

INFLUENCE OF SUSTAINABILITY ADVERTISING ON CONSUMER RESPONSES: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

In the last few years, there has been a growing interest amongst organizations and consumers in the adoption and promotion of sustainable products and services. Since a brand's sustainability credentials significantly influence consumer choices, these must be communicated effectively to the target consumers. This has resulted in emergence of a specialized domain of marketing termed 'sustainability advertising'. However, there is a lack of consensus amongst researchers over the dimensions of sustainability advertising and the operationalization of its constructs. Therefore, the current study aims to summarize the extant literature available in sustainability advertising domain and assess its role in influencing consumer response. For this, a systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted on empirical studies published between the years 2000 and 2023, and insights were derived by performing a thematic synthesis of 118 studies obtained through multiple databases. The study gives a snapshot of various theoretical frameworks, and summarizes antecedents, moderators, mediators, and outcome variables studied so far in context of sustainability advertising. Based on the synthesis of findings, the authors propose a conceptual framework of various dimensions of sustainability advertising and their influence on outcome variables. At the end of the study, future research directions are also proposed. The study makes a profound contribution to the academic literature while providing important strategic recommendations to advertisers and advertising agencies in crafting their sustainability advertisement and communication.

Keywords: Sustainability Advertising, Green Advertising, Advertising Appeals, Advertising Dimensions, Attitude, Purchase Intention, Brand Purpose, Purpose-Driven Advertising.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability advertising is a relatively recent phenomenon that has gained prominence over the last few years. However, its inception can be traced to the 1970s, when ecology was first incorporated into marketing strategy (Kassarjian, 1971). During the last two decades, ecological marketing has evolved from being green to greener and finally sustainable (Sander et al., 2021). The concept of 'sustainability' was first introduced in the year 1987 by the Brundtland Commission Report, in which *sustainable development* was defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987, p.27). While green or environmental dimensions have been the focal point of many empirical studies, sustainability marketing is now multi-dimensional and incorporates both green and social dimensions (Sander et al., 2021).

In the context of advertising, the term 'Sustainability Advertising' can be defined as "advertising messages that explicitly promote sustainable goods or services, and inform stakeholders about environmental, social or economic efforts of firms" (Sander et al., 2021; Rathee & Milfield, 2023). However, the terms green, social, and sustainable have often been

used interchangeably by researchers, and there is a lack of consensus and uniformity amongst various sub-dimensions of sustainability advertising. This calls for a more distinct exploration and empirical validation of sub-dimensions of sustainability advertising and the operationalization of constructs from an academic standpoint.

It is evident from scholarly literature that marketing initiatives have the potential to encourage sustainable development, promote favorable brand outcomes such as strong brand-user interaction, positive brand evaluations, and increased brand purchases (Sarkar et al., 2023), and reward firms through significant performance payoffs. Advertising is an important marketing tool that motivates purchase and affects consumer choices between alternatives by conveying product information to consumers (Chang et al., 2019). Researchers have also highlighted the pivotal role of advertising in influencing consumer's attitudes towards ads, purchase intentions, and actual behaviors.

Advertisements, including literacy interventions, can play an essential role in promoting climate-friendly consumption through green advertising and demarketing climate-harmful consumption. Studies also report consumer preferences for brands known for their sustainable efforts. Due to increased consumer awareness about sustainability, brands are now actively advertising their social and environmental efforts (Kong & Witmaier, 2021). Some of the notable advertisements based on sustainable themes are – ‘Save our Species’ by Lacoste, ‘Real Beauty Sketches’ by Dove, ‘We accept’ by Air BnB, ‘Run for Oceans’ by Adidas, ‘Waterless’ by Levis, and many more. The year 2024 alone saw about 588 ads nominated into SDG category at Cannes Lions. The highest award Grand Prix went to Renault – Cars to Work, which highlighted the importance of decent work and economic growth. This was followed by Gold Lion, which was jointly shared by four different ads – ‘Pink Chip’ focusing on gender equality, ‘Filter Cap’ dedicated to clean water and sanitation, ‘Sightwalks’ based on sustainable cities and communities, and ‘The Move to -15’ with climate action as the central theme. Thus, it is evident that brands are embracing themes from environmental, social, and economic domains to communicate their sustainable initiatives. However, from a brand's perspective, sustainability communication is only beneficial if it positively influences attitudes towards brands and responsible consumption behavior (Sarkar et al., 2023). The research therefore focuses on the following objectives:

*What is sustainability advertising? What are its various dimensions and constructs?
What are the various components, themes and sub-themes under the sustainability advertising?
Which components of sustainability advertisement maximize favorable brand outcomes?*

Furthering our enquiry into the scholarly literature, the current systematic review summarizes the extant literature available in the domain and focuses on two dimensions of sustainability advertising – green and social. While various researchers have defined green advertising in a multitude of ways, we have consolidated our findings based on Morelli's definition. According to Morelli (2011), ‘Green Advertising’ encompasses any advertising “that addresses the relationship between a product and its biophysical environment, promotes a green lifestyle, or presents an image of environmental responsibility.” Conversely, ‘Social Sustainability Advertising’ focuses on a firm's impact on society, incorporation of responsible business practices, workforce, and community well-being (Elkington, 1998). In continuation of the same, social sustainability advertising can be elaborated as advertising that promotes the socially sustainable behavior of a firm (Sander et al., 2021).

The research paper is broadly categorized into two sections – methods and thematic synthesis. The methods section outlines the search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and quality assessment. The section also summarizes some important study characteristics. This is followed by thematic synthesis, which summarizes the findings pertaining to

sustainability marketing, impact of green and social dimensions, and components of sustainability advertising. The dimensions of sustainability advertising have been further categorized into ad creative, ad copy, ad execution, and communication of sustainability initiatives. The paper also summarizes variables studied so far, categorized into antecedents, moderators, mediators, and outcome variables. The paper ends with a conceptual framework and some exciting research directions based on the gaps.

