A Study on the Green Washing Strategy on Influencer Marketing with Special Reference to Chennai

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Abstract—**Influencer marketing has become a powerful tool for brands to reach consumers. However, concerns exist regarding the use of green washing tactics by influencers to promote products. This study investigates the prevalence and impact of green washing strategies employed by influencers marketing brands in Chennai, India. The research explores the types of green washing tactics used by influencers in Chennai and assesses consumer awareness and perception of greenwashing in influencer marketing. It further evaluates the influence of green washing on consumer purchase intentions and explores the potential negative consequences on consumer trust and the environment. The study employs a survey approach with questionnaires distributed to consumers in Chennai. Data analysis is empirical research and the sampling method is a convenient sampling method with 200 responses, which is collected from the general public within Chennai to identify the prevalence of green washing tactics, consumer awareness levels, and the impact of green washing on purchase intention and trust. This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of green washing practices in influencer marketing within the specific context of Chennai. The findings can inform consumers about green washing tactics and empower them to make more informed purchasing decisions. Additionally, the research can provide valuable insights for influencers and brands, encouraging them to adopt more transparent and sustainable marketing practices.**

Keywords—**Greenwashing; Influencer Marketing; Sustainability; Chennai; Consumer Behavior**

I. Introduction

The rise of social media has revolutionized marketing, with influencer marketing emerging as a dominant force. Influencers leverage their social media presence and audience trust to endorse products and services. However, concerns are mounting about the prevalence of "greenwashing" within influencer marketing – deceptive practices where brands and influencers misrepresent a product's environmental sustainability. Greenwashing is a common problem in the consumer marketplace, as many consumers are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products and are more likely to buy products that they believe are sustainable. However, the claims made by companies about their products' environmental impact are not always truthful, and consumers may end up buying products that are not as eco-friendly as they seem. Some common examples of greenwashing include using vague or misleading language in advertising, such as using terms like "natural" or "eco-friendly" without any clear explanation of what those terms mean, or making claims that are technically true but do not actually make a significant difference in the product's environmental impact.

Evolution of the Topic: The concept of greenwashing has been evolving since the 1980s, initially referring to corporate efforts to portray themselves as environmentally friendly while engaging in practices

that harm the environment. Today, greenwashing tactics have permeated influencer marketing, with influencers using vague environmental claims, irrelevant imagery, and a lack of transparency to mislead consumers about a product's true environmental impact.

Government Initiatives: Governments worldwide are starting to address greenwashing. For instance, the European Union (EU) is implementing stricter regulations on green claims, requiring companies to substantiate their environmental marketing messages with scientific evidence. Similarly, countries like China have introduced guidelines for environmental advertising, aiming to combat misleading practices. However, these regulations are still in their early stages, and their effectiveness in tackling influencer marketing remains to be seen.

Factors Affecting Greenwashing: Influencers: Pressure for content, lack of knowledge, focus on aesthetics. Brands: Vague claims, lack of transparency, image over action. Consumers: Limited knowledge, convenience over research, trust in influencers. Regulations & Platforms: Lack of specific rules, weak enforcement, loose social media policies.

Current Trends: Greenwashing in influencer marketing is a global phenomenon, observed in various countries. Consumers are getting smarter: More scrutiny on influencer claims, demanding data & verification for sustainability. Rise of the "Green fluencer": Influencers specializing in sustainable practices and brand accountability. Alternative platforms gaining traction: Consumers seeking eco-friendly products and reviews beyond traditional influencer marketing channels. Regulations on the horizon: Governments considering stricter rules to tackle greenwashing. Tech to the rescue: AI and blockchain exploring ways to verify sustainability claims.

Comparison: A Global Issue with Local Nuances. Although greenwashing is a global problem, it manifests differently across countries. In the US, greenwashing often involves vague sustainability claims and a lack of transparency. In China, a focus on promoting domestic brands can lead to greenwashing tactics that emphasize national certifications over international environmental standards.

Focus on Chennai: This study focuses specifically on Chennai, India. Chennai is a rapidly developing city with a growing influencer marketing scene. However, consumer awareness of greenwashing and the regulatory landscape surrounding influencer marketing in India might differ from other countries. This study aims to understand the specific context of greenwashing in Chennai and its impact on consumer behavior.

II. Objectives

The objectives of this study are: to find the agenda setting of media to attract customers; to analyze the integrated transparency of the influencer and consumers; to evaluate the prevalence and nature of greenwashing strategies used by influencers marketing brands; and to examine the potential negative consequences of greenwashing on consumer trust and the environment.

III. Hypotheses

H_0: There is a significant relationship between age and responsibilities of preventing greenwashing from customers.

H_1: There is no significant relationship between age and responsibilities of preventing greenwashing from customers.

