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Communicating Sustainability in the FMCG Industry: A Comparative Media Analysis of Greenwashing and Corporate Transparency

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Abstract- ***The Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry has increasingly positioned sustainability as a central element of corporate communication in response to growing environmental concerns, heightened consumer awareness, and evolving regulatory expectations. Through advertising campaigns, corporate websites, sustainability reports, and social media platforms, companies frequently promote commitments related to plastic reduction, carbon neutrality, responsible sourcing, and circular economy initiatives. Simultaneously, concerns regarding greenwashing the dissemination of misleading or exaggerated environmental claims have intensified, raising questions about the credibility and transparency of sustainability communication. This study critically examines sustainability narratives communicated by six major FMCG companies Unilever, Nestlé, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble (P&G), and ITC Limited between 2021 and 2025. Employing a qualitative comparative media content analysis, the research analyses sustainability reports, corporate websites, digital advertising campaigns, Instagram and LinkedIn content, and environmental commitment statements. To validate corporate claims, the study triangulates these communications with independently verified assessments from organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), CDP, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the Changing Markets Foundation, and Corporate Knights. The analysis focuses on five dimensions: sustainability messaging, transparency and disclosure, supply-chain accountability, environmental targets, and consistency between communication and documented environmental performance. Findings indicate considerable variation in the authenticity of sustainability communication. While several companies demonstrate measurable progress through science-based targets and transparent reporting, others rely heavily on symbolic environmental messaging supported by limited quantitative evidence. The study argues that media framing significantly influences public perception of corporate sustainability, often emphasizing positive environmental narratives while minimizing unresolved environmental challenges. By integrating media framing with documentary evidence, the research contributes to scholarship on corporate communication, green marketing, and sustainability communication. It also offers practical recommendations for strengthening transparency, improving regulatory oversight, and promoting evidence-based environmental communication within the FMCG sector.***

Keywords: Greenwashing, Sustainability Communication, FMCG Industry, Media Framing, Corporate Communication, Consumer Trust, ESG Communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Environmental sustainability has emerged as one of the defining challenges of contemporary business and communication. Rising concerns over climate change, biodiversity loss, plastic pollution, and resource depletion have fundamentally altered stakeholder expectations, compelling corporations to demonstrate environmental responsibility alongside economic performance. As public awareness of environmental issues continues to grow, sustainability has become not only an operational objective but also a strategic communication tool through which organizations seek to strengthen reputation, build consumer trust, and differentiate themselves in increasingly competitive markets (Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

Among global industries, the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector occupies a particularly significant position due to its extensive production networks, high consumption rates, complex supply chains, and substantial environmental footprint. The industry is closely associated with challenges such as plastic packaging waste, greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption, agricultural sourcing, and post-consumer waste management. According to the

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2023), packaging waste and unsustainable production practices continue to contribute significantly to environmental degradation, highlighting the need for more transparent and accountable corporate sustainability practices. Likewise, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2023) emphasizes that transitioning toward a circular economy requires businesses to move beyond incremental environmental improvements and adopt systemic changes in production, packaging, and resource management.

In response to increasing public scrutiny, FMCG companies have substantially expanded sustainability communication across multiple media platforms. Sustainability reports, integrated annual reports, television advertising, digital campaigns, corporate websites, YouTube videos, LinkedIn updates, Instagram posts, and environmental awareness initiatives have become integral components of corporate communication strategies. These platforms are used to promote commitments related to recyclable packaging, carbon neutrality, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, water conservation, and responsible sourcing. Such communication aims not only to inform stakeholders but also to enhance corporate legitimacy and strengthen brand reputation among environmentally conscious consumers.

However, the rapid growth of sustainability communication has also intensified concerns regarding greenwashing. Greenwashing refers to the practice of presenting an environmentally responsible image through selective disclosure, exaggerated claims, or misleading communication that is not fully supported by actual environmental performance (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Rather than reflecting comprehensive sustainability transformation, environmental messaging may sometimes emphasize isolated initiatives while overlooking broader environmental impacts associated with production, packaging, or supply-chain operations. Consequently, stakeholders increasingly question whether corporate sustainability communication represents genuine environmental commitment or strategic reputation management.