Taking cues from this exploration, the findings will help in understanding trending and most impactful themes, which can be used for designing advertising and communication strategies that can positively influence the consumer outcomes. The study will thus contribute to the existing scientific literature both from an academic and practical standpoint. To the researcher's knowledge, no systematic review on the topic has been conducted to date.

METHOD

For the current systematic literature review, three major digital databases - Scopus, EBSCO, and ProQuest – were accessed between June 10, 2023, and July 12, 2023, and 1105 documents were extracted. This section outlines the search strategy used, inclusion and exclusion criteria, details of the study protocol for evaluation and selection of the studies, critical appraisal tool, and the PRISMA flow diagram describing the process of study selection.

Search Strategy

A systematic search for the literature published between the years 2000 and the date of the search was performed among Scopus, EBSCO, and ProQuest. Search terms used for the review were “sustainability advertising”, “sustainable advertising”, “sustainable marketing”, “social sustainability advertising”, “green advertising”, “environmental advertising”, “brand purpose”, “conscientious brand”, “purpose-led advertising”, “purpose-driven advertising”, “responsible brand”, and “sustainability communication” in combination with “attitude”, and “purchase intention”. The search string was modified until the maximum inclusive keywords were arrived at and was kept as broad as possible to ensure the inclusion of a maximum number of relevant articles. The search terms were combined differently for the databases, and wild card operators were used to ensure all similar words were considered while extracting the studies.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria, Selection and Evaluation

To ensure the quality of research studies, we only included peer-reviewed research articles and excluded grey literature, conference proceedings, and book chapters while performing the keyword search. The time frame from the year 2000 till date was chosen to ensure the relevancy of the studies extracted (Sharma et al., 2023). Though UN SDGs were introduced in 2015, green advertising and marketing have gained momentum since 2000. Further, many of the concepts of sustainability advertising are an extension of green advertising, which has been studied extensively from the beginning of the new millennium. Only the studies published in the English language were considered for ease of access. The exclusion format varied across databases, but consistency was maintained regarding excluding studies from unrelated domains.

Initially, the results obtained from each database were uploaded to Zotero and de-duplicated. In the first phase, studies were screened by titles and abstracts, and the study protocol was formulated based on SPIDER guidelines (Cooke et al., 2012). During the screening process, only the studies that explored the direct or indirect impact of sustainability advertising components on consumer responses such as attitude and/or purchase intentions,

were chosen for full-text review. Studies which involved marketing claims in the form of sustainability claims, packaging claims, or ecolabelling were also considered. To ensure maximum inclusion, studies where advertising was moderating or mediating the relationship were also considered.

198 studies were shortlisted after initial screening and were subjected to full-text review. After full-text reading, 74 articles were found irrelevant and hence eliminated. 6 articles with full-text unavailable were also excluded. The process details are described in Figure 1, PRISMA Flow Diagram (Page et al., 2021). To ensure the quality of studies chosen for final analysis, only studies published in ABDC A* and A were considered, and critical appraisal for risk of bias was conducted using the JBI checklist (Aromataris et al., 2015). Further, 30% of randomly chosen studies were independently evaluated by two co-authors at both the screening and full-text review stages, and consensus was reached in case of any conflicts. Due to word limit constraints, only key references are mentioned at the end of the paper.

Study Characteristics

This section highlights some important study characteristics, including research setting, research design, publication outlets, and theoretical frameworks used in the studies.

In terms of research setting and design, the studies have a wide geographical spread across 23 countries, with the top five contributing countries listed in Table 1; however, 38 studies do not explicitly state the research setting. The top three contributing countries are the USA, China, and Taiwan. Out of the studies considered for thematic synthesis, 102 used quantitative methods, and sixteen used qualitative methods. Among the studies that employed quantitative research design, experimental design and structured equation modeling were the most deployed methods. In qualitative analysis, researchers have primarily focused on content analysis. Other methods were exploratory case studies, in-depth or focus interviews, discourse analysis, and literature review. The studies considered for final synthesis were published in 40 different journals of international repute. Based on the number of studies published (summarised in Table 2), the top five journals contribute to approximately 47% of the publications. *Regarding theoretical frameworks*, sixty-two theories have been used to explain various aspects of Sustainability Advertising in the chosen studies. The top five theories used are “Elaboration Likelihood Model”, “Construal Level Theory”, “Persuasive Communication Theory”, “Signalling Theory” and “Theory of Planned Behaviour”. Forty-two papers did not have any theoretical guiding framework. While most papers have used a single theory to outline the theoretical concept, few papers have more than one theory for explaining different concepts within the same study.

THEMATIC SYNTHESIS AND PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Sustainability Marketing - Sustainability Marketing (SM) can be majorly categorized into three broad categories – auxiliary, reformative, and transformative (Kamper & Ballantine, 2019). Auxiliary SM is organization-centric and includes integration of sustainability throughout the marketing mix. It focuses on environmental, social and economic dimensions of production and consumption. Reformative SM is consumer-centric where consumers are recognized as leaders of change. It therefore promotes a sustainable lifestyle by demarketing undesirable products or services. Transformative SM aims to transform institutions that inhibit the transition to a sustainable society. Researchers highlight various activities under the scope of sustainable marketing and their differential impact on consumers.

Sun et al. (2000) highlight the social, environmental, and economic dimensions of SM, stating all three dimensions have a significant influence on consumer's positive association with the brand and brand loyalty. However, the perceived equity of the customers is adversely impacted even if any one of these dimensions is underperforming. Differing in view, Sander et al. (2021) highlight the higher credibility of environmental dimension over the social dimension in sustainability advertising (SA), resulting in a positive attitude towards ads, brand attitude and brand personality.