IV. Literature Review

R. Kavitha and N. Senthil Kumar (2023) suggest that firms should integrate transparency into green products without employing greenwashing, which would increase consumer trust in green products and reduce green perceived risk and green scepticism. Astrid Sailer, Harald Wilfing, Eva Straus (2022) examined predictive factors for consumer evaluations of Black Friday ads by sustainable brands. Sinisalo, Camilla (2020) gathered knowledge about young consumers' reactions and perceptions of greenwashing in fast fashion advertisements. Fernando, A. G., Suganthi, L., & Sivakumaran, B. (2014) used agenda-setting theory to investigate consumer opinions on greenwashed advertisements, finding two significant themes: marketing communication credibility and impact on the natural environment. Fernando, A. G., Sivakumaran, B., & Suganthi, L. (2014) performed a content analysis of Indian English green print

advertisements, finding 51.7% of claims were greenwashed. Medina, Sascha (2023) noted that SHEIN uses influencer marketing on TikTok to fuel desire for trendy clothing. Matthias Gräuler and Prof. Dr. Frank Teuteberg (2014) proposed a research endeavor quantifying the influence of online advertisement design elements to detect greenwashing. Elliott, R., & Percy, L. (2007) suggested that greenwashing can harm a company's reputation and erode consumer trust. D'Souza, C., Taghian, M., & Lamb, P. (2006) found that greenwashing can undermine the credibility of environmental labels. Vermeir, I. and Verbeke, W. (2006) examined the attitude-behavior gap in sustainable food consumption. Laczniak, R. N., & Murphy, P. E. (2006) suggested companies can reduce the risk of greenwashing by aligning claims with genuine sustainability efforts. Henriques, A. M., & Richardson, J. (2004) reviewed the triple bottom line concept. Boulstridge, E. and Carrigan, M. (2000) examined the attitude-behavior gap in corporate responsibility. Kilbourne, W. E., & Beckmann, S. C. (1998) reviewed the hierarchy of effects in advertising. Henion, K. E. (1972) found that greenwashing can reduce consumer trust in environmental claims. Lyon, T. P., & Montgomery, A. W. (2013) reviewed the effectiveness of environmental regulations in deterring greenwashing. Grimmer, M. and Bingham, T. (2013) found that greenwashing can lead to negative word-of-mouth communication. Parguel, B., Benoit-Moreau, F., & Russell, C. A. (2017) reviewed the potential of sustainability ratings to deter greenwashing. Kashyap, R. K., & Rangnekar, S. (2018) found that greenwashing is widespread in India. Kumar, P. (2020) provides an overview of greenwashing literature.

V. Research Methodology

The sampling method followed in this study is convenient sampling. The study is unable to collect data through random sampling methods due to the reduced geographical area. Since the study is restricted to the territory within Chennai, the conclusion derived by average is not perfectly accurate. Since the study collected responses from the general public at large, the findings are mostly based on generalized opinion rather than legal or scientific background. Independent variables: age, gender, occupation, education, marital status. Dependent variables: biggest responsibility, prevent greenwashing, hashtag, disaster causes, promote sustainability.
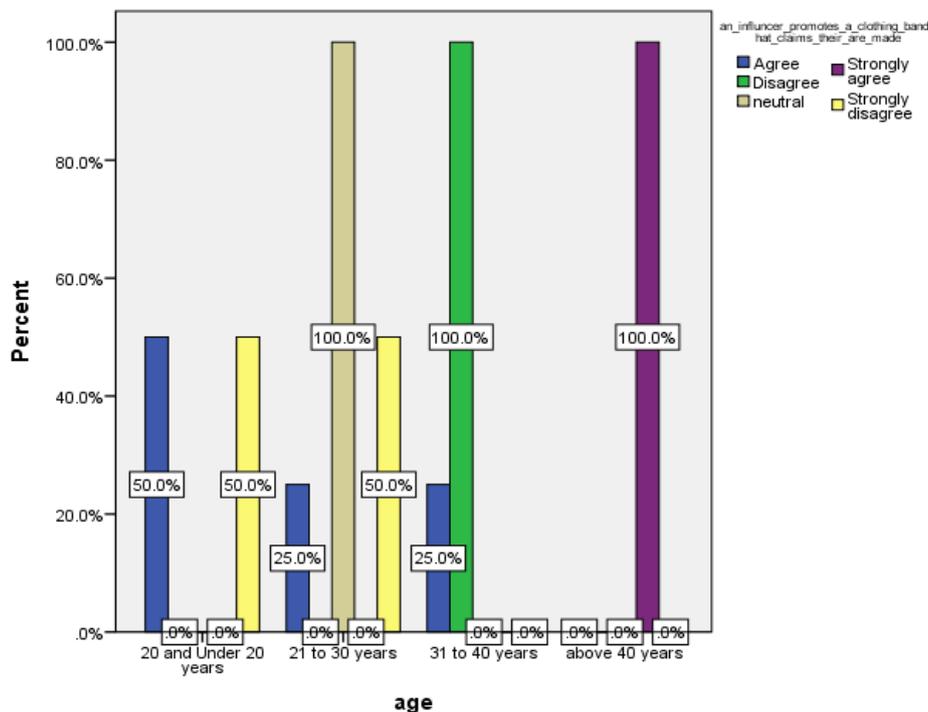
VI. Analysis