The media plays a central role in shaping these perceptions. Through carefully designed advertising campaigns, sustainability storytelling, visual imagery, and social media engagement, corporations construct narratives that frame environmental responsibility in ways that influence public understanding. Media Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) suggests that communication selectively highlights certain aspects of reality while downplaying others, thereby shaping audience interpretation. Within the context of sustainability communication, brands often emphasize positive environmental achievements such as recycled packaging, tree-planting programmes, or carbon reduction commitments while giving comparatively less attention to ongoing environmental challenges, including plastic production, resource-intensive manufacturing, and supply-chain emissions.

The increasing importance of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reporting has further amplified expectations for transparency and accountability. Investors, regulators, consumers, and civil society organizations now evaluate corporate sustainability performance not only through marketing campaigns but also through independently verified disclosures and environmental benchmarks. Organizations such as CDP, Corporate Knights, and the Changing Markets Foundation regularly assess corporate environmental performance, enabling comparisons between publicly communicated sustainability claims and documented environmental outcomes. This shift has made credibility, transparency, and evidence-based communication critical determinants of corporate reputation.

Despite the growing body of research on sustainability communication, green marketing, and corporate social responsibility, relatively few studies have comparatively analysed how leading FMCG companies frame sustainability across different media channels while simultaneously examining the consistency of these narratives with independently verified environmental assessments. Existing research frequently focuses on either sustainability reporting or consumer perceptions, leaving limited understanding of the relationship between corporate media narratives and documented environmental performance.

Addressing this gap, the present study undertakes a comparative media analysis of sustainability communication by six major FMCG companies Unilever, Nestlé, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble, and ITC Ltd covering the period 2021–2025. By analysing advertising campaigns, sustainability reports, corporate websites, and social media communication alongside independent environmental assessments, the study seeks to distinguish genuine sustainability communication from symbolic environmental messaging. In doing so, it contributes to the fields of media studies, corporate communication, public relations, sustainability communication, and consumer behaviour, while offering practical insights for policymakers, communication professionals, and corporations seeking to enhance the credibility of environmental communication.

Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the sustainability communication strategies adopted by selected FMCG companies across advertising, corporate websites, sustainability reports, and social media platforms.
2. To analyse how sustainability narratives are framed through corporate media communication.
3. To compare corporate sustainability claims with independently verified environmental performance reported by recognised international organisations.
4. To identify indicators of greenwashing within sustainability communication in the FMCG industry.
5. To evaluate the implications of sustainability communication for corporate transparency, consumer trust, and responsible business communication.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Greenwashing and Corporate Environmental Communication

Greenwashing has emerged as one of the most widely debated issues in corporate sustainability communication over the past decade. Lyon and Montgomery (2015) describe greenwashing as an outcome of information asymmetry, whereby organizations selectively disclose favourable environmental information while withholding evidence of practices that may adversely affect environmental performance. Their study argues that environmental communication can influence stakeholder perceptions even when actual sustainability performance remains difficult to verify. Consequently, they advocate for stronger empirical methods to evaluate the authenticity of corporate environmental claims. While their work provides an important conceptual understanding of greenwashing, it primarily focuses on theoretical explanations and does not investigate how sustainability narratives are communicated across multiple corporate media platforms or whether these narratives correspond with independently verified environmental performance.

Building upon this perspective, Seele and Gatti (2017) reconceptualize greenwashing by introducing an accusation-based approach, arguing that organizations are considered guilty of greenwashing only when stakeholders perceive inconsistencies between corporate sustainability claims and actual environmental practices. The authors emphasize legitimacy, stakeholder expectations, and corporate reputation as central components of sustainability communication. Their work significantly advances greenwashing scholarship by shifting attention from corporate intent to stakeholder perception. However, the study remains conceptual and does not empirically examine sustainability communication across advertising, social media, corporate websites, and sustainability reports simultaneously. Moreover, it does not provide a comparative assessment across industries or evaluate environmental claims using independent sustainability indicators.