Gordon et al. (2011) have proposed a sustainable marketing framework highlighting two critical dimensions of sustainable marketing – 'green' and 'social'. Green marketing focuses on incorporating sustainability efforts into the core of the marketing process and business practices by facilitating the development and marketing of sustainable products and services. This highlights that product design and development, manufacturing, distribution, and promotion are made sustainable, thus limiting consumption and waste. Conversely, social marketing aims to encourage sustainable behavior change amongst consumers and businesses while assessing the impact of business activities. Lee and Haley (2022) also highlight three primary motivations for segmenting green consumers – personal health, social and environmental Table 3.

Research highlights that consumers attribute their excessive or unsustainable consumption to marketing activities. Sheth and Parvatiyar (2021), therefore, emphasize the important role of the marketing function in driving sustainable consumption, by re-organizing it to promote sustainability stewardship. They suggest redesigning products and services for sustainable use, including their re-purposing on reaching the end of the life cycle, promoting responsible consumption amongst users, re-purposing the marketing mix, and incorporating of educational interventions. Apart from this, they also suggest an important role of government intervention by introducing reform measures and regulatory policies to boost responsible production.

Green Dimensions and their Impact

Companies usually communicate their green brand initiatives through various green marketing tools such as eco-label, eco-branding, and green advertisements. The literature reports a host of green dimensions that significantly impact consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, purchase behavior, or the green gap. Research establishes that consumers' green purchase behavior is significantly and directly determined by their green purchase intentions, which in turn is directly determined by attitudes toward green products. Further, consumers require information to support the environmental evaluation of available product choices and translate their environmental concerns to purchase intentions. Therefore, purchase intentions are higher for companies that signal effective green marketing than those companies that do not focus on their environmental impact (Waites et al., 2020). Researchers report a significant and positive relationship between green advertisement in maintaining environmental reputation, better financial performance, and the purchase behavior of consumers (Chin et al., 2018). Green initiatives or activities adopted by the brand and its green image have significant positive influence on the brand's corporate image and its competitive advantage. A significant influence of green marketing, advertising, and packaging on purchase behavior is also seen in emerging economies. However, the relationship is mediated by price (Amoako, 2022).

Studies report a positive impact of green brand positioning (Gong et al., 2020) and green consumption values (Bailey et al., 2018) on attitude towards ads, brand attitude and green purchase intention. Functional and emotional 'green advertising receptivity (GAR)' (Shi & Jiang, 2023) along with 'green brand intention' (Rahman & Nguyen, 2023) has a positive influence on consumer's purchase intention. GAR also positively affects the purchase intention

of eco-labeled products (Sun et al., 2021). A high correlation is seen between environmental advertisements and green purchase behavior (Chin et al., 2018). ‘Green advertising design’ incorporating functional features or green claims (Mo et al., 2018) significantly impacts consumer’s purchase decisions. Based on the advertising agenda, green advertising has been categorized into three levels – *macro, meso and micro* (Fowler et al., 2012). Advertisements based on macro-level agendas focus on raising awareness about environmental issues such as pollution, global warming, protection and restoration of nature. The meso-level agenda focuses on the promotion of green aspects of brands along with associated products or institutions. The micro-level agenda is consumer-centric, where advertisements focus on promoting conscious consumerism, resource optimization, and the role of consumers in saving the planet. Basing their research on a content analysis of 473 international ads, they highlight that ad either addressed the relationship between product or service and environment, promoted an environmentally responsible lifestyle, or presented an image of corporate social responsibility.

Researchers report a significant and positive relationship between eco brands and eco-labels on the purchase behavior of consumers (Chin et al., 2018). Environmental labels or eco-labels strengthen beliefs about the environmental performance of the brand, thus positively influencing attitudes towards the brand. Awareness and knowledge of eco-labels and their traffic light colored design (Neumayr & Moosauer, 2021) positively impact consumer’s purchasing decisions. However, mentioning the name of a country with an unfavorable eco-image has a negative influence. Consumers also highlight the role of green partnerships, the development of genuine green products and services, and the credibility of green advertisements in influencing consumers (Chan, 2014). In-fact, message credibility is an essential driver of green advertising effectiveness.

Studies also report specific green dimensions that have a negative impact on consumer’s purchase intentions as green advertising skepticism (Luo et al., 2020), greenwashing and false claims. At times, purchasing products advertised as green may also have paradoxical post-purchase effects (Meijers et al., 2019). While credible, complete, and persuasive information on green products is important, they do not directly influence consumers’ green product quality perceptions and likelihood to purchase them (Kumar et al., 2021). Further, it is not necessary, that positive attitudes or purchase intentions always translate in positive purchase behavior. The phenomenon known as the green gap can be attributed to many reasons. According to Fowler et al. (2012), the green gap is mainly due to the utilitarian value as consumers look for the same quality without a price premium. Price, poor perception of quality, lack of green product availability, or brand loyalty to conventional products also contribute to the green gap. Companies that are truthful and sincere in their advertisement, add sustainability-based information to their labeling and have green marketing content in their advertising will have customers buying more from them than those without green marketing content in their advertising (Amoako, 2022).

Social Dimensions and their Impact

Besides the environmental impact, consumers are increasingly becoming conscious of the social impact of their purchase decisions (Bhaduri & Ha-brookshire, 2015). Though there is significant empirical research on various green dimensions, the research on social dimensions is relatively less. Analogous to the environmental or green dimension of sustainability, the social dimension focuses on promoting the socially sustainable behaviour of firms by incorporating fair business practices and their impact on the workforce and consumers (Sander et al., 2021). However, it is still difficult for consumers to evaluate if the products they buy have incorporated responsible business practices such as fair wages, fair working conditions, etc. (Bhaduri & Ha-brookshire, 2015).