Fig. 1. Comparison between age and an influencer promoting a cloth brand claiming environmentally friendly products.
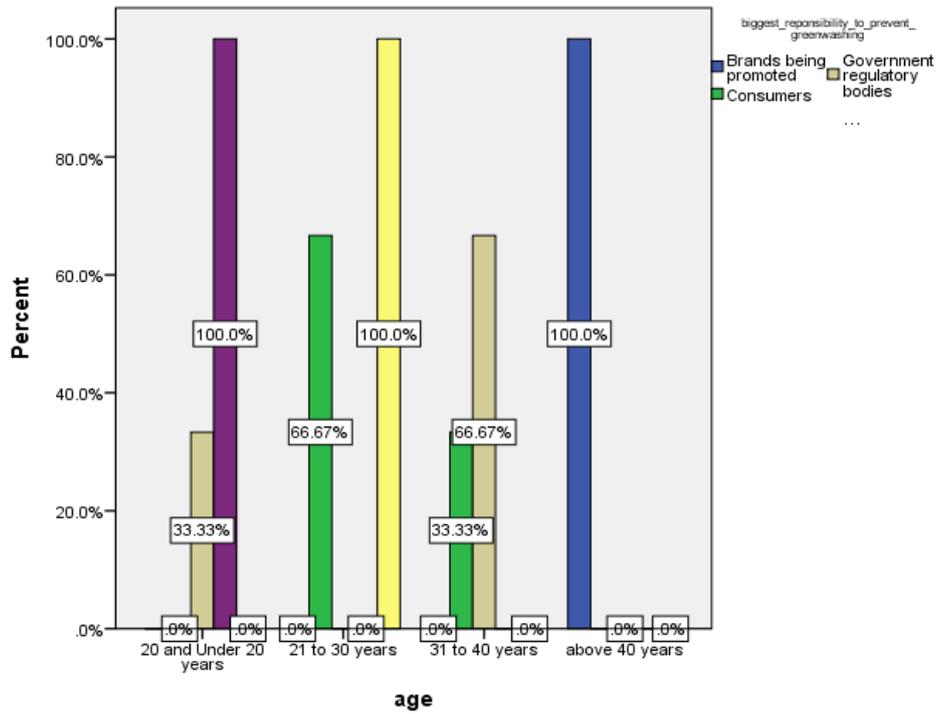
Fig. 2. Opinion of sample respondents about the biggest responsibility of influencers to prevent greenwashing among age.
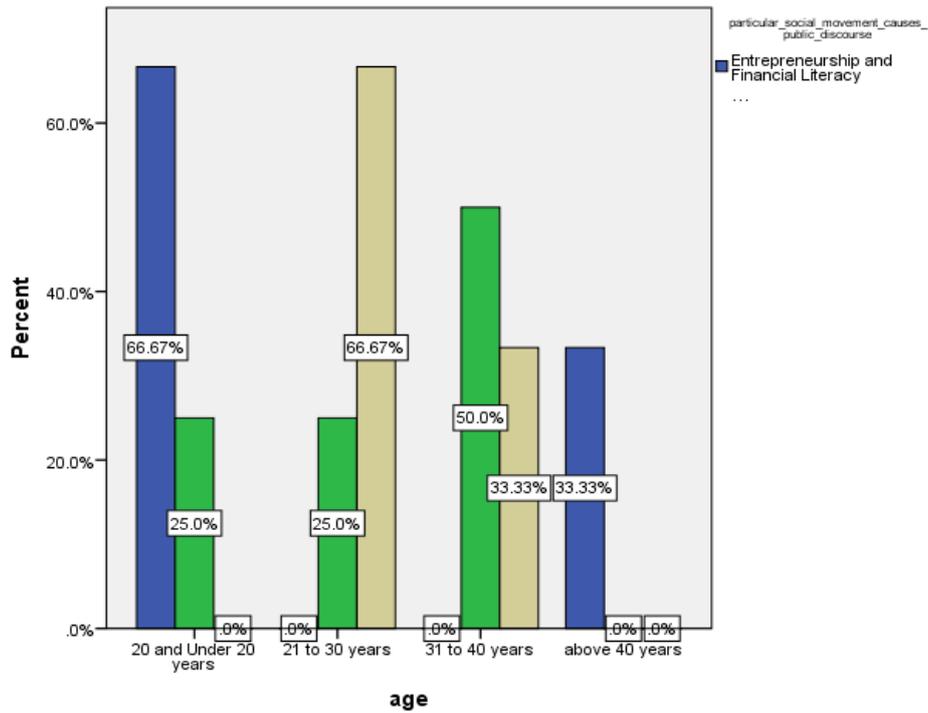

