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Green Claims, Thin Evidence: Sustainability Marketing and Greenwashing Risk in Indonesian Consumer Brands

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ABSTRACT

Environmental claims now perform ordinary brand work: they differentiate products, give campaigns moral meaning, and signal values that consumers cannot verify at the point of purchase. The evidence behind those claims is usually less visible. This study examines claim-evidence alignment across six consumer-brand organizations operating in Indonesia: Unilever Indonesia, Danone-AQUA, Indofood, Paragon/Wardah, Garudafood, and Nutrifood. A qualitative comparative content analysis separates consumer-facing claim artifacts from corporate evidence used to substantiate them. Individual environmental claims were coded for semantic breadth, specificity, quantitative substantiation, boundary clarity, temporal alignment, and claim-evidence proximity. Greenwashing risk is treated as a communication risk rather than an allegation of deception or a measure of environmental performance. The findings show that "thin evidence" is relational. Evidence can be real, detailed, and still too narrow for the meaning carried by a marketing claim. Product-level recycled-content statements tend to be easier to substantiate than umbrella positions such as green beauty or sustainable living. Program-based claims create a different weakness when visible activities lack a denominator that shows their material scale. The study develops claim-evidence distance as a practical marketing-management lens and argues that sustainability communication requires an evidence architecture designed alongside the claim, not assembled after it.

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental claims now sit inside ordinary brand competition rather than at its edge. A bottle can be presented as recyclable, a refill system as a better way to shop, or a beauty brand as part of a greener lifestyle. None of these messages merely reports an operational fact. Each also works as a market signal about what the brand stands for. Green brand image can support preference and loyalty when consumers regard the environmental information as credible, while social and environmental positioning can strengthen purchase intention and brand advocacy (Panda et al., 2020; Nguyen-Viet et al., 2024). The commercial attraction is therefore easy to understand. The difficulty is that most environmental qualities are not directly observable at the moment of purchase. Consumers see the package or campaign before they can know how a material was sourced, how much waste was recovered, or whether a corporate target applies to the particular product in front of them.

Greenwashing is often reduced to an environmental lie. Contemporary marketing creates a wider grey area. A statement may be factually true while the meaning it invites is broader than the evidence supporting it. A pilot can be presented so prominently that it appears representative. A recycling program can be visible without showing how much packaging entered the market. An umbrella expression such as "green beauty" can gather several genuine initiatives under a phrase whose product coverage is not obvious. Reviews of greenwashing consistently identify exaggeration, selective disclosure, ambiguity, and symbolic environmental communication alongside outright falsehood (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2024). In this article, "thin evidence" does not mean that a company discloses little. Evidence becomes thin when its boundary is narrower than the environmental

meaning carried by the claim. The marketing risk appears when a modest fact is allowed to carry a larger promise than it can substantiate.

That relational view fits a signaling problem. Environmental communication reduces information asymmetry only when the signal can be connected to something that makes it believable. Signaling theory has become one of the main lenses used in greenwashing research because vague, inexpensive, or difficult-to-verify environmental signals can create favorable impressions without giving audiences much basis for checking them (Persakis et al., 2025). The relevant marketing question is therefore not simply whether evidence exists somewhere in the firm. It is whether the evidence substantiates the signal actually placed before consumers. Claim specificity matters here. Specific claims can increase diagnostic value, but they also make inconsistency easier to detect because the audience has a clearer proposition to test (Janssen et al., 2022).

Weak substantiation has consequences beyond one campaign. Green advertising skepticism can lower the persuasive value of environmental information and suppress purchase intention (Luo et al., 2020; Wang & Li, 2022). Perceived greenwashing has also been linked to weaker green trust, greater perceived risk, poorer brand evaluation, and lower purchase or repurchase intention across different settings (Chen et al., 2020; Hameed et al., 2021). The mechanism is not identical in every market. Some consumers may ignore sustainability information altogether, and others can remain loyal for reasons unrelated to environmental performance. Still, credibility matters once a brand chooses to make greenness part of its proposition. Studies of consumer reactions show that the perceived mismatch itself can alter brand attitude even when the underlying environmental activity is not fictitious (Bladt et al., 2024).

Indonesia offers a useful marketing setting because environmental messages appear across familiar consumer categories and in very different forms. Wardah currently places "Halal Green Beauty" on its consumer website as part of the brand philosophy (Wardah, n.d.). AQUA's consumer site promotes #BijakBerplastik and connects the brand with collection, education, and packaging innovation (AQUA, n.d.). Unilever Indonesia invites consumers into #GenerasiPilahPlastik and has marketed refill shopping through brands such as Rinso and Sunlight (Unilever Indonesia, 2022, 2023). Indofood brought sustainability into a youth-facing IdeaFest activation involving Indomie, Pop Mie, Indomilk, and Chitato Lite (Indofood, 2025). Garudafood's packaging-waste dropbox and Nutrifood's green collaboration through Nutrimart likewise turn environmental activity into public-facing brand communication (Garudafood, 2023; Nutrifood, 2024). These messages differ markedly in breadth, which means they should not be judged against the same type of evidence. Most greenwashing research, however, begins only after environmental communication has already reached an audience.