Further expanding greenwashing research, de Freitas Netto et al. (2020) conducted one of the most comprehensive systematic reviews on the concept and forms of greenwashing. Their review classifies greenwashing into firm-level, product-level, and executional practices while identifying selective disclosure, misleading communication, vague environmental terminology, and unsubstantiated sustainability claims as common manifestations. The study emphasizes that inconsistencies between corporate communication and environmental performance continue to undermine stakeholder trust and recommends greater standardization in defining and measuring greenwashing. Nevertheless, the review primarily synthesizes existing conceptual knowledge and highlights the need for empirical comparative studies that examine corporate sustainability communication alongside independently verified environmental performance across different sectors.

More recently, Forliano et al. (2025) mapped the evolution of greenwashing research through a comprehensive bibliometric and theoretical review. Their findings indicate that corporate communication, stakeholder legitimacy, transparency, and sustainability reporting have become dominant themes in contemporary greenwashing research. Importantly, the authors identify a growing need for interdisciplinary studies integrating communication, environmental governance, and sustainability assessment. Despite these advances, they conclude that relatively few empirical studies compare sustainability communication across multiple communication channels using independently verified environmental evidence, thereby identifying an important research gap that the present study seeks to address

2.2 Sustainability Communication and Corporate Transparency

Recent scholarship increasingly recognizes sustainability communication as a strategic component of corporate governance rather than merely a public relations function. McNeill and Moore (2015) found that although consumers express favourable attitudes towards environmentally responsible products, they often experience considerable difficulty evaluating sustainability claims because environmental information communicated by companies is frequently complex, inconsistent, or insufficiently substantiated. The study suggests that consumer trust depends not only on environmental commitment but also on the credibility and clarity of sustainability communication. However, its emphasis remains on consumer behaviour rather than corporate communication strategies or media representations.

Similarly, Henninger, Alevizou, and Oates (2016) examined sustainability communication within the fashion industry and reported that consumers frequently struggle to distinguish genuine sustainability initiatives from symbolic environmental marketing. The authors attribute this confusion to inconsistent communication practices, vague environmental terminology, and limited transparency regarding supply-chain operations. Although their findings provide valuable insights into sustainability communication, the research remains confined to the fashion industry and does not investigate communication practices within the FMCG sector or compare multiple multinational corporations.

Jung and Jin (2016) further argue that sustainability communication should reflect broader organizational commitment rather than isolated environmental initiatives. Their research demonstrates that sustainable branding requires consistency between environmental communication, ethical production, product longevity, and responsible business practices. The study reinforces the importance of aligning sustainability narratives with organizational performance. Nevertheless, it primarily focuses on slow-fashion enterprises and provides limited discussion of corporate sustainability reporting, digital communication, or cross-industry comparisons.

A more comprehensive perspective is offered by Mukendi et al. (2020), whose systematic review identifies transparency, traceability, stakeholder engagement, and responsible supply-chain management as emerging priorities in sustainability communication research. The authors observe that organizations increasingly integrate sustainability into corporate branding strategies but frequently emphasize positive environmental achievements while providing comparatively limited disclosure regarding operational challenges or environmental trade-offs. They recommend future studies that

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integrate sustainability communication with measurable sustainability performance to assess communication credibility more effectively. This recommendation directly informs the present study's comparative analysis of corporate communication and independently verified environmental evidence.

2.3 Consumer Trust and Sustainability Communication

Consumer trust remains a central outcome of effective sustainability communication. White, Habib, and Hardisty (2019) argue that sustainability communication significantly influences consumer behaviour only when environmental claims are perceived as credible, transparent, and supported by evidence. Their SHIFT framework demonstrates that effective communication requires simplicity, credibility, social influence, and tangible behavioural incentives to encourage sustainable consumption. Although the study advances understanding of sustainable consumer behaviour, it primarily examines communication outcomes from the consumer perspective rather than evaluating the authenticity of organizational sustainability communication.