Fig. 3. Opinion of sample respondents about the particular social movement causing public discourse among age.
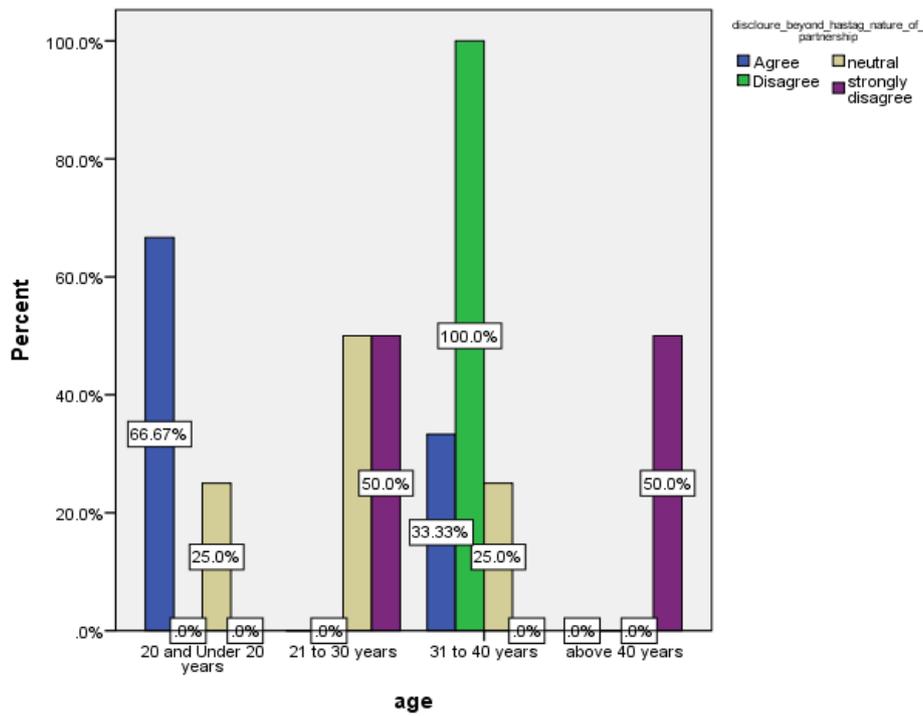
Fig. 4. Opinion of sample respondents about the disclosure beyond the hashtag and proof of nature of partnership.
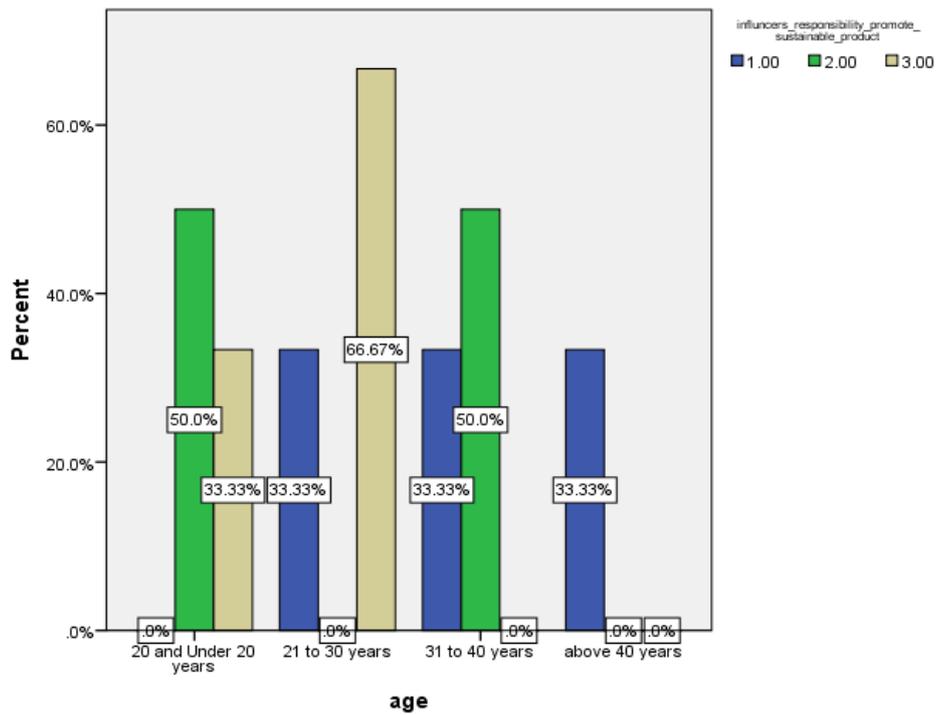

Fig. 5. Opinion of sample respondents about the influencer responsibility to promote sustainable products.
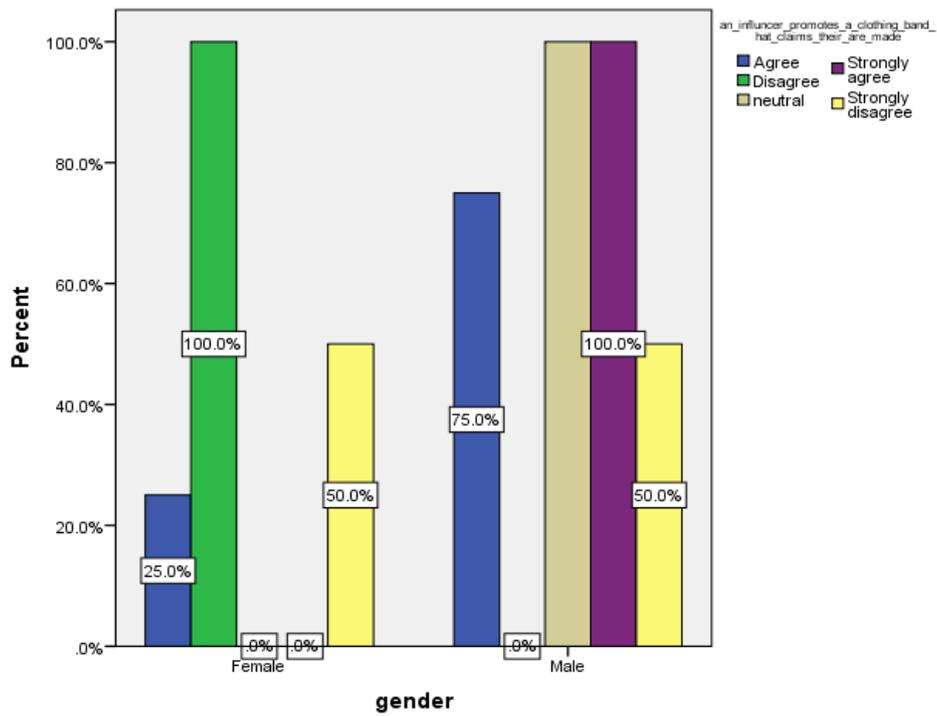
Fig. 6. Opinion of sample respondents about an influencer promoting clothing brands and claiming their product nature.
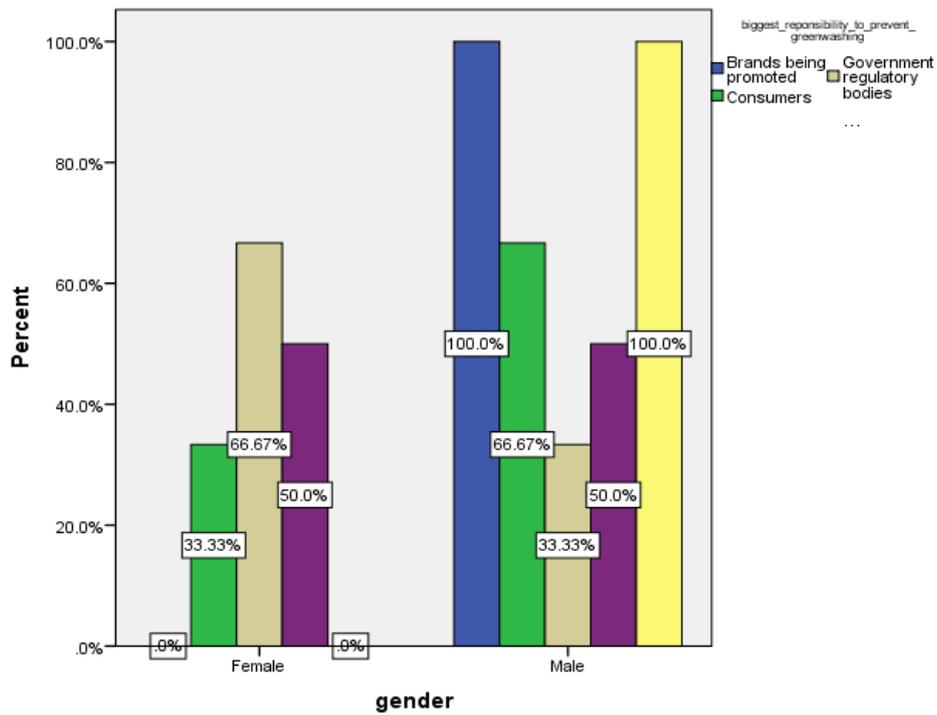

