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BUILDING CONSUMER TRUST IN GREEN MARKETING: ANALYZING THE ROLE OF BRAND TRANSPARENCY, ECO-LABELING, SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING, AND ETHICAL ADVERTISING IN FMCG

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

In recent years, sustainability has become a critical consideration for consumers, particularly in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector. As environmental concerns rise, consumers are increasingly seeking brands that align with their values of eco-consciousness. Green marketing is one of the primary strategies companies in FMCG are using to address this demand. However, for green marketing to be effective, companies need to establish trust with their audience.

Design/methodology/approach

Green marketing has become essential for companies seeking to promote sustainability and change customer behaviour. Green marketing campaigns in FMCG depend on consumer trust. Brand transparency builds trust by communicating a company's sustainability activities honestly. Eco-labeling verifies FMCG product environmental claims and boosts consumer trust. Sustainable packaging enhances a brand's environmental responsibilities, impacting consumer impressions. Ethical advertising promotes truthful and socially responsible content to build trust.

Findings

Consumers are increasingly sceptical of green claims due to instances of greenwashing, where companies overstate their environmental efforts. This skepticism leads to consumer cynicism and mistrust, highlighting the importance of genuine transparency in marketing communications. Sustainable packaging involves using materials and designs that minimize environmental impact.

KEYWORDS: *Green Marketing, Consumer Trust, Brand Transparency, Eco-Labeling, Sustainable Packaging, Ethical Advertising, FMCG*

INTRODUCTION

Due to rising environmental consciousness and demand for eco-friendly products, the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector has shifted towards sustainability in recent years. For FMCG firms to satisfy changing customer tastes, green marketing—promoting products for their environmental benefits—has become essential. Green marketing relies on consumer trust, which is affected by brand transparency, eco-labeling, sustainable packaging, and ethical advertising.

Brand transparency refers to the openness and honesty with which companies communicate their environmental practices and product information to consumers. A lack of transparency can lead to consumer skepticism and erode trust in green marketing claims. For instance, the beauty industry has faced challenges with transparency, as many brands fail to provide clear information about ingredient sourcing and environmental impact, leading to consumer distrust (Vogue Business, 2024). Therefore, enhancing transparency is crucial for building consumer trust in green marketing efforts.

Eco-labeling serves as a certification mechanism that informs consumers about the environmental standards met by a product. These labels can significantly influence purchasing decisions by providing assurance of a product's eco-friendly attributes. However, the proliferation of unverified or misleading eco-labels has led to confusion and mistrust among consumers. According to recent findings, while consumers tend to prefer eco-labeled products, there is a lack of full understanding and trust in these labels, especially when negative environmental consequences of production are revealed (Wikipedia, 2023). This underscores the need for standardized and credible eco-labeling practices to maintain consumer trust.

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Sustainable packaging and ethical advertising are also important green marketing elements that build consumer confidence. Sustainable packaging aligns with consumers' environmental ideals by employing eco-friendly materials and procedures. Ethics in advertising guarantees that product environmental benefits are not exaggerated or deceptive. Greenwashing, where firms lie about their environmental efforts, has raised customer scepticism. The UK's Competition and Markets Authority examined Unilever for overstating some goods' environmental benefits, emphasising the necessity of truthful advertising (Financial Times, 2024). Therefore, green marketing must use sustainable packaging and ethical advertising to build consumer trust.