Similarly, Torelli, Balluchi, and Lazzini (2020) investigated the relationship between corporate environmental communication and stakeholder perceptions. Their findings indicate that transparent sustainability communication enhances organizational legitimacy and stakeholder trust, whereas symbolic environmental messaging without measurable environmental commitment increases scepticism and reputational risk. The authors emphasize that organizations should support sustainability narratives with verifiable environmental indicators rather than relying solely on promotional communication. However, they also acknowledge that further comparative research across industries is required to understand how different organizations construct sustainability narratives through diverse communication platforms

2.4 Recent Research Trends (2020–2025)

During the last five years, sustainability communication research has increasingly shifted from conceptual discussions towards empirical investigations of corporate transparency, environmental reporting, and stakeholder accountability. Dzhengiz, Haukkala, and Sahimaa (2023) argue that organizations must transition beyond symbolic sustainability initiatives toward systemic organizational transformation if sustainability communication is to remain credible. Their research highlights the growing disconnect between ambitious sustainability commitments and the structural realities of contemporary production systems. However, the study focuses primarily on sustainability transitions rather than analysing corporate communication strategies.

More recently, Badhwar et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review of green marketing and greenwashing literature, concluding that vague environmental terminology, selective disclosure, and symbolic sustainability narratives remain widespread despite growing regulatory scrutiny. Their review highlights the increasing importance of transparent environmental communication and calls for empirical comparative studies that evaluate corporate sustainability communication against independently verified environmental evidence. Although the review provides important theoretical insights, it primarily focuses on the fashion and textile sector, leaving considerable scope for comparable investigations within other consumer-oriented industries such as FMCG.

2.5 Research Gap

The review of literature published between 2015 and 2025 demonstrates substantial progress in understanding greenwashing, sustainability communication, consumer trust, and corporate transparency. Existing studies have significantly advanced conceptual understanding of greenwashing (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015; Seele & Gatti, 2017; de Freitas Netto et al., 2020), sustainability communication (Mukendi et al., 2020), consumer responses to environmental claims (White et al., 2019), and stakeholder perceptions of corporate environmental communication (Torelli et al., 2020). More recent scholarship (Dzhengiz et al., 2023; Badhwar et al., 2024; Forliano et al., 2025) increasingly emphasizes transparency, legitimacy, and evidence-based sustainability communication.

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However, three significant research gaps remain. First, comparatively few studies have examined sustainability communication within the FMCG industry from a media and communication perspective, despite the sector's extensive use of advertising, digital media, and sustainability branding. Second, limited research integrates corporate sustainability communication across multiple media platforms—including advertising, corporate websites, sustainability reports, and social media—with independently verified environmental performance, making it difficult to assess the authenticity of sustainability claims. Third, the application of Media Framing Theory to evaluate how corporate sustainability narratives are strategically constructed and communicated across different media platforms remains underexplored. Addressing these gaps, the present study undertakes a comparative media analysis of sustainability communication by six leading FMCG companies between 2021 and 2025, integrating corporate communication with independently verified environmental evidence to distinguish genuine sustainability from symbolic environmental messaging.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on Media Framing Theory and Legitimacy Theory, which together explain how organizations communicate sustainability and how stakeholders interpret these communications.

3.1 Media Framing Theory

Media Framing Theory explains how communication emphasizes certain aspects of reality while downplaying others, thereby influencing audience perceptions (Entman, 1993). In corporate sustainability communication, organizations frame environmental initiatives by highlighting achievements such as recyclable packaging, carbon reduction, renewable energy, and responsible sourcing, while giving less attention to issues such as plastic pollution, supply-chain emissions, and resource consumption.

Recent studies suggest that such selective communication can shape stakeholder perceptions and influence corporate reputation (Seele & Gatti, 2017; Torelli et al., 2020). In this study, Media Framing Theory is used to analyse how selected FMCG companies construct sustainability narratives through advertising, sustainability reports, corporate websites, and social media.