Fig. 7. Opinion of sample respondents about the biggest responsibility to prevent greenwashing.
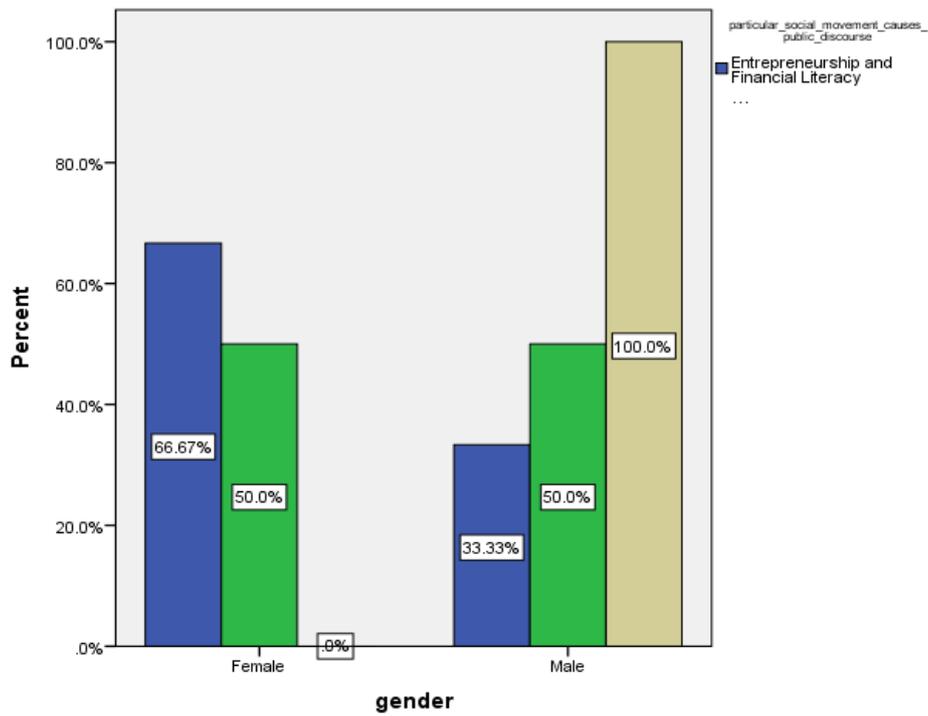
Fig. 8. Opinion of sample respondents about the particular social movement that causes public awareness among genders.