Theoretical Background

Consumer trust in green marketing is deeply rooted in theories such as the Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). Signaling Theory suggests that credible environmental claims and transparent brand communication serve as signals that reduce information asymmetry, thereby fostering consumer trust (Chen & Chang, 2013). Meanwhile, TPB posits that consumer trust influences attitudes and purchase intentions toward eco-friendly products (Paul et al., 2016). Four key determinants play a crucial role in enhancing consumer trust: brand transparency, eco-labeling, sustainable packaging, and ethical advertising. Brand transparency ensures that companies openly communicate their sustainability practices, reinforcing authenticity and credibility (Zerbini, 2017). Eco-labeling, backed by regulatory certifications, acts as a trust-enhancing mechanism by providing consumers with verified environmental claims (Testa et al., 2015). Sustainable packaging, incorporating biodegradable or recyclable materials, aligns with consumer values and strengthens trust in green product offerings (Rokka & Uusitalo, 2008). Additionally, ethical advertising, which emphasizes honesty and avoids deceptive greenwashing practices, is critical in maintaining long-term consumer confidence (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017). However, despite the rising demand for sustainable products, consumer trust in green marketing remains inconsistent due to concerns about greenwashing, misleading claims, and lack of transparency (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017). Consumers often struggle to differentiate between genuinely sustainable brands and those engaging in superficial sustainability efforts, which affects their purchasing decisions (Chen & Chang, 2013). While studies highlight factors like brand transparency, eco-labeling, sustainable packaging, and ethical advertising as key influencers of consumer trust (Testa et al., 2015; Zerbini, 2017), there is limited empirical research examining how these elements collectively shape consumer perceptions in the FMCG sector. The lack of consumer confidence in green marketing efforts creates a gap between sustainability claims and actual purchasing behavior, impacting brand credibility and long-term customer loyalty. This study aims to address this issue by analyzing the role of these four critical factors in strengthening consumer trust in green marketing, providing insights for businesses to develop authentic, transparent, and effective sustainability-driven marketing strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Transparency

Transparency involves providing clear, honest, and verifiable information about a brand's environmental practices, sourcing, and sustainability efforts. According to a study by Kim and Kim (2022), brands that are transparent about their environmental impact tend to foster higher levels of trust among consumers. Transparency allows consumers to make informed decisions and reduces the ambiguity surrounding green products, which is often a barrier to consumer adoption. However, a lack of transparency can result in skepticism and erosion of consumer confidence, as consumers might feel deceived if they perceive the brand is not truthful about its sustainability efforts (Lee et al., 2021). This is particularly true in industries like FMCG, where consumer skepticism about sustainability claims is prevalent. Therefore, enhancing brand transparency is fundamental in driving consumer trust in green marketing, as consumers increasingly seek authenticity in brands' sustainability efforts.

Eco-Labeling

Eco-labels serve as a sign of product credibility, providing consumers with clear indicators of a product's environmental and sustainability attributes (Testa et al., 2020). When eco-labels are backed by reliable, independent organizations, they significantly enhance consumer trust and increase the likelihood of purchase (Dangelico et al., 2021). However, not all eco-labels are perceived equally by consumers, with unverified or misleading labels contributing to confusion and mistrust. Testa et al. (2020) found that customers trust products with eco-labels from Energy Star or Fair Trade. Using credible eco-labels to promote customer confidence is vital to moulding consumer attitudes towards green products.

Sustainable Packaging

Brands are innovating packaging design due to consumer concerns about the environmental impact of packaging, especially single-use plastics (Nielsen, 2020). However, the effectiveness of sustainable packaging in building consumer trust depends on the transparency of the materials used and the brand's overall environmental commitment. Brands that engage in sustainable packaging but fail to integrate it into a broader sustainability strategy may be seen as participating in "greenwashing" (Anderson, 2020). Hence, the authenticity and consistency of packaging sustainability efforts are vital for building and maintaining consumer trust.

Ethical Advertising

Ethical advertising is vital for maintaining consumer trust, especially in the context of green marketing. Advertising plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of a brand's environmental commitments, and misleading or exaggerated claims can significantly harm

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consumer trust (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2021). Ethical advertising refers to the honest portrayal of a brand's environmental impact without exaggeration or the use of "greenwashing" tactics. Research by Kim and Rhee (2022) highlights that consumers are more likely to trust brands that use honest and transparent messaging in their advertising, particularly regarding environmental claims. Ethical advertising not only involves making accurate claims but also involves promoting corporate social responsibility initiatives that align with consumers' environmental values. The increasing awareness of greenwashing has led consumers to scrutinize advertisements closely, making ethical advertising even more critical in building trust in green marketing.

Consumer Trust

Trust influences not only consumers' willingness to purchase green products but also their overall perception of a brand's sustainability efforts (Nair et al., 2021). When consumers trust a brand's environmental claims, they are more likely to engage in long-term loyalty and advocacy (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2021). On the other hand, a lack of trust in green marketing leads to skepticism and resistance to green products, which can significantly hinder the success of sustainability strategies. In recent years, increasing concerns about greenwashing have heightened the need for businesses to ensure their sustainability claims are credible and transparent. Consumers are more informed and sceptical than ever before, making it essential for brands to establish trust through consistent, transparent actions across all aspects of their marketing, from product design to advertising.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Descriptive correlational study examines the links between independent variables and customer trust. Recent FMCG buyers who are conversant with green marketing and eco-friendly items make up the sample frame. A sample size of 214 participants ensures statistical power to discover relevant variable correlations.