3.2 Legitimacy Theory

Legitimacy Theory suggests that organizations communicate sustainability initiatives to gain and maintain societal approval (Suchman, 1995). As consumers and regulators increasingly demand environmental responsibility, companies use sustainability communication to strengthen their corporate image and legitimacy.

However, when sustainability claims are not supported by measurable environmental performance, organizations risk being perceived as engaging in greenwashing (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). Legitimacy Theory therefore helps explain why companies strategically communicate environmental commitments and why transparency is essential for maintaining stakeholder trust.

Conceptual Framework

The study proposes that corporate sustainability communication influences stakeholder perceptions through strategically framed environmental messages. The credibility of these messages depends on their consistency with independently verified environmental performance.

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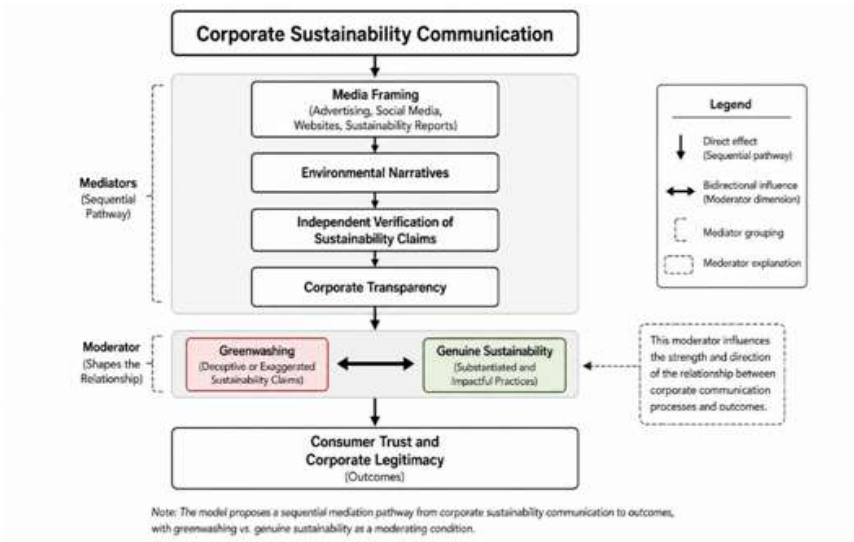

Fig.1 Conceptual Framework

IV. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative comparative research design using media content analysis to examine sustainability communication by selected FMCG companies. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret sustainability narratives, media framing, and corporate communication strategies rather than measure consumer responses or establish causal relationships. Comparative analysis enables the identification of similarities and differences in sustainability communication across multiple organizations.

4.2 Sample Selection

Six leading FMCG companies were purposively selected based on their global market presence, regular publication of sustainability reports, active digital communication, and publicly available environmental disclosures. The selected companies are Unilever, Nestlé, The Coca-Cola Company, PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble (P&G), and ITC Limited. These companies represent both multinational and Indian FMCG sectors and have established sustainability communication initiatives, making them appropriate for comparative analysis.

4.3 Data Sources

The study is based exclusively on secondary data collected from publicly accessible sources published between 2021 and 2025. These include:

1. Sustainability and ESG reports
2. Corporate websites
3. Advertising campaigns
4. Official Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube content
5. Environmental commitment statements
6. Publicly available policy documents
7. Independent sustainability assessments and ESG disclosures

Only official corporate communication and verified public documents were included to ensure authenticity and reliability.

4.4 Analytical Framework

The collected media content was analysed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis focused on five predefined themes derived from previous sustainability communication literature:

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Table 1. Analytical Framework

Dimension	Indicators Examined
Sustainability Messaging	Climate action, plastic reduction, renewable energy, circular economy, responsible sourcing
Transparency & Disclosure	Availability of measurable data, ESG reporting, third-party verification
Supply Chain Accountability	Responsible sourcing, traceability, supplier standards
Environmental Targets	Net-zero goals, emission reduction targets, packaging commitments
Communication Consistency	Alignment between media communication and publicly reported sustainability performance

The findings from corporate communication were compared with independently available environmental information to identify whether sustainability claims reflected genuine sustainability practices or indicated greenwashing.