Therefore, to capitalize on the sustainability efforts adopted by the organization, it must be communicated to consumers on various platforms (Viciunaite, 2022) in easy to understand and transparent manner (Bhaduri & Ha-brookshire, 2015). While there are not many theories available to elaborate the social dimensions, Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework has been used by researchers to highlight the social dimensions on which brands focus. TBL posits that apart from taking actions to protect the environment, the economic resources of the firms should also be deployed towards commitment for community well-being (Kwon et al., 2023). Further, organizations are also adopting the Sustainable Business Model approach, which incorporates social and environmental aspects into business operations (Viciunaite, 2022). Researchers also highlight that percentage recall and buying intention is higher for corporate social and environmental advertising ads (Pyle et al., 2022). Further, sustainable environmental behavior positively impacts sustainable social behavior and sustainable marketing (Risitano, 2022).

Dimensions of Sustainability Advertisement and their Impact

According to recent findings, the advertising industry can play a crucial role in driving sustainability. The industry can take initiatives to provide accurate information, raise awareness about greenwashing, and promote conscious consumerism aimed towards climate-friendly behavior. Researchers suggest using substantive claims, emotional appeals, and appropriate visual cues to motivate low carbon consumption. The addition of sustainability disclosures also results in eco-conscious consumer evaluations and choices, resulting in increased purchase intention, perceived quality, and likelihood of choosing the brand (Cho et al., 2018). Scholarly literature highlights various dimensions of sustainability advertisement which impact attitude towards ad, attitude towards brand or purchase intentions. For ease of summarization, these dimensions have been categorized into *ad creative*, *ad copy*, *ad execution*, and *communication of sustainability initiatives*. The dimensions have been synthesized into a conceptual framework (Figures 1 & 2).

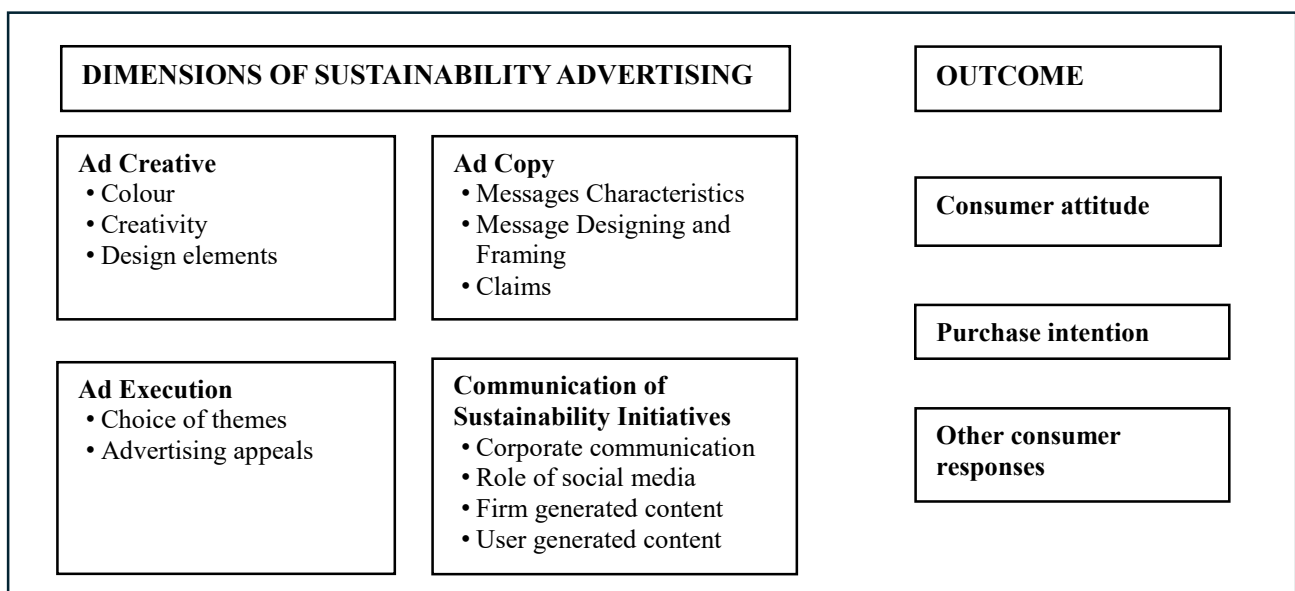


FIGURE 1
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Ad Creative – ‘Ad creative’ primarily involves visual, auditory, or design elements of an advertisement. The studies under consideration highlight three main dimensions of ad creative – *colour*, *creativity*, and *design elements*. Findings reveal that more than half of the green advertisements predominantly use colour and imagery representing ‘greenness’ as a peripheral cue (Segev et al., 2016). Positive impact can also be attained by ensuring consistency of colour with messaging content (Kim et al., 2023), raising awareness through creative ads (Mkhize & Ellis, 2020), or generating higher social media engagement through the use of emojis (Baek et al., 2022).

Advertising imagery featuring pleasant nature scenery (Harman et al., 2016), virtual nature experience, advertisements with an eco-friendly country image (Chan, 2000), use of a green certification logo or graphic symbols that convey an environmental attribute (Segev et al., 2016), were also found to have a positive impact. A significant matching effect is also reported between green product types and anthropomorphic advertising images. More substantial persuasive effect is reported with egoistic green products matched with humanoid images and altruistic green products matched with animal images (Wang et al., 2020).

Ad Copy - The ad copy is the written text, message, dialogue, or script that appears in the advertisement. While summarizing the extant research on ad copy, we have categorized message dimensions into *message characteristics*, *message designing and framing*, and *use of claims*. Scholarly literature highlights that message cues about sustainable business practices of the organization, and propagation of brand-related user-generated content on social media platforms significantly impact consumption decisions. Therefore, while designing a suitable message, marketers must focus on content, i.e., argument quality and contextual factors such as popularity and attractiveness of the message (Sarkar et al., 2023). Regarding argument quality, at least one dimension out of information relevance or accuracy must be fulfilled. However, it must be complemented with high trustworthiness and expertise of source to reach the viral level (Knight et al., 2022). Studies also highlight the importance of source credibility, persuasion ability, source-message congruency, and message alignment with target consumers (Milfield & Pitman, 2024). It is also seen that attitudes towards ads and purchase intentions are higher when CSR messages are used (Lecuyer et al., 2017). Extending the work on the REGRAD scale, Tiwari et al. (2022) highlight a directly proportional relation between REGRAD i.e. receptivity to green advertising, and purchase intention. It is therefore essential that the right message is communicated to the consumers.

Message characteristics - The literature identifies two key characteristics of messages that influence consumer’s response – *assertiveness* and *specificity*. Advertisers often use assertive messages in their communication, as these are attention-grabbing, minimize ambiguity, and encourage behavioral compliance (Milfield & Pitman, 2024). Assertive messages, in particular, persuade individuals to exhibit more favorable attitudes and behavioral intentions. The persuasiveness of assertive ads results in the pro-social behavior of consumers; however, the relationship is moderated by price discounts and purchase motivations (Choi et al., 2023). In a different view, Bang et al. (2021) additionally highlight the role of cultural influence on the persuasiveness of assertive messages. It is observed that American consumers generally dislike assertive messages but feel a sense of reciprocal obligations if price discounts are available. Contrarily, Korean consumers accept both assertive and nonassertive messages without resistance, and discounts do not affect their persuasion. Messages that demonstrate specific management actions or actual social, cultural, or environmental improvements are more persuasive (Hardeman et al., 2017).

The use of assertive or persuasive messages has also been researched in the context of health-related messages, where contrasting results are available. Volgger et al. (2022) report a

significant positive effect of persuasive communication on consumers in encouraging healthier and ecological choices. However, Lu and Cai (2022) report the negative effect of persuasive messages on consumer's purchase intention. The specificity of the messages is another crucial variable considered in research. Literature establishes that specific messages score over vague messages in developing positive attitudes by strengthening perceived intrinsic motivation (Shin & Ki, 2021). The use of numerical precision is perceived as more informative and scientific and contributes to positive perceptions of a company's competence. However, Tocoglu et al. (2022) report a stronger effect of message abstractness on green brand image and behavioral intention

Message designing and framing - The designing or framing of messages plays an important role in influencing consumer actions. Researchers have highlighted various message-framing strategies as benefit-based, attribute-based, gain-framed, loss-framed, communication-focused, sustainability-focused etc. According to research, there is no dominant generic combination. However, there are some arguments that are found to be more appropriate. Two of the most commonly used message-framing methods are benefit-based and attribute-based.

Benefit-based messages have been reported to be more persuasive and effective than *attribute-based messages* especially in advertisements related to green restaurants. These are further categorized as self-benefit or egoistic, and other's benefit or altruistic. If a consumer has high perceived effectiveness, the depiction of altruistic messages in a green advertising context result in a positive attitude toward the brand and higher purchase intention (Ekebas et al., 2021). Conversely, higher purchase intentions are reported with attribute-based messages (Zhan et al. 2023). In sustainability advertising, researchers have also focused on the impact of *gain-framed and loss-framed messages*. Gain framed messages, when combined with upcycling information (Zhang et al., 2021) or food waste reduction (Huang et al., 2021) trigger a more positive response towards green behavior. A message framed as a positive gain for the future or a negative loss for the present is effective in enhancing consumer's attitudes and purchase intentions. On the contrary, when receivers are concerned about environmental problems, negatively framed messages exert a positive influence on consumer's purchase intention (Pino et al., 2022).

Results also indicate that sustainability-based messages highlighting issues such as responsible production, result in a higher willingness to buy as compared to product excellence-focused communication (Amatulli et al., 2021). Consumers having a high interest in sustainability are positively influenced by the emotionality of the language used in ads, the amount of sustainability-related information and the presence of sustainability labels (Vinzenz et al., 2019). Low construal messages are perceived as more credible than abstractly framed messages but do not generally increase purchase intentions. Further, abstract construal messages score over concrete in enhancing positive perceptions of a green product's effectiveness amongst environmentally conscious consumers. The messages can also have a *promotion vs prevention focus*. Prevention-focused messages were found to be more persuasive than promotion-focused messages, especially in individuals with an active interdependent self-view. A recent study adds the dimension of a brand's market share in enhancing brand attitudes. Millfield and Pitman (2023) highlight that use of altercast framing can result in positive brand attitudes for brands with high market share.

Claims - Using claims to convey information or persuade consumers is a common practice in advertising. Claims are also used to communicate the sustainable practices of an organization. Research highlights various aspects of claims used in communication such as claim type, claim specificity, claim emphasis and claim validity. The studies under consideration highlight various types of claims and their differential impact on consumers. Some of the claims

mentioned by various researchers are substantive, associative, emission offsetting, emission reduction, implicit, explicit, green, natural, and others. Substantive claims, being more objective, accurately represent a company's genuine improvement in environmental behavior. Consumers tend to prefer advertisements featuring substantive claims, as these contribute to more favorable brand perceptions, positive attitudes toward the ads, and increased purchase intention (Chan, 2000). As a result, substantive claims generate significantly more positive responses from consumers compared to associative claims (Chan, 2000). Amongst substantive claims, product orientation has been reported to be most powerful in inducing positive attitudes and purchase intentions (Chang, 2022). On the contrary, unsubstantiated ecological claims positively impact attitudes towards the product, while boosting beliefs that the product is natural, environment friendly, and healthy (Soderlund & Mattsson, 2020).