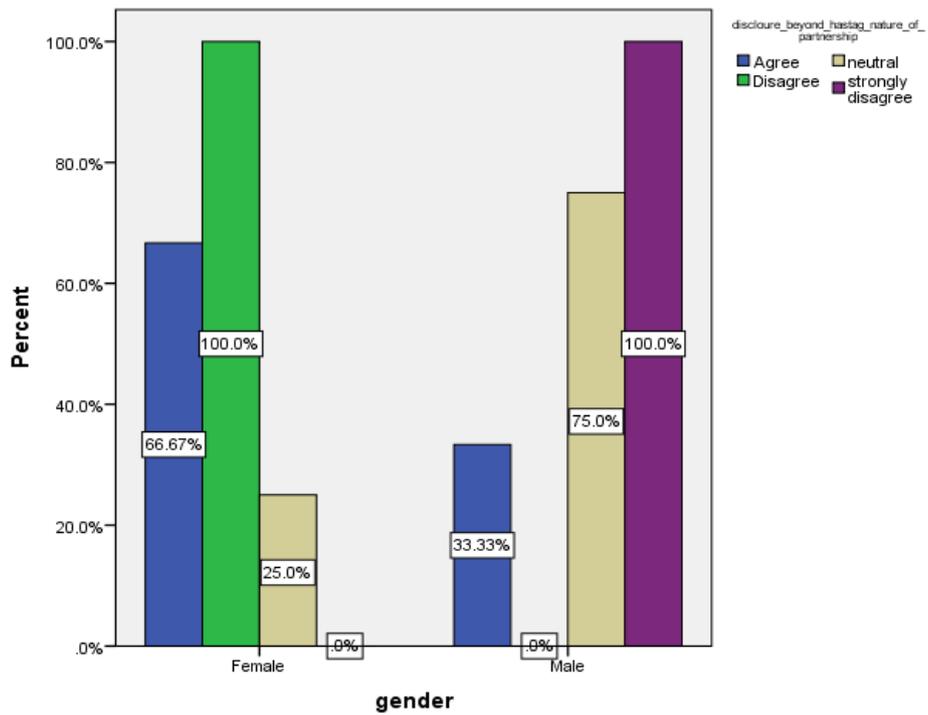*Fig. 9. Opinion of sample respondents about the disclosure of products beyond the hashtag and nature of the product under partnership among gender.*

Fig. 10. Opinion of sample respondents about the influencers' responsibility to promote sustainable products among gender.