4.5 Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis, in which corporate communication was systematically coded according to recurring sustainability themes. Patterns across the six companies were then compared to identify common communication strategies, similarities, differences, and evidence of transparency or symbolic sustainability messaging. The interpretation of findings was guided by Media Framing Theory and Legitimacy Theory, enabling an assessment of how sustainability narratives were constructed and how they aligned with documented environmental commitments.

V. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The analysis examined sustainability communication by six leading FMCG companies Unilever, Nestlé, The Coca-Cola Company, PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble (P&G), and ITC Limited using official sustainability reports, corporate websites, advertising campaigns, and social media content published between 2021 and 2025. The findings are presented under five analytical dimensions to evaluate whether corporate sustainability narratives reflected genuine environmental commitment or symbolic communication.

Table 2. Heat Map of Sustainability Transparency Across Selected FMCG Companies. Developed by the author based on analysis of corporate sustainability reports, ESG disclosures, official websites, and publicly available environmental reports (Unilever, Nestlé, PepsiCo, The Coca-Cola Company, Procter & Gamble, and ITC Limited, 2021–2025).

Company	Sustainability Messaging	Transparency& Disclosure	Supply Chain Accountability	Environmental Targets	Communication Consistency
Unilever	🟩 High	🟩 High	🟩 High	🟩 High	🟩 High
Nestlé	🟩 High	🟩 High	🟩 High	🟩 High	🟩 High
PepsiCo	🟩 High	🟩 High	🟧 Moderate–High	🟩 High	🟩 High
The Coca-Cola Company	🟩 High	🟧 Moderate–High	🟧 Moderate	🟩 High	🟧 Moderate–High
Procter & Gamble (P&G)	🟩 High	🟩 High	🟧 Moderate–High	🟩 High	🟩 High
ITC Limited	🟩 High	🟩 High	🟩 High	🟩 High	🟩 High

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5.1 Sustainability Messaging

All six companies prominently incorporated sustainability into their corporate communication. Common themes included plastic reduction, climate action, responsible sourcing, renewable energy, circular economy initiatives, and water stewardship. Sustainability was consistently positioned as an integral component of corporate identity rather than merely an environmental responsibility.

Unilever and Nestlé emphasized regenerative agriculture, responsible sourcing, and climate resilience across sustainability reports and digital campaigns. Coca-Cola and PepsiCo primarily framed sustainability around packaging innovation, recycling, and water replenishment initiatives. Procter & Gamble highlighted product innovation, recyclable packaging, and net-zero commitments through its "Ambition 2030" strategy, while ITC Limited communicated sustainability through integrated reporting with emphasis on renewable energy, afforestation, water positivity, and circular economy initiatives.

Across all companies, sustainability messaging relied heavily on positive environmental narratives designed to reinforce corporate responsibility and stakeholder confidence.

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Across all companies, sustainability messaging relied heavily on positive environmental narratives designed to reinforce corporate responsibility and stakeholder confidence.

5.2 Transparency and Disclosure

Transparency varied considerably among the selected companies. Unilever, Nestlé, PepsiCo, P&G, and ITC provided detailed sustainability reports aligned with internationally recognised reporting frameworks, including the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), and CDP disclosures. These reports included measurable indicators relating to greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy adoption, water use, packaging, and responsible sourcing.

Coca-Cola also reported quantitative sustainability indicators; however, several independent assessments have noted continuing challenges related to plastic packaging despite significant corporate commitments to recyclable packaging and collection systems. Overall, greater disclosure was associated with higher perceived transparency, although the extent and quality of reporting differed across companies.

