Stat*	*P-value*	*Lower 95%*	*Upper 95%*	*Lower 95.0%*	*Upper 95.0%*
Intercept	0.198611	0.063651	3.120323	0.001938	0.073477	0.323744	0.073477	0.323744
Loss of trust on fast fashion brands due to greenwashing	0.885189	0.025116	35.244	1.9E-124	0.835813	0.934566	0.835813	0.934566

The value of the Adjusted R-Square for this regression analysis is 0.76 which indicates that 76% of the changes in purchasing intentions are dependent on the changes in the trust of the consumers on

the greenwashing fast fashion brands in China. The results of the analysis are represented in the following equation:

Reduction in purchasing intentions of the consumers = 0.2 + 0.88*(Loss of trust due to greenwashing by fast fashion brands)

The p-value for the concerned relationship is also less than 0.05, which indicates that the relationship is statistically significant (Gunst and Mason, 2018). This leads to rejection of the null hypotheses, H02, stating that:

The loss of trust of consumers, on fast fashion brands due to their greenwashing activities, leads to reduction in their purchase intentions from these greenwashing fast fashion brands, in a statistically significant manner.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The above chapter has highlighted the diverse study findings, obtained from survey with the selected respondents and analysis of the survey findings and their interpretations in the forms of graphs and also outputs of regression analysis. The purpose of the study had been to analyse the impacts of greenwashing on the consumer behaviour, and the roles of social media marketing in this domain, with specific focus on the fast fashion industry in China, in the current period. As per the findings from the information obtained from the surveys conducted with 400 consumers in the concerned market, there are considerable knowledge and awareness among the consumers about the aspects of greenwashing and types of greenwashing that usually takes place in the fast fashion industry in China. The findings also highlight that a large number of consumers perceive that the fast fashion brands resort to different greenwashing strategies and practices in the current period and they also use social media marketing for spreading false and manipulated information about sustainability of their products and also collaborates with influencers to promote the same. This in turn, indicates that social media marketing is largely used by these brands to aid their greenwashing practices, without hampering their sustainable and environment-friendly brand image. The study sample considered can be seen to be majorly the young population of the country and also more females than males, which indicates roughly the customer demographics for the concerned market, given the assumption that the study sample is a representation of the consumer population in the contemporary fast fashion market of China.

The consumers can be seen to perceive greenwashing activities by the fast fashion companies, as those practices including spread of false or partial information about their sustainability initiatives, false eco-labelling of their products to make them appear to be green, even though they are not and presence of vagueness regarding the materials used for production and also regarding the production processes. The customers also believe that social media marketing is used by the concerned businesses to promote selective and false information in this domain, for paid influencer marketing, to market their products as reliable and sustainable and to develop and engagement different sustainability and green campaigns for improvement of their brand image, in the current period. As evident from the regression analysis conducted in the concerned study, the presence of perceived greenwashing activities among the fast fashion business, and also their social media marketing strategies to hide their greenwashing practices by spreading misleading information and developing a falsely promoted sustainable brand image, leads to considerable loss of confidence and trust of the consumers on the concerned brands. Both of these element's lead to distrust on part of the consumers, while the impact of the perceptions of greenwashing-aiding social media marketing can be seen to be statistically significant.

On the other hand, the findings also highlight that the loss of confidence of the consumers, on the contemporary fast fashion brands in China, specifically due to their various greenwashing strategies and practices, leads to considerable and statistically significant reduction in the purchase intentions of the consumers, from the concerned brands. This in turn, indicates that greenwashing is not only detrimental for the environment and the customers, but can also be seen to have long-term detrimental impacts on the consumer behaviour, thereby affecting the sustained market positioning, revenue generation, reputation and sales of the concerned fast fashion brands in China. This, in turn, not only addresses the research gaps but can also be seen to highlight the reasons behind the recent

shift that is taking place, among the fast fashion brands in the county, towards production of more sustainable products, and also towards reduction of their churning rates of new products, to reduce wastage and thereby to refrain from further greenwashing activities.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has tried to develop robust and unique insights regarding the impacts of greenwashing practices and social media marketing, facilitating such practices, on the consumer behaviour, in the contemporary fast fashion industry in China. The findings have highlighted considerable presence of greenwashing-related awareness and knowledge among the current consumer population (mostly younger sections of the population of China), in the fast fashion industry of the concerned country. The findings can also be seen to highlight that not only do the consumers perceive that the fast fashion brands in China, have considerable greenwashing problems and practices, even in the current period, they use social media marketing for aiding such practices. These are having considerably negative impacts on the consumer behaviour in this industry, especially in terms of loss of trust and loss of purchase intentions of the aware customers. To address these challenges and also to mitigate greenwashing strategies and practices among these businesses for more efficient consumer behaviour, the following recommendations are developed:

- It is of immense importance for the different social media platforms to be stricter on the companies using them to promote their products and services. The platforms should have a dedicated and independent body, who will be verifying the information provided by the fast fashion brands, regarding the sustainability of their productions and operations. This can help in reduction of false or misleading information about greenwashing by the fast fashion brands in the country to a considerable extent.
- The companies should use real-time technologies to track as well as provide information about the customers about the materials and resources used for the production of their clothes and authentic proof of sourcing of raw materials can be included in the list of entitlements of the customers of the concerned companies.
- Apart from the eco-labelling of the products by the fast fashion businesses (which can have authenticity-related issues), it is important for the concerned businesses to also obtain credible third-party certifications of international standards, to ensure that the consumers perceive their products to be not only sustainable, environment-friendly and cruelty-free but also made in ethical work environment where there are no labour exploitations.
- Awareness should also be generated for the consumers in this industry, regarding the importance of embracing slow fashion as an alternative to the non-sustainable and wasteful fast fashion. The success of the concerned awareness initiatives can lead to considerable shifts in the demand patterns of the consumers, thereby influencing the fast fashion brands in China to change their products and also their supply chain, distribution and production processes.

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APPENDIX

1. Age of the Respondent

- 18-30 years
- 31-40 years
- 41-50 years
- 51 years and above

2. Gender of the Respondent

- Male
- Female

3. How frequently have you purchased from fast fashion brands in the last few years?

- More than once in a month
- Once in a month
- Once in few months
- Others

4. Are you familiar with the term and the concept of greenwashing in the fast fashion industry?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

5. How far do you agree that the fast fashion brands engage in greenwashing activities?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

6. As per your perceptions what activities are included under greenwashing?

- False information about environmental implications
- Vagueness regarding materials, products and methods
- Providing partial or no proof of sustainability
- False green labelling of products

7. How far do you agree that the fast fashion companies use social media marketing for greenwashing?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

8. In what ways do social media marketing help in greenwashing?

- Promoting selective or false information
- Paid influencer collaborations
- Lack of verification of claims
- Engaging in green campaigns for positive brand image
- Others

9. How far do you agree that you have loss trust on fast fashion companies due to their greenwashing activities?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10. How far do you agree that you have reduced purchasing from the fast fashion brands in the current period?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree