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Research on Greenwashing and Consumer Behavior in the Vegan Cosmetics Industry in Hanoi City

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Abstract

The proliferation of “green” cosmetic brands lacking verifiable evidence in the market has led to the phenomenon of greenwashing, causing consumers to doubt product quality, thereby directly impacting their trust and purchasing decisions. This article focuses on analyzing the current situation regarding factors influencing greenwashing on

vegan cosmetic consumer behavior, identifying the barriers resulting from this phenomenon, and subsequently proposing solutions to enhance consumer awareness, strengthen corporate information transparency, and reinforce the legal framework.

Keywords: Greenwashing, Consumer Behavior, Vegan Cosmetics

1. The necessity of studying the impact of Greenwashing on customer trust in the vegan cosmetics industry

Globally, there is a current shift towards sustainable development and responsible consumption, making the issue of greenwashing also known as brand greenwashing a notable phenomenon in contemporary green marketing activities. The National Strategy on Green Growth for the period 2021-2030 (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2021) emphasizes the goal of promoting sustainable production and consumption models, aiming to reduce emissions and raise public awareness. This indicates that the green consumption trend is developing strongly in Vietnam, especially in major cities like Hanoi. Furthermore, a survey by (Nielsen Vietnam, 2024) ^[6] found that over 60% of urban consumers are willing to pay an extra cost for environmentally friendly products. Among these consumers, Gen Z and Millennials (Gen Y) are leading the trend of responsible consumption. However, parallel to the sustainable consumption trend, the phenomenon of greenwashing in the cosmetics industry is becoming increasingly common, with many brands labeling products as eco, cruelty-free, natural, or vegan without providing verifiable evidence. This threatens consumers' green trust (Chen & Chang, 2012) ^[4] and diminishes the reputation of brands operating transparently.

Firstly, identifying and clarifying the aspects of greenwashing's impact within the vegan cosmetics industry

According to (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2023), there is a growing trend of businesses self-labeling products as environmentally friendly without verification or clear product origin, especially among beauty and personal care products sold sporadically in the market or via online platforms such as TikTok, Shopee, etc. Identifying manifestations of greenwashing in the vegan cosmetics industry a rapidly developing sector lacking effective control mechanisms is essential and timely to serve as a basis for market management, protecting consumer rights, and increasing transparency in trade.

Secondly, analyzing the impact of greenwashing on green consumption behavior holds significant importance as it affects customer trust

When consumers lack the capacity and clear knowledge to differentiate between genuinely sustainable brands and deceptive 'green' brands, they easily enter a state of green skepticism and psychological doubt regarding the authenticity of environmental claims (Mohr *et al.*, 1998) ^[5], questioning whether they are truly purchasing beauty products genuinely derived from nature. This situation not only impacts their green purchase intentions but also diminishes loyalty, trust, and advocacy for authentic green cosmetic brands.

Thirdly, the contribution lies in supplementing the scientific basis for the field of green marketing and sustainable consumption behavior

From a theoretical and practical perspective, international studies have proven that greenwashing significantly affects consumer attitudes, beliefs, or behavior (Braga Junior *et al.*, 2019) [3] and (Chen & Chang, 2012) [4]. However, in Vietnam, especially within the vegan cosmetics industry, relevant research remains limited. The results of this study will serve as a basis for proposing solutions for honest communication, building transparent and reputable brands, and simultaneously supporting regulatory bodies in issuing clear regulations and certification standards for environmentally friendly vegan products.

Thus, research analyzing and clarifying Greenwashing and customer trust, along with studying the consumption behavior of vegan cosmetics, is necessary and holds profound theoretical and practical significance. The results of this study will serve as an important basis for cosmetic manufacturing enterprises to build honest communication strategies, enhance brand reputation, and strengthen consumer confidence in environmentally friendly vegan products.

2. The Current Situation of Factors Influencing Greenwashing in the Vegan Cosmetics Industry

In recent years, Vietnam’s vegan cosmetics market has grown rapidly due to the rise of green consumption trends and increasing awareness of animal protection. However, the phenomenon of *greenwashing* when companies advertise products as “green” or “vegan” without valid evidence has had a negative impact on consumer trust and purchasing behavior.

Table 1: Current factors influencing greenwashing in Vietnam’s vegan cosmetics industry

Survey Content	Rate / Data	Impact on Consumer Behavior	Source
Consumers interested or highly interested in vegan cosmetics	72.9%	Increases positive attitude but not necessarily purchasing behavior	Ngô Thị Ngọc <i>et al.</i> , 2024 [7]
Consumers purchasing ≥3 times/year	38.5%	Unstable purchasing behavior, low frequency	Ngô Thị Ngọc <i>et al.</i> , 2024 [7]
Consumers purchasing <3 times/year	61.5%	Constrained by price, product efficacy, and distrust of information	Ngô Thị Ngọc <i>et al.</i> , 2024 [7]
Green advertising skepticism (<i>Green skepticism</i>)	High	Reduces brand trust and purchase intention	Nguyen-Viet & Nguyen, 2024 [7]
Concern for animal welfare	Medium – High	Enhances positive attitudes and purchase intention	Ngô Thị Ngọc <i>et al.</i> , 2024 [7]
Transparency / Reliable certification	High	Increases trust, reduces greenwashing risk	Nguyen-Viet & Nguyen, 2024 [8]; Ngô Thị Ngọc <i>et al.</i> , 2024 [7]

The survey results show that consumer awareness of vegan cosmetics is relatively high, with nearly 73% of consumers

being interested or highly interested. This indicates that awareness of green consumption and animal welfare is increasing, creating significant potential for the vegan cosmetics market.

However, purchasing behavior remains unstable, with only about 38.5% of consumers buying regularly (≥3 times per year). The main reasons are skepticism toward the authenticity of green information (*greenwashing*), high prices, and unclear product efficacy. Thus, although consumers show positive attitudes, brand trust and purchasing decisions are still limited by negative influencing factors.

On the other hand, positive factors such as concern for animal welfare and transparency in information or credible certifications can strengthen trust and stimulate purchase intention. These findings highlight that *greenwashing* remains a critical barrier reducing marketing effectiveness and undermining trust within the vegan cosmetics community.

Therefore, businesses need to focus on information transparency, credible certification, and honest communication to ensure sustainable development of the green market in Vietnam. If not properly addressed, *greenwashing* will continue to hinder marketing performance, weaken consumer trust, and obstruct the sustainable growth of the green cosmetics industry.

3. Some Issues Arising from the Phenomenon of Greenwashing in Vegan Cosmetic Consumption

Firstly, greenwashing causes consumers to misunderstand the concepts of green cosmetics and vegan cosmetics

Nowadays, many brands on the market launch advertising campaigns using terms such as *vegan*, *eco-friendly*, or *100% natural* to attract consumers, while their claims have not been verified by reliable organizations such as The Vegan Society or PETA. This leads customers to mistakenly believe that these products are genuinely safe and environmentally friendly, although in reality, they may still contain ingredients harmful to both the environment and consumers themselves. According to The Guardian (2020), about 60% of respondents said they were willing or somewhat willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products. This shows that consumers are ready to pay a premium for green products, and many companies take advantage of this trend to make deceptive green claims. As a result, many consumers misunderstand and make purchasing decisions based on emotions and marketing images rather than verified information.

Secondly, greenwashing reduces consumer trust in the vegan cosmetics market

When consumers discover that some brands intentionally provide misleading information, they tend to become skeptical of all products labeled as vegan. This severely undermines the reputation of genuinely ethical brands that comply with proper standards and certifications. Consequently, the vegan cosmetics market suffers a negative impact, as consumers become more cautious or even turn away from vegan cosmetics. Moreover, legitimate companies bear the consequences of the contagion effect caused by the deceptive practices of less transparent brands.

Thirdly, the legal framework and mechanisms for regulating green advertising in Vietnam remain weak. In Vietnam, regulations on vegan cosmetics are still vague, lacking clear definitions of terms such as vegan, eco-friendly, or organic

Additionally, there is no specialized agency responsible for verifying the authenticity of these claims; monitoring mainly depends on general regulatory bodies without in-depth expertise. This creates opportunities for some businesses to exploit the green image, while consumers lack tools to verify information, leading to misconceptions about the sustainability and safety of vegan cosmetics. Consequently, public trust in the vegan cosmetics market declines, ethical businesses suffer losses, and the development of a sustainable market becomes limited.

4. Some proposals to limit greenwashing and raise awareness of green consumption in the vegan cosmetics industry in Hanoi

First, improve understanding of the phenomenon of Greenwashing, green cosmetics or vegan cosmetics

In order to increase knowledge, qualifications and awareness of the above concepts, people need to learn information from mainstream media channels and at the same time learn about the ingredients and level indicators in ingredients that meet green standards according to state or international regulations to ensure product quality before buying instead of believing in advertisements exaggerated on other social media channels. In addition, the people of Hanoi need to be more vigilant and selective when receiving information as well as sharing experiences, watching programs on green products to propagate to those around them. In order to protect the environment, the awareness of buying sustainable products is not enough, people need to have appropriate knowledge to avoid being taken advantage of by bad actors to take advantage of green trust. People need to have an attitude of condemnation and criticism of the Greenwashing phenomenon so that companies and organizations do not easily exaggerate the level of greenness in their products.

Second, businesses need to build an image that comes with substantive sustainable value

Businesses need to make real investments in technology, natural materials and sustainable production processes. Businesses need to publish full, transparent and public social responsibility reports periodically on mainstream websites to create trust with customers. This information transparency not only helps businesses build trust and credibility in the hearts of customers, but also shows a clear commitment to the community and the environment. Businesses accompany the community, invest in environmental protection programs, social charity and improve propaganda to people to be aware and learn about vegan cosmetics.

Third, build a transparent and clear legal framework that provides strict testing standards to ensure that cosmetics are truly vegan to consumers in Hanoi

The State needs to complete the development of vegan and environmentally friendly product standards, and at the same time, in the inspection process, it is necessary to implement it strictly, avoiding the situation of making laws but not enforcing them in specific work. Our country can learn from

international experiences such as the United States or Europe, which have issued laws on this issue to ensure strictness and clarity. In addition, state management agencies can strengthen the inspection and supervision of communication activities, false acts, and take advantage of sustainability factors to deceive consumers. When detecting violations, the state needs to have strict handling regulations, setting an example so that the following businesses do not violate activities in the production process and communication about green products, including vegan cosmetics.

5. Conclusion

Research on greenwashing in the vegan cosmetics industry is necessary, as consumers today are very concerned about safety and environmental friendliness, especially in big cities like Hanoi. The current situation shows that many brands label vegan cosmetics but do not have authentic proof, making products lack transparency or unclear. As a result, consumer confidence decreased, customer attitudes shifted from supportive to suspicious, and genuine brands were also affected. Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness of consumers and businesses to be transparent about information and really invest in sustainable value, in addition, it is necessary to complete the legal framework and strengthen supervision. When these solutions are implemented, customer trust will be strengthened and the vegan cosmetics market will be developed sustainably and long-term.

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