5.3 Supply Chain Accountability

Supply-chain sustainability emerged as a recurring communication theme across all six organizations. Unilever and Nestlé reported comprehensive responsible sourcing programmes covering agricultural commodities such as palm oil, tea, cocoa, coffee, and dairy. PepsiCo and Coca-Cola communicated sustainable agriculture initiatives and supplier engagement programmes aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions across value chains.

Procter & Gamble highlighted responsible forestry practices and sustainable sourcing of raw materials through supplier standards, while ITC emphasized traceable agricultural procurement, social forestry programmes, and sustainable livelihood initiatives supporting rural communities.

Although supply-chain commitments were widely communicated, the level of publicly available supplier-level disclosure varied, indicating opportunities for improved transparency regarding implementation and verification.

5.4 Environmental Targets and Commitments

All selected companies communicated measurable environmental targets aligned with international sustainability goals. Common commitments included achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions, increasing renewable energy use, reducing virgin plastic consumption, improving packaging recyclability, enhancing water stewardship, and promoting circular economy practices.

Several companies reported progress through Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi)-validated climate targets and annual sustainability disclosures. Nevertheless, differences were observed in the specificity of interim targets, reporting frequency, and disclosure of implementation progress. While long-term commitments were consistently communicated, detailed reporting on short-term outcomes and operational challenges varied across organizations.

5.5 Consistency Between Communication and Business Practices

The comparative analysis indicates varying levels of consistency between sustainability communication and publicly documented environmental performance. Companies with comprehensive sustainability reporting, third-party disclosures, and measurable environmental indicators demonstrated stronger alignment between communication and documented sustainability initiatives.

Conversely, some organizations relied extensively on promotional sustainability campaigns while continuing to face criticism regarding plastic packaging, waste generation, and supply-chain emissions. These observations do not necessarily indicate deliberate greenwashing; rather, they highlight the challenges of balancing ambitious sustainability communication with the environmental realities of large-scale FMCG production systems.

Thus, the findings suggest that sustainability communication across the FMCG sector increasingly combines substantive environmental initiatives with strategic reputation management. Greater transparency, measurable disclosure, and independent verification remain essential for distinguishing genuine sustainability from symbolic environmental communication.

VI. DISCUSSION

The increasing prominence of sustainability in corporate communication reflects a broader transformation in how FMCG companies engage with their stakeholders. Across all six companies analysed, sustainability was not presented as a peripheral corporate responsibility initiative but as an integral part of brand identity and long-term business strategy. Themes such as climate action, responsible sourcing, circular economy, renewable energy, and plastic reduction appeared consistently across sustainability reports, corporate websites, advertising campaigns, and social media. This shift mirrors the observations of Mukendi et al. (2020), who argue that sustainability communication has evolved into a strategic means of building corporate reputation and strengthening stakeholder relationships.

While sustainability messaging was common across all companies, the analysis also revealed noticeable differences in how these commitments were communicated. Some organisations supported their environmental claims with detailed progress reports, measurable targets, and disclosures aligned with internationally recognised reporting frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), and the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi). Others relied more heavily on aspirational language and broad environmental commitments, providing comparatively less evidence of implementation or measurable outcomes. These differences highlight an important distinction between communicating sustainability and demonstrating sustainability.

Another important observation relates to the way sustainability is framed within corporate communication. Most companies emphasised achievements and future commitments, creating optimistic narratives around environmental responsibility. Positive stories about recyclable packaging, renewable energy, water conservation, and community initiatives received considerable visibility, whereas ongoing environmental challenges such as plastic dependency, supply-chain emissions, or operational constraints received comparatively limited attention. This pattern reflects the strategic nature of corporate communication and supports the argument of Seele and Gatti (2017) that stakeholder scepticism often arises when environmental narratives appear stronger than the supporting evidence.

Transparency also emerged as a defining factor influencing the credibility of sustainability communication. Companies providing detailed disclosures, quantitative performance indicators, and regular progress updates appeared more convincing than those relying primarily on promotional messaging. This finding is consistent with Torelli et al. (2020), who suggest that transparent reporting enhances organisational legitimacy and stakeholder confidence. Nevertheless, transparency was not uniform across all dimensions. Information relating to supplier performance, value-chain emissions, and independent verification remained comparatively limited, despite these areas representing significant environmental impacts within the FMCG sector.