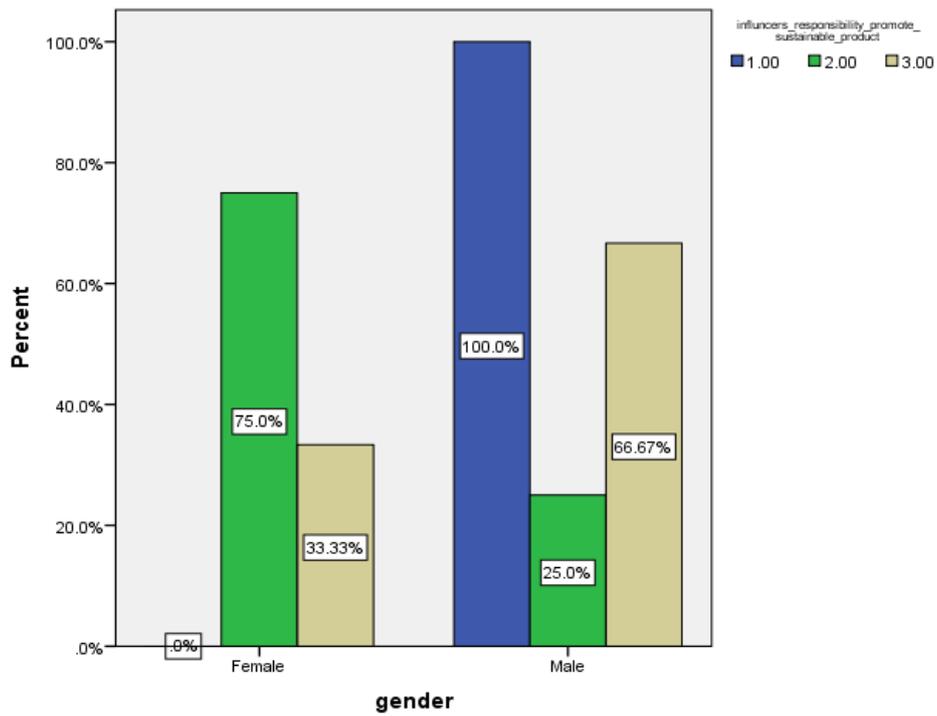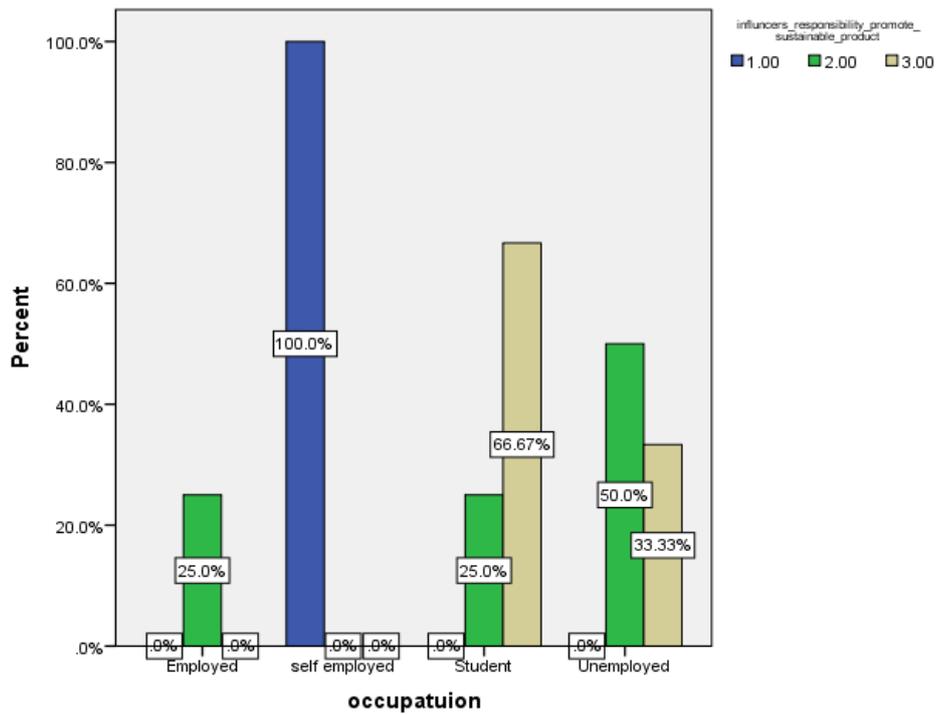*Fig. 11. Opinion of sample respondents about the influencer responsibilities to promote the sustainable product among occupation.*
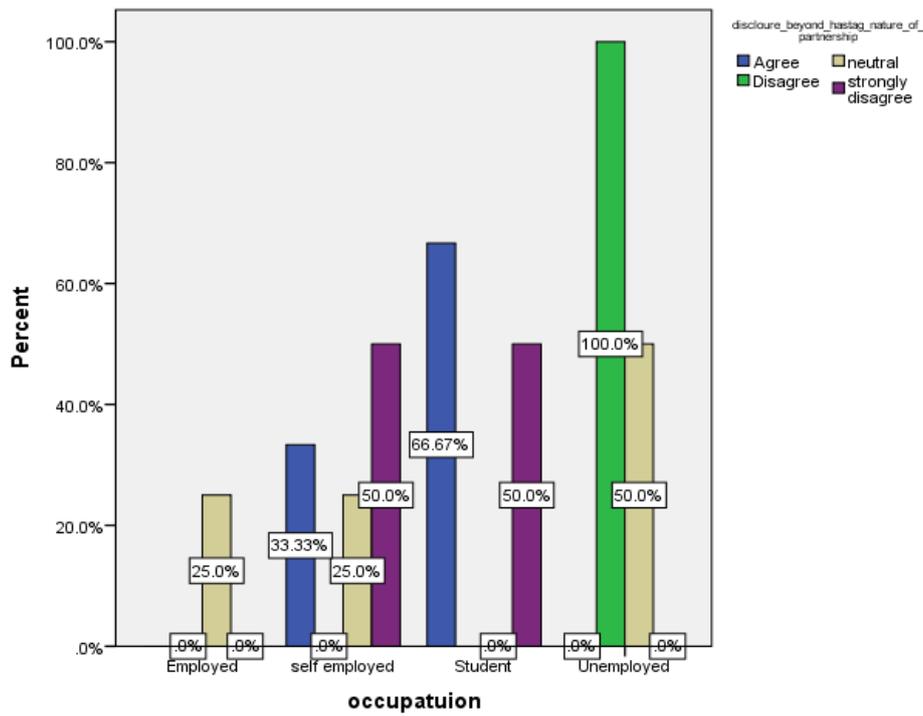
Fig. 12. Opinion of sample respondents about the disclosure of products beyond the hashtag among occupations.
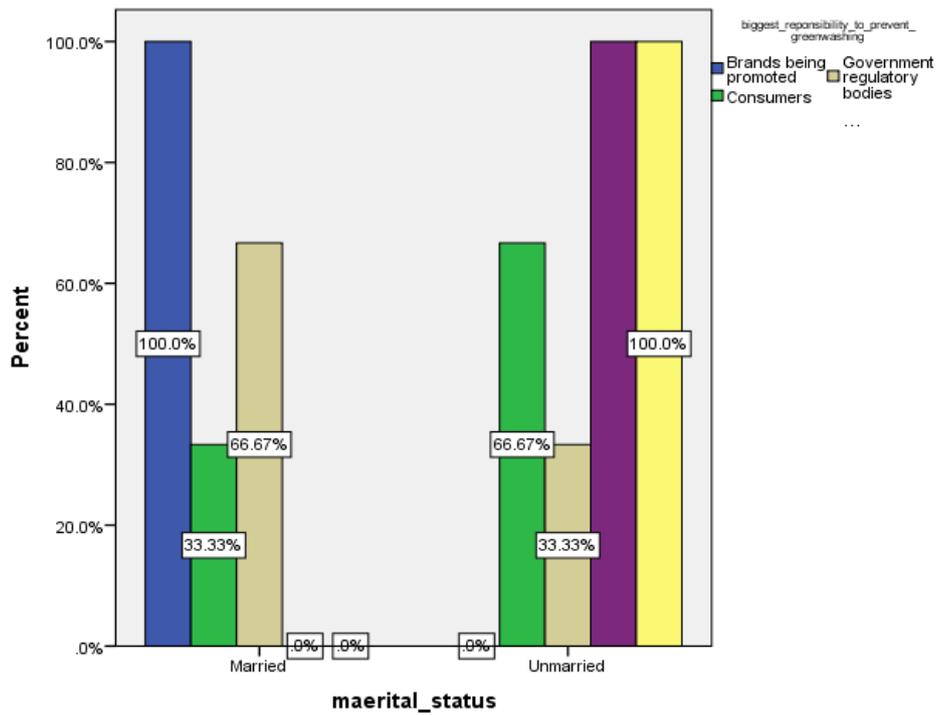

Fig. 13. Opinion of sample respondents about the biggest responsibility of the influencer to prevent and support sustainable products among marital status.