Those studies ask whether consumers perceive greenwashing and what follows for trust, image, or purchase behavior. Indonesian studies follow a similar route: perceived greenwashing has been associated with weaker repurchase intention in personal-care markets and, more recently, with brand-image and trust mechanisms among Generation Z skincare consumers (Raihana & Purwanegara, 2023; Supryanita et al., 2026). That work is useful but leaves an earlier managerial problem underexamined. Before a consumer can distrust a claim, a marketing team has already chosen its wording, boundary, and evidence. A source-side analysis can therefore ask why some claims are easier to defend than others without needing to infer what consumers actually thought.

Disclosure volume is a poor proxy for marketing credibility. A sustainability page may contain many environmental activities, yet none may substantiate a particular product promise. One narrow material specification may still support a narrow packaging claim. Research on sustainable packaging similarly shows that audiences evaluate claims together with other visible cues, so inconsistency can weaken an otherwise favorable message (Steenis et al., 2023). Fit matters as much as quantity. Marketing scholarship increasingly recognizes that green communication has to be integrated with substantive business practice rather than treated as a promotional layer added after the fact (Braga et al., 2024; Vangeli et al., 2023).

The study examines how closely public environmental claims made by six consumer-brand organizations operating in Indonesia align with the public substantiation available behind them. It does not rank firms and does not determine whether any organization has intentionally or legally engaged in greenwashing. The object is narrower: claim-evidence distance. Two questions organize the analysis. How closely do consumer-facing sustainability claims match the scope of publicly disclosed evidence? Which forms of mismatch create the greatest greenwashing risk from a marketing-management

perspective? The contribution lies in moving attention from the amount of sustainability communication to the evidentiary fit of the signal being marketed.

RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative comparative content analysis was used to examine the meaning and substantiation of environmental marketing claims rather than consumer responses. Six consumer-brand organizations were purposively selected: Unilever Indonesia, Danone-AQUA, Indofood, Paragon/Wardah, Garudafood, and Nutrifood. They were chosen for their high consumer visibility, accessible environmental communication, and variation across food, beverage, household, and beauty markets. The organizational cases provided comparative context, while the unit of coding was each environmental claim concerning a product, brand, campaign, program, or organization. The documentary corpus covered publicly available to 2026 and was divided into a claim layer and an evidence layer. The former included consumer-facing webpages, campaigns, product-related sustainability statements, collection or refill initiatives, and public event communication, while the latter comprised sustainability disclosures, program updates, environmental data, and corporate explanations capable of substantiating those claims. At least three documentary items were reviewed for each case where suitable material was available. Corporate sustainability material was included as marketing communication only when it clearly advanced an environmental proposition directed toward a brand, product, or consumer audience.

Claims were assessed for semantic breadth, specificity, quantitative substantiation, boundary clarity, temporal alignment, and claim-evidence proximity. These dimensions were recorded in coding memos rather than combined into an additive score, as the documentary evidence did not support that level of numerical precision. Each claim was traced to its closest publicly available substantiation, with recurring inconsistencies identified as boundary stretch, scale opacity, portfolio projection, or temporal slippage. These categories describe communication structures rather than deceptive intent, consistent with research that treats greenwashing as a problem of discrepancy between apparent and substantiated environmental performance rather than the mere use of environmental language (Fella & Bausa, 2024; Pendse et al., 2023). The analysis relies on public corporate substantiation and does not independently audit reported environmental performance or test consumer interpretation. Accordingly, findings concern whether the scope of marketed claims corresponds with the scope of available supporting evidence, while implications for consumer trust and brand response are considered separately through relevant consumer-behavior literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Claim Breadth Changes What Counts as Evidence

A recycled-content statement makes a relatively small promise. An umbrella environmental identity makes a much larger one. The difference is visible in the Indonesian cases before any judgment about corporate performance is made. AQUA's #BijakBerplastik page discusses collection, consumer education, and packaging innovation, while Wardah's homepage places "Halal Green Beauty" beside the brand philosophy itself (AQUA, n.d.; Wardah, n.d.). The first communication still contains broad commitments, but much of its environmental meaning is tied to plastic. The second invites a wider reading because "green beauty" can reasonably encompass formulation, sourcing, manufacturing, packaging, and disposal unless the brand narrows it. A broad claim is not weaker by definition. It simply needs evidence that travels equally far.