Researchers also highlight a significant positive impact of environmental advertising claims on consumer's attitudes and purchase intentions (Chang et al., 2019). Some of the prominent themes on which claims in environmental ads are based are – the preservation or restoration of the planet, climatic changes and adverse impacts, and animal protection. Apart from this, claims about offsetting or reduction of emissions are also used. As opposed to emission offsetting claims, the emission reduction claims have more substantial effect on the attribution of the company's environmental commitment and positively affect consumers' intentions to buy the advertised product. However, consumers can be misled by the exaggerated concept of zero impact (Iovino et al., 2023). Greenness of environmental advertising claims also has a significant impact on consumers. The stronger the greenness of an advertisement, the more specific, strong, substantive, and acceptable are the issues raised. Regardless of the natural environment in which a target audience is rooted, depictions of landscapes with lush green vegetation and clear water are preferred to any others or to urban scenes and elicit more favorable emotional responses. However, these do not work in the long run if products have missing green attributes.

Claims can also be categorized as implicit and explicit. The effect of explicit claims is more potent when they pertain to health topics, but no significant difference exists between explicit and implicit claims that describe environmental benefits. Claim specificity is also an important consideration when using claims in advertisements. Specific green claims are particularly effective for brands with high competence or strong environmental commitment (Jansen et al., 2022). Studies have also noted gender differences in evaluating claims. Both male and female participants relied on their pre-existing schemas when assessing sustainability claims, but this effect was more pronounced in females. Information transparency in claims helped reduce information asymmetry and decreased participants' reliance on schemas (Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire, 2015).

Ad Execution - Ad execution focuses on the *choice of themes* and *advertising appeals*. Kao & Du (2020) emphasize the role of emotions while designing green ads. They have classified environment-protecting emotions into three types – social, ecological, and moral. According to them, the green advertising effect is better in the case of positive social and moral emotions. They further highlight that green marketing should focus on the overall sustainable development of the environment and society. However, Chan (2004) reports a direct positive relationship between the ecological performance of the brand and its attitude towards the brand.

Various advertisement themes have been researched, highlighted, or suggested by researchers to promote the concept of sustainability. A content analysis based on 433 unique ads also highlights various themes and execution elements, the major being preservation of the planet, use of environment-friendly images, and prominent use of white, green or blue colours (Segav et al., 2016). The studies also highlight the impact of various advertising appeals on consumers. Two prominently mentioned appeals are self-benefitting or egoistic and others

benefitting or altruistic. Advertising messages combining altruistic appeals with prevention focus increase favorable responses from consumers. Studies highlight the advantages of using altruistic appeals in communicating sustainability initiatives, as these positively influence consumers' purchase intentions (Moes et al., 2022). Literature also reports various other appeals in dyadic comparison. These are co-created versus firm- created (Zhang & Jeong, 2023) competence versus warmth (Chen et al., 2022), concrete versus abstract (Yang et al., 2015), functional versus emotional (Matthes et al., 2014), green marketing versus green demarketing (Reich & Soule, 2016), hedonic versus utilitarian (Casado et al., 2022).

Communication of Sustainable Initiatives

The communication of sustainable initiatives focuses on *corporate communication*, the *role of social media*, *firm-generated content* and *user-generated content*. Companies adopt various practices to communicate their sustainability efforts. The two most common methods adopted by firms are communication of product-related or pro-environmental attributes, and consequences aimed at encouraging behavioral change (Viciunaite, 2022). Common pro-environmental attributes include third-party certification, animal welfare measures, use of environment-friendly raw materials, and responsible manufacturing practices. Apart from this, companies also suggest various behavioral practices to help mitigate adverse impacts and enhance the overall sustainable value.

Since communication is an important aspect, brands must take the initiative to communicate their green initiatives through various channels such as print and electronic media, advertising, event sponsorships, and others. If sustainable practices are being promoted in the form of a movie, it is essential that there is synergy between movie content, features, and type of sponsor for promoting positive brand associations. Apart from the firm's initiatives to promote its sustainable practices, user-generated content on social media has a significant positive influence on the consumption decisions along with strengthening consumer brand relationships (Sarkar et al., 2023). Research highlights that intention to share sustainability-focused content on social media is driven by attitude towards brand posts and general social media engagement and promotes electronic word of mouth (Kong & Witmaier, 2021). However, to reach viral sharing, the messages must be highly relevant or accurate and must be from a source who has high expertise and is trusted (Knight et al., 2022) including green influencers.

Various variables used in the study have been summarized in Table 4 for reference.

IMPLICATIONS

Academic Implications

The current SLR offers multiple academic implications. Though work on sustainability advertising is present, so far, it is not a well-researched area as it overlaps at multiple places with green advertising. There is also a lack of consensus and uniformity amongst various sub-dimensions of sustainability advertising and the operationalization of its constructs. Further, while many sustainability-based themes are emerging in the industry; relevant academic literature is missing from an advertising and communications standpoint. Firstly, through this SLR, the authors have tried to summarize the fragmented literature available in the domain while trying to establish a differentiation between green and social dimensions. The present systematic review, therefore, serves as a compendium to apprise the researchers about the work done so far, while presenting a directional overview for future research. Taking cues from this exploration, the researchers can work towards defining and validating various sub-dimensions of sustainability advertising, and operationalizing respective constructs. Secondly, the review

attempts to summarize various variables used by the researchers in the past two decades and categorize them into antecedents, moderators, mediators, and consequences. The authors also highlight various dimensions, their characteristics, and their influence on consumer responses. These characteristics and facilitators will serve as an essential reference for further empirical validation in various contexts and geographies, both from an advertising and communications standpoint, as well as interdisciplinary research. Finally, the SLR has identified certain unexplored areas, and suggests exciting future research directions, outlined in Table 5. These directions will contribute to advancing the body of knowledge in the sustainability advertising domain from various perspectives. The study thus provides a valuable contribution to the literature by summarising the results of the studies investigating the impact of sustainability advertising on consumer response, along with synthesis of variables and themes.