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
age * biggest_reponsibility_to_ prevent_greenwashing	10	100.0%	0	0.0%	10	100.0%

age * biggest_reponsibility_to_prevent_greenwashing Crosstabulation

Count

		biggest_reponsibility_to_prevent_greenwashing					
		Brands being promoted	Consumers	Government regulatory bodies	Influencers themselves	Social media platforms	Total
age	20 and Under 20 years	0	0	1	2	0	3
	21 to 30 years	0	2	0	0	1	3
	31 to 40 years	0	1	2	0	0	3
	above 40 years	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total		1	3	3	2	1	10

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.111[a]	12	.049
Likelihood Ratio	18.639	12	.098
N of Valid Cases	10		

a. 20 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .10.

Table 1. Relation between age and the biggest responsibility of influencer marketing to prevent greenwashing.

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
gender * discloure_beyond_hastag_nature_of_partnership	10	100.0%	0	0.0%	10	100.0%

gender * discloure_beyond_hastag_nature_of_partnership Crosstabulation

Count

		discloure_beyond_hastag_nature_of_partnership				Total
		Agree	Disagree	neutral	strongly disagree	
gender	Female	2	1	1	0	4
	Male	1	0	3	2	6
Total		3	1	4	2	10

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.097[a]	3	.251
Likelihood Ratio	5.142	3	.162
N of Valid Cases	10		

a. 8 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .40.

Table 2. Relation between the disclosure of the fact beyond hashtags and promoting natural products with partnership relation to male and female.

VII. Result

It is revealing that among the age group and an influencer promoting a sustainable product, agreement was expressed by 50% of respondents aged 20 and under, and 25% of those aged 21 to 40. Only a small number of people above 40 years strongly supported the statement (Figure 1). The relation between age and responsibility reveals that nearly 100% of respondents indicated brands as responsible, and consumers at 66.6%. Some respondents identified government regulatory bodies in the 20 and under age group at 33.33% (Figure 2). The relation between age and social disclosure in marketing shows that nearly 66.6% of the age group 20 and under agreed over entrepreneurship and financial literacy in equal proportion to 25% (Figure 3). Regarding age and disclosure beyond basic hashtags, 100% of respondents aged 31–40 disagreed, and among the above 40 years group, 50% strongly disagreed (Figure 4). Nearly 40% of people aged 21 and above, and 50% of people under 20 years and 30 to 40 years, were influenced by sustainability (Figure 5). 100% of males strongly agreed over the sustainability claims statement, while approximately 100% of females strongly disagreed (Figure 6). Nearly 100% of male respondents indicated branding promoters and agencies as responsible for preventing greenwashing, whereas 56.67% of females placed the responsibility on the government (Figure 7). 100% of female respondents showed a 66.6% higher-order response to social movements, while 33.33% supported disclosure (Figure 8). 100% of males strongly disagreed over the partnership disclosure statement, while 66.67% of females agreed (Figure 9). 100% of males strongly agreed on influencer responsibility for sustainability; 75% of females agreed (Figure 10). 100% of self-employed respondents strongly agreed on influencer responsibility for sustainable products, while 25% of employees and students highly agreed, and 6.67% of students and 33.3% of unemployed agreed (Figure 11). Nearly 100% of unemployed respondents disagreed over disclosure beyond the hashtag, while 66.67% of students agreed and 25% of employees strongly disagreed (Figure 12). 100% of unmarried respondents cited brand building and 66.67% of married couples cited their own responsibility (Figure 13). The null

hypothesis value is 0.005 (Table 1). The alternate hypothesis value is 0.049, which is less than 0.05 (Table 2).

VIII. Discussion

This survey unveils interesting trends in consumer perception of influencer marketing and sustainability. Younger demographics (under 40) prioritize sustainable products promoted by influencers (Figure 1), highlighting a growing environmental consciousness. There is a lack of consensus on who should champion sustainability, with some suggesting influencers and brands (Figures 1 & 2) while others see a role for government regulations (Figure 2). Consumers want transparency beyond basic hashtags, desiring details about partnerships and potential conflicts (Figure 4). A significant portion questions influencer effectiveness (Figure 5), suggesting a need for authenticity. Gender differences emerge regarding greenwashing. Males hold influencers and branding agencies accountable (Figure 6), while females see a bigger role for government (Figure 7). There is strong agreement on the importance of transparency regarding materials and partnerships (Figure 8), with both genders believing influencers should be held accountable. Employed individuals, especially the self-employed, are more likely to believe influencers have this responsibility (Figure 11). Unemployed respondents are the most skeptical of influencer marketing, entirely rejecting disclosure beyond hashtags (Figure 12). While the data on marital status seems inconclusive (Figure 13), it could be more insightful when analyzed alongside other demographics.

IX. Limitation

It is important to acknowledge potential limitations of the study, such as sample size, demographics of respondents, and the possibility of self-reporting bias.

X. Conclusion

This study delved into the concerning issue of greenwashing within Chennai's influencer marketing landscape. We explored the types of greenwashing tactics employed by influencers, assessed consumer awareness and perception of this deceptive practice, and evaluated its influence on purchase decisions. Additionally, we investigated the potential negative consequences of greenwashing for consumer trust and the environment. This knowledge can empower consumers in Chennai to become more critical of influencer marketing messages and make informed purchasing decisions. Influencers can leverage these findings to adopt more transparent and ethical marketing practices, building stronger trust with their audience. For brands, the research emphasizes the importance of genuine sustainability efforts and avoiding greenwashing tactics to cultivate a positive brand image. Finally, policymakers can utilize these findings to explore potential regulations or educational initiatives that can curb greenwashing in influencer marketing within Chennai.

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