The survey comprises urban and semi-urban customers that are interested in sustainable products, particularly FMCG businesses that use green marketing. To study consumer behaviour across segments, the sample is diverse in age, gender, income, and education.

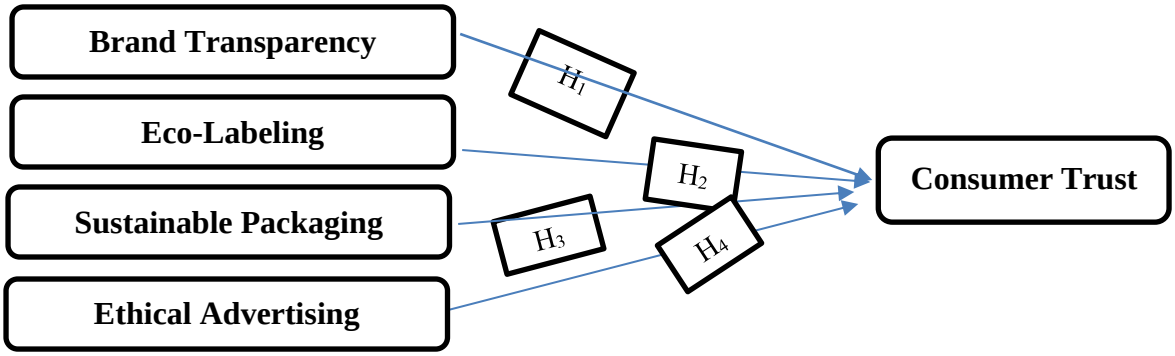
Convenience sampling is used to choose respondents from internet surveys and local eco-friendly FMCG retailers. This method collects data efficiently but may hinder generalisability. The study employs Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to confirm construct measurement models and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to analyse causal linkages between independent factors and consumer trust to evaluate hypothesised relationships. These statistical techniques allow complicated connection analysis and give a solid framework for studying how green marketing aspects affect FMCG customer confidence.

- **Research Gap**

  Brand transparency, eco-labeling, sustainable packaging, and ethical advertising individually shape consumer trust, but how they collectively influence FMCG consumer behaviour is poorly understood. Most research study these elements separately, not their overall impact or interactions on consumer trust. While most research focusses on developed markets, there is little empirical evidence on how these characteristics affect consumer trust in emerging markets, especially in regions with differing environmental and cultural environments. In FMCG brands, customer scepticism and greenwashing have been understudied. Thus, further study is needed to examine the synergistic impacts of these independent variables on customer trust in varied geographical and cultural situations and the implications of greenwashing on consumer perceptions and behaviour.
- **Objectives**
  1. To examine the impact of brand transparency on consumer trust in green marketing within the FMCG sector.
  2. To investigate the role of eco-labeling in building consumer trust towards FMCG products marketed as environmentally friendly.
  3. To assess the influence of sustainable packaging on consumer trust in FMCG brands adopting eco-friendly packaging practices.
  4. To analyze the effect of ethical advertising on consumer trust in green marketing claims made by FMCG brands.
- **Hypotheses**
  - H_1: Brand transparency has a significant positive effect on consumer trust in green marketing within the FMCG sector.
  - H_2: Eco-labeling positively influences consumer trust in FMCG products marketed as environmentally friendly.
  - H_3: Sustainable packaging has a positive impact on consumer trust in FMCG brands adopting eco-friendly packaging practices.
  - H_4: Ethical advertising positively influences consumer trust in green marketing claims made by FMCG brands.

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Conceptual Model



DATA ANALYSIS

Reliability Analysis

Variable Number	Variable	Cronback Alpha	Result
V_1	Brand Transparency	0.865	Good
V_2	Eco-Labeling	0.812	Good
V_3	Sustainable Packaging	0.876	Good
V_4	Ethical Advertising	0.801	Good
V_5	Consumer Trust	0.825	Good
V_6	Overall	0.856	Good