Managerial Implications

Along with this, the current SLR also offers important managerial implications. While sustainability is now a mainstream agenda for both organizations and consumers, many consumers are still unable to transition to sustainable choices due to a lack of awareness about the environmental and social consequences of their daily products or lifestyle. Further, another section of consumers prefer a sustainable lifestyle but cannot to translate it into purchase behavior, thus resulting in an intention-action gap. In order to facilitate consumers make sustainable choices with ease, the marketing function must reach out to the customers with more sustainable messaging through effective and creative utilization of advertisement and communication strategies. At the same time, they should be mindful of greenwashing and bluewashing attempts. The current SLR presents a summary of various researched variables along with their impact on several outcome variables. Taking cues from this exploration, the findings will help understand trending and most impactful themes, spanning from designing to execution. This will serve as a compendium for industry practitioners looking to strategize, design, and communicate sustainability advertisements that can influence the consumer outcomes in a positive manner.

LIMITATIONS

The current SLR has incorporated 118 studies for the analysis, making it difficult to describe the findings elaborately. Though attempts were made to comprehensively include the major findings of the studies, it limited the analysis from going in-depth. While the authors took serious efforts to make the study as inclusive and exhaustive as possible, some studies might have been excluded unintentionally due to the choice of keywords, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, filters used, and databases considered.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Table 1 TOP 5 COUNTRIES	
Country	Count of publications
USA	27
China	11
Taiwan	6
Spain, India, Germany	5 each
Italy, Korea	4 each

Table 2 TOP 5 PUBLICATION OUTLETS	
Publication Title	Count of Publications
International Journal of Advertising	17
Journal of Advertising	11
Business Strategy and the Environment	8
Journal of Business Research	7
Journal of Cleaner Production	7
Journal of Consumer Marketing	5

Table 3 TOP 5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS	
Theoretical Grounding	Frequency
Elaboration Likelihood Model	7
Construal Level Theory	6
Persuasive Communication Theory	5
Signaling theory	5
Theory of Planned Behavior	5
Regulatory Focus Theory	3

Table 4 SUMMARY OF VARIABLES		
ANTECEDENTS	MODERATORS & MEDIATORS	OUTCOME VARIABLES
• Ad appeals • Ad colour • Ad creativity • Ad themes • Altruistic vs egoistic message • Argument quality • Benefit vs attribute framing • Claim specificity • Claim type • Corporate communication of green practices • Ecological attributes • Emoji • Gain vs loss framing	MODERATORS • Anthropomorphism • Brand competence • Brand loyalty • Brand luxury • Brand trust • Brand's market share • Brands green reputation • Consumer knowledge • Consumer's construal level • Customer's green involvement • Customer's regulatory focus • Eco-label credibility • Everyday habits • Identity salience	• Ad credibility • Advertising effect • Advertising effectiveness – Attitude towards ad, Attitude towards brand • Advertising effectiveness – free recall, cued recall, brand recognition • Attitude towards ads • Attitude towards firms • Behavioral intention • Brand attitude • Brand environmental commitment • Brand personality

• Green advertising design • Green advertising practices • Green advertising receptivity • Green advertising skepticism • Green brand positioning • Green consumer segmentation • Green consumption values • Green information quality • Green Marketing tools • Greenwashing • Message assertiveness • Message content • Message explicitness • Message focus • Message specificity • Message substantiation • Promotion vs prevention focus • Sustainability disclosure • Sustainability marketing • Sustainable marketing activities – social, environmental and economic	• Message persuasiveness • Non-Deception • Perceived attractiveness • Perceived credibility • Perceived sustainability motives • Persuasion knowledge • Political views • Price Discount • Public self-awareness • Purchase motivation • Temporal distance MEDIATORS • Brand attitude • Brand stereotypes • Consumer attitude • Environmental Concern • Gender • Green Brand credibility • Green Brand Image • Green Brand Trust • Information transparency • Learning • Manipulative intent • Perceived Behavioral control • Perceived color appropriateness • Perceived competence & warmth • Perceived CSR • Perceived environmental commitment • Perceived green innovativeness • Perceived health consequences • Perceived information utility • Perceived tangibility of benefits • Price • Recycling identity, Climate Change Identity	• Brand relationships • Communication effectiveness – Attitude towards ad, Attitude towards brand, Purchase Intention • Consumer reaction towards brand • Customer attitude • Customer loyalty • Customer satisfaction • eWOM • Green purchase behaviour • Message persuasiveness • Perceived competence • Pro social behavior of consumer • Product attractiveness • Purchase Intention • Purchase Intention / Buying intention • Responsible consumption • Social and emotional well-being • Sustainable consumption • User engagement • Visit intention • Willingness to share messages
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Table 5
FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Dimension	Future research directions and research questions
Sustainability	• What is the relevance and importance of sustainability as a concept for consumers? • How are Brands communicating their sustainability initiatives to target consumers? • What is the impact of advertisements in influencing consumer's sustainable choices? • What are the most important advertisement characteristics that influence sustainable choices of consumers? • How can advertisers and advertisement agencies find the right trade-off between sustainability, ethics and product-attribute benefits?