The findings further suggest that sustainability communication should not be viewed simply as either genuine or misleading. Instead, it appears to exist along a continuum. Some organisations have clearly integrated sustainability into their governance structures, reporting practices, and operational decision-making, while others are still progressing towards translating long-term environmental commitments into measurable performance. This observation aligns with Lyon and Montgomery (2015), who note that information asymmetry remains one of the principal challenges in evaluating corporate environmental claims. The absence of complete disclosure does not necessarily imply deliberate greenwashing; however, it does make independent verification increasingly important for stakeholders seeking to assess corporate credibility.

From a media and communication perspective, the study demonstrates that sustainability narratives are carefully constructed to reinforce positive corporate identity. Corporate media platforms are no longer used merely to disseminate information; they have become strategic spaces where organisations negotiate trust, legitimacy, and public expectations. As environmental concerns become increasingly central to consumer decision-making and investment practices, stakeholders are likely to expect not only persuasive communication but also greater openness about both achievements and continuing challenges. In this context, transparency itself becomes a powerful communication strategy.

Thus, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of sustainability communication depends less on the volume of environmental messaging and more on its credibility. Organisations that combine clear communication with measurable evidence, transparent reporting, and consistent disclosure are more likely to strengthen stakeholder confidence. Conversely, sustainability narratives that are not adequately supported by verifiable information may risk creating scepticism, regardless of how effectively they are communicated. This highlights the growing importance of evidence-based sustainability communication in building long-term corporate trust.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study examined how six leading FMCG companies communicate sustainability across corporate websites, sustainability reports, advertising campaigns, and social media platforms between 2021 and 2025. Using Media Framing Theory and Legitimacy Theory as the guiding perspectives, the research explored whether corporate sustainability narratives were supported by transparent environmental disclosures and publicly available evidence of sustainability performance.

The analysis shows that sustainability has become a defining feature of corporate communication within the FMCG industry. Environmental themes such as climate action, responsible sourcing, renewable energy, circular economy, and plastic reduction now occupy a prominent place in brand communication. However, the findings also reveal that the quality and depth of sustainability communication vary considerably across companies. Organisations adopting recognised sustainability reporting standards and providing measurable environmental data demonstrate stronger alignment between communication and documented performance than those relying primarily on broad environmental narratives.

Rather than categorising companies as either genuine or engaging in greenwashing, the study suggests that sustainability communication should be understood as existing along a spectrum. Corporate communication increasingly combines environmental commitment with strategic reputation management, making transparency and independent verification essential for maintaining stakeholder trust. As expectations from consumers, investors, and regulators continue to evolve, organisations will be required to complement persuasive sustainability narratives with credible, measurable, and accountable environmental performance.

This study contributes to media and communication research by demonstrating the value of combining media content analysis with independently available sustainability information to evaluate corporate environmental communication. It also extends the application of Media Framing Theory to sustainability communication within the FMCG sector, an area that has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. By integrating communication analysis with environmental transparency, the research offers a practical framework for distinguishing substantive sustainability communication from symbolic environmental messaging.

The study is limited to six FMCG companies and relies exclusively on publicly available secondary data. Future research may broaden the scope by examining additional industries, incorporating consumer perception studies, or using mixed-method approaches that combine media analysis with interviews or surveys. Such research would provide deeper insights into how sustainability communication influences stakeholder trust and purchasing behaviour in an increasingly environmentally conscious marketplace.

Ultimately, the credibility of sustainability communication will depend not on the number of environmental commitments organisations make but, on their willingness, to communicate progress, limitations, and challenges with equal transparency. In an era where sustainability claims are subject to increasing public scrutiny, authentic communication supported by verifiable evidence is likely to become one of the most important determinants of corporate reputation and long-term stakeholder trust.

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