In the table, all Cronbach's alpha values for the research variables are within the permissible range for internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha scores suggest the study's construct scales' reliability. All variables have dependability values above 0.70, which is good. This shows that the variable measurement tools are trustworthy and consistent. Overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.856 validates the study's scale's good internal consistency. The measurements utilised for each variable and the overall construct are reliable, ensuring that the findings from these variables are trustworthy.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Fit Indices	Observed	Result
$CMIN_1$	2.122	Acceptable Fit
CFI_1	0.967	Acceptable Fit
TLI_1	0.975	Acceptable Fit
$PNFI_1$	0.768	Good Fit
$RMSEA_1$	0.062	Acceptable Fit

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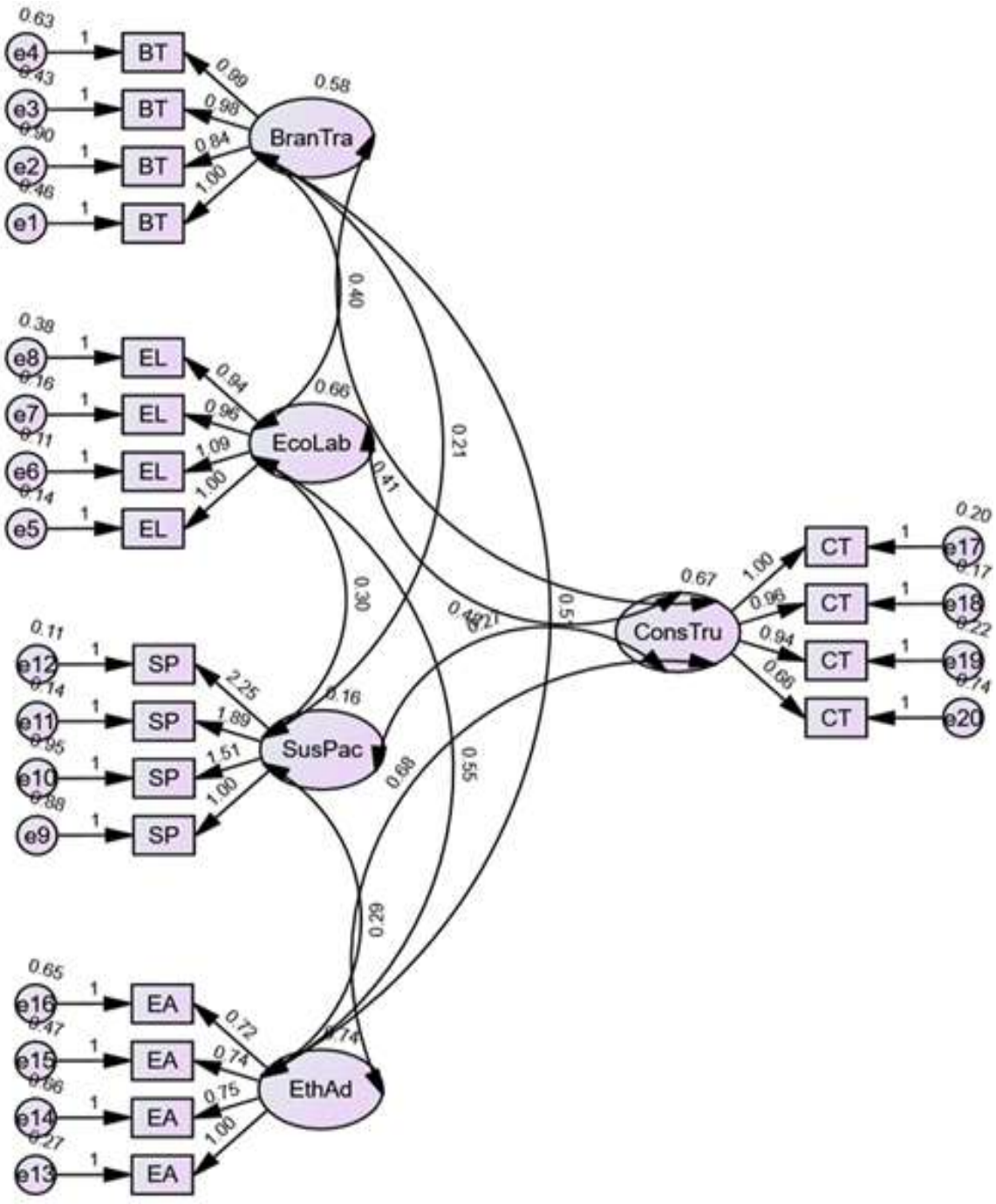
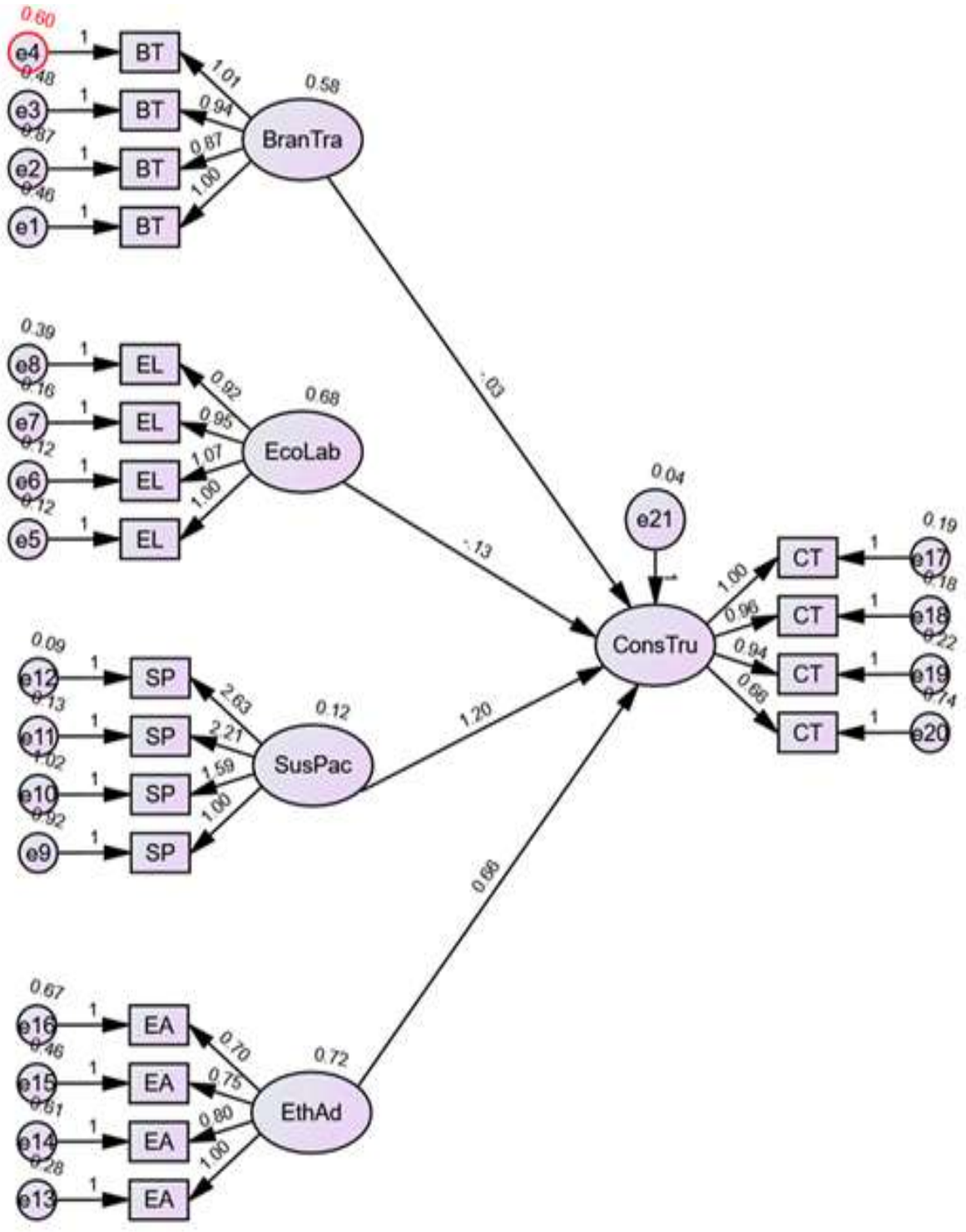