	What is the difference in consumer perception between companies that actively champion sustainability and those that do not? Does this influence consumer buying behavior?
Organizational Role	- What is the diversity of problems and trade-off by Brands as solutions? - Strategic initiatives being taken by Brands, and how can they be communicated? - How can organizations focus on niche vs holistic revolution? - What is the impact of Brand related sustainable actions on consumer choices? - How can organizations leverage emerging technologies like Generative AI in influencing consumer decision making process? - How can Brands quantify and communicate the eco impact of products and lifestyles? How can standardized metrics be developed to assess this impact?
Advertising Appeals	- What is the difference in advertising appeals in B2B and B2C context? - What is the role of advertising appeals in influencing the sustainable purchase decision and behavior? - What are the most prevalent advertising appeals used by Brands? Which advertising appeals will gain most prominence while advertising sustainability initiatives? - What is the difference in advertisement appeals of established brands versus start-ups? - What is the impact of advertising appeals on brand metrics as - brand loyalty, brand equity? - Investigating impact of various advertisement appeals on Gen-Z and Gen – alpha - Role of perceived social norms and cultural context in advertising appeals? - Difference in advertising appeals across products, industries, and geographies
Sustainability themed Message Dimensions	- What are the emerging themes in Sustainability advertising? - Which SDGs are most popular for designing of advertising communications? - Difference in storytelling approaches between TV, Print, Social Media - Communication optimization w.r.t consumer demographics and communication platforms - Relationship between advertising themes and industry sectors? - Relationship between advertising themes and geographies? - Investigate the impact of sustainability themed message dimensions in emerging economies like India - Impact of Brand's instructions about end of life cycle products - Impact of educational interventions directed towards behavioral change - Influence of educational interventions vs communicating product-attribute benefits?
Advertising Creativity	- Role of advertising creativity in influencing consumer decision making? - Relationship between advertising creativity and performance metrics like sales, repeat purchases, brand loyalty? - Difference in advertising creativity w.r.t industries, products, geographies and consumer groups
Sustainability Marketing Claims	- Role of various types of sustainability claims - Impact of claim combinations? Which types of claims can be clubbed for optimized effects? - Minimum claim requirement to establish credibility - Role of product attributes as eco-friendly packaging on sustainability claims - Role of communicating supply chain transparency in establishing credibility of claims - Effective method of communicating claims - Optimization of claim placement for maximum positive impact on consumers
Role of Celebrity & Influencers	- Role of influencers in promoting adoption of sustainable products and behaviors - Characteristics of influencers which impact sustainable choices of consumers? - Which advertising strategies are commonly used by influencers?

	• What are the upcoming trends that are likely to have maximum impact on the consumers? • Which types of influencers are most preferred by Gen -Z? • Do influencers have any role in influencing Gen – alpha?
Social Media Platforms	• How can social media marketing help create awareness about sustainable products or services? • Which social media platforms can be leveraged to engage the target audience effectively? • Relationship between different social media platforms and target audience? • Role of Brand or Consumer activism while leveraging social media and digital channels
Consumer Drivers	• Which sustainable initiatives are preferred most by the consumers when deciding to adopt a product or service? • What is the influence of demographic factors ? • Impact of trends like minimalism, frugality, circularity • Influence of sustainability advertisements on green vs non-green consumers • Role of consumers in co-creating and amplifying ads
Purchase Behavior	• What are the triggers that initiate purchase? How can these triggers be communicated? • What are the factors leading to consumer resistance towards adoption of sustainable behavior? • What is the reason behind intention-action gap?
Greenwashing	• Consequences of greenwashing, sustainability washing, purpose-washing • Advertising and communication strategies to overcome perceived greenwashing

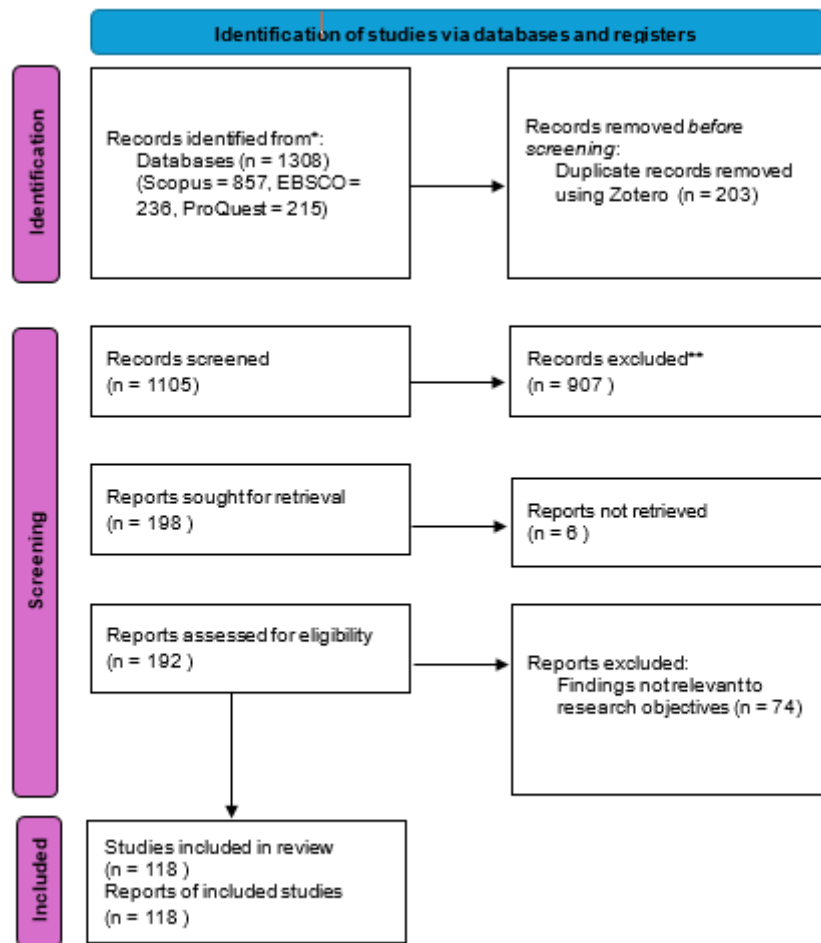


FIGURE 2
PRISMA FLOW DIAGRAM

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