Table shows the fit indices used to evaluate the study model's fit. Most of the indices meet model evaluation thresholds, indicating an acceptable model fit. The comparative fit and Tucker-Lewis indices indicate that the model fits the data well. The parsimony normed fit index shows that the model balances complexity and fit. The root mean square error of approximation is also within acceptable limits, demonstrating that the model accurately represents the data. The fit indices show that the model fits the study and data.

Structure Equation Modelling

Fit Indices	Observed	Result
$CMIN_2$	2.225	Acceptable Fit
CFI_2	0.954	Acceptable Fit
TLI_2	0.945	Acceptable Fit
$PNFI_2$	0.734	Good Fit
$RMSEA_2$	0.064	Acceptable Fit

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Second fit indices used to evaluate model goodness of fit are shown in the table. Most indices fall within acceptable thresholds, indicating a satisfactory model fit. The comparative fit index and Tucker-Lewis index values indicate that the model matches data. A good parsimony normed fit index indicates that the model balances complexity and data representation. The root mean square error of approximation is likewise acceptable, confirming that the model accurately represents the data. The fit indices show that the model is well-specified and fits the data.

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Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis No	Framed Hypothesis	P-Value	Result
H_1	Brand Transparency->Consumer Trust	0.00	Supported
H_2	Eco-Labeling->Consumer Trust	0.00	Supported
H_3	Sustainable Packaging->Consumer Trust	0.00	Supported
H_4	Ethical Advertising->Consumer Trust	0.00	Supported

The first hypothesis investigates brand transparency and consumer trust. The p-value of 0.00 shows that brand transparency is strongly correlated with consumer trust. This suggests that when a brand provides clear, honest, and verifiable information about its environmental practices and sustainability efforts, it fosters higher levels of consumer trust. In today's market, where consumers are increasingly looking for authenticity, transparency has become a vital factor in influencing purchase decisions and consumer loyalty. The results imply that brands that are open about their sustainability practices are more likely to gain consumer confidence, making transparency an essential component of green marketing strategies.

The second hypothesis focuses on the influence of eco-labeling on consumer trust. With a p-value of 0.00, this hypothesis is strongly supported, indicating significantly enhances consumer trust in green products. Eco-labels, when seen as credible and backed by reputable organizations, act as a powerful tool in shaping consumer perceptions of a brand's environmental responsibility. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that consumers trust products that are clearly marked with eco-certifications, as these labels serve as proof of the brand's commitment to sustainability. The presence of such labels reassures consumers about the environmental impact of their purchases, which ultimately leads to greater trust and increased likelihood of purchasing eco-friendly products.

The third hypothesis investigates the relationship between sustainable packaging and consumer trust. The p-value of 0.00 confirms a significant positive relationship, meaning that sustainable packaging practices play a critical role in fostering consumer trust. As sustainability becomes a core value for many consumers, the type of packaging used by a brand can strongly influence their perception of the brand's environmental commitment. Consumers are increasingly looking for brands that adopt packaging solutions that reduce waste and minimize environmental harm. The findings suggest that FMCG brands adopting eco-friendly packaging materials are perceived as more responsible and trustworthy. Therefore, sustainable packaging not only supports environmental sustainability but also enhances brand reputation and trust among eco-conscious consumers.

The fourth hypothesis examines the effect of ethical advertising on consumer trust. With a p-value of 0.00, this hypothesis is also supported, indicating that ethical advertising significantly influences consumer trust in green marketing. Ethical advertising involves presenting environmental claims truthfully, without exaggerating or engaging in greenwashing. The results show that consumers are more likely to trust brands that use ethical advertising practices, especially when it comes to sustainability claims. As consumers become more aware of deceptive marketing practices, they are increasingly skeptical of brands that overstate their environmental impact. This finding highlights the importance of honesty and integrity in advertising, suggesting that brands that engage in ethical advertising not only build trust but also create stronger, long-term relationships with their customers.

Managerial Implications

For managers, the findings emphasize the need for greater brand transparency as a strategic tool to enhance consumer trust. To build long-term customer loyalty, companies must proactively communicate their sustainability initiatives, product sourcing, and environmental impact. Clear, accessible information about a brand's operations can significantly improve perceptions and reduce skepticism, especially in sectors like FMCG, where consumers are increasingly scrutinizing environmental claims. Managers should implement transparent communication strategies across all marketing channels, from packaging to digital platforms. This openness not only fosters consumer trust but also differentiates the brand in a competitive marketplace. Additionally, companies can consider leveraging third-party certifications or transparency reports to substantiate their sustainability efforts. Embracing transparency can improve brand image, attract eco-conscious consumers, and ultimately drive sales by aligning with consumer values. Furthermore, ensuring transparency should be a core part of the brand's ethos and corporate culture, not just a marketing tactic. This approach will help build a reputation as an authentic and responsible brand, leading to stronger customer relationships.

Managerial Implications for Objective 2: Investigating the Role of Eco-Labeling in Building Consumer Trust

Eco-labeling is an essential aspect of consumer decision-making in today's sustainability-conscious market. Managers should prioritize obtaining and showcasing credible eco-labels to signal a brand's environmental commitment. These labels not only serve as proof of environmental responsibility but also reassure consumers that the product has undergone third-party verification, which significantly increases trust in green marketing claims. It is crucial for companies to choose eco-labels from well-established and reputable organizations to maximize the trustworthiness of the product's environmental claims. In addition, integrating eco-labels into the product design and marketing strategy can create a competitive advantage in the FMCG market. Companies must educate consumers about the meaning of eco-labels through marketing campaigns to improve understanding and increase label effectiveness.

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Managers should also ensure that the sustainability claims associated with these labels are consistent with the company's overall sustainability efforts to avoid greenwashing. Eco-labeling should be an ongoing commitment rather than a one-time certification, reinforcing the brand's dedication to environmental integrity and customer satisfaction.

Managerial Implications for Objective 3: Assessing the Influence of Sustainable Packaging on Consumer Trust
Sustainable packaging is increasingly becoming a key determinant of consumer trust and brand loyalty. Managers should integrate sustainable packaging solutions into their product offerings to align with growing consumer demand for eco-friendly practices. This includes adopting recyclable, biodegradable, or reduced material packaging, which not only reduces environmental impact but also resonates with eco-conscious consumers. As packaging is one of the most visible components of a product, it directly influences a brand's perceived environmental responsibility. Therefore, it is essential for managers to ensure that packaging choices reflect the company's commitment to sustainability. Companies should communicate the environmental benefits of their packaging clearly through labeling and marketing materials to reinforce consumer perceptions. Moreover, adopting sustainable packaging can help brands differentiate themselves in an increasingly crowded marketplace. It is also important for managers to regularly assess and improve their packaging practices, as consumers are becoming more knowledgeable about sustainability. By making sustainable packaging a cornerstone of their brand strategy, companies can foster trust, increase customer satisfaction, and drive brand loyalty.

Managerial Implications for Objective 4: Analyzing the Effect of Ethical Advertising on Consumer Trust
Ethical advertising plays a critical role in maintaining and building consumer trust, especially in the context of green marketing. Managers must ensure that all marketing communications, particularly those related to sustainability claims, are transparent, truthful, and free from exaggeration or misleading information. Greenwashing, where companies overstate their environmental efforts, can severely damage a brand's credibility and lead to consumer backlash. To avoid this, companies should prioritize ethical advertising practices, focusing on honest depictions of their sustainability efforts and aligning their marketing messages with actual practices. Managers should provide training to marketing teams to ensure the ethical representation of sustainability initiatives and avoid manipulative tactics. It is essential for companies to highlight their long-term commitment to environmental responsibility rather than just short-term marketing gimmicks. Ethical advertising not only helps build trust but also strengthens the overall brand image. Furthermore, managers should engage in two-way communication with consumers, listening to their concerns and feedback about sustainability claims to refine marketing strategies. By embracing ethical advertising, brands can establish credibility and foster a loyal customer base in the competitive FMCG sector.

CONCLUSION

The results indicate that when companies adopt these practices, they not only enhance their credibility but also build long-term consumer loyalty. As sustainability continues to be a key factor in consumer decision-making, brands must ensure that their environmental claims are authentic, transparent, and aligned with their overall sustainability efforts. This approach not only helps in differentiating the brand in a competitive market but also plays a vital role in promoting responsible consumption. Therefore, managers should prioritize these elements to strengthen their market position and establish a reputation as trustworthy and environmentally responsible brands.

FURTHER RESEARCH

While this study offers valuable insights into the relationship between green marketing practices and consumer trust, there are several areas that require further exploration. Future research could investigate the synergistic effects of the independent variables on consumer trust, examining how these factors interact to influence consumer behavior. Additionally, studies could explore the regional variations in consumer responses to green marketing, particularly in emerging markets, where cultural and economic factors may shape attitudes toward sustainability differently. Another area for future research is the long-term impact of ethical advertising and green marketing practices on brand loyalty and consumer retention. Investigating the role of consumer skepticism and greenwashing in shaping these dynamics could also offer valuable insights. Furthermore, research could examine how emerging technologies, such as AI and blockchain, can enhance transparency and sustainability claims in the FMCG sector.

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