Unilever Indonesia shows how a claim becomes easier to defend when the marketed action and evidence remain close. Its refill-station communication offered Rinso and Sunlight to consumers as a way of shopping with less single-use packaging, and later reporting on refill trials described the Indonesian models, customer reach, and estimated plastic savings (Unilever Indonesia, 2022, 2025). The claim is not that every package has become circular. It concerns an alternative purchasing model. This bounded form of communication leaves less room for a single pilot to be mistaken for total portfolio performance, although scale still matters when a trial is presented as evidence of a wider packaging transition. Marketing communication can still be concise, but the evidentiary boundary has to remain recoverable. Green advertising tends to work better when information quality gives the audience a recognizable basis for the environmental message rather than relying on tone alone (Mansoor et al., 2022).

AQUA combines product and program signals. Its consumer-facing #BijakBerplastik page tells visitors that the brand is working toward more collection and greater circularity in packaging, with ambitions around recyclability and recycled material (AQUA, n.d.). Separate Danone communication reports 1,400 metric tons of plastic packaging waste managed through a 2024 collaboration with Rekosistem (Danone Indonesia, 2024). The latter is useful evidence for a collection program because it has a quantity and a period. It does not by itself substantiate a portfolio-wide claim that packaging is circular. The distinction is simple but often lost in sustainability marketing: evidence for recovery activity is not automatically evidence for the environmental quality of every package sold.

Wardah's positioning makes the boundary problem more visible. "Halal Green Beauty" appears at the consumer-brand level and its Beauty Moves You campaign links the idea to product innovation undertaken through sustainable processes and cruelty-free principles (Wardah, 2021; Wardah, n.d.). Paragon's own communication provides more context around the concept and the development of halal green beauty with experts (Paragon Corp., 2023). The public evidence therefore goes beyond a slogan. What remains less visible is coverage. The wording does not easily tell a consumer which green criteria apply to which products or how consistently the umbrella philosophy reaches the portfolio. The risk lies in semantic breadth, not in the absence of activity.

Indofood offers a different configuration. The company has a defined plastic-waste roadmap, including a stated aim to reduce plastic waste by 30% by the end of 2029, and gives a specific responsible-packaging example involving degradable polypropylene for 25 kg Bogasari flour packaging (Indofood, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). At IdeaFest 2025, however, sustainability was also folded into consumer engagement involving Indomie, Pop Mie, Indomilk, and Chitato Lite. Waste-sorting points and an upcycling workshop gave the festival a tangible environmental component (Indofood, 2025). The activity supports a claim that the event incorporated environmental action. It does not demonstrate that the four participating brands are environmentally superior products. The boundary becomes credible only if marketing keeps those two propositions separate.

Garudafood and Nutrifood rely more heavily on program narratives than on green product attributes. Garudafood's dropbox communication invited the public to sort paper, plastic, and glass packaging at selected retail locations, explicitly framing participation as part of its sustainability strategy (Garudafood, 2023). Nutrifood uses a more expansive sustainable-living vocabulary in consumer-oriented blogs and collaborations. NutriClass asked journalists to engage with sustainable living, while a later Nutrimart-Avoskin collaboration was promoted as a "green collaboration" connected with sustainable beauty (Nutrifood, 2022, 2024). These are marketing and engagement signals about organizational values. Their evidence should therefore be judged against what the program actually does, not against an assumed claim that every product has become environmentally preferable.

The cases expose a distinction that is easy to miss when greenwashing is studied only through corporate reports. Brand claims, campaign claims, and corporate sustainability statements operate at different levels. A company may disclose a strong waste-management program while a specific brand remains silent about environmental performance. It may also do the reverse and give a brand a green identity that relies on evidence assembled at corporate level. Claim-evidence distance grows when those levels are merged without explanation. Otherwise, the strength of evidence somewhere in the organization can be mistaken for strength of evidence behind the particular signal being marketed.

2. Real Evidence Can Still Be Too Thin for the Marketed Meaning

Evidence was often real in the six cases. Its weakness appeared when it was asked to prove something larger than it measured. This is most obvious in program communication because programs produce attractive proof points: a number of dropboxes, participants, collection locations, kilograms recovered, or workshops delivered. Those figures make a campaign concrete. They do not automatically show material environmental change. A collection program involving several retail sites can be successful on its own terms while still representing a very small share of packaging placed on the market. Without a denominator, the activity is visible but its scale is hard to judge.

Garudafood's packaging-waste dropbox makes the problem clear without requiring any allegation of greenwashing. The 2023 communication names five Hero supermarket locations, explains the types of packaging accepted, and invites the public to participate in sorting and recycling (Garudafood, 2023). A later program with assisted schools continued the collection logic and reported post-consumer packaging management (Garudafood, 2024). These are concrete activities. The public

material does not provide a portfolio-wide packaging denominator alongside the campaign, so the evidence cannot tell readers how much of Garudafood's packaging footprint the program addresses. Materiality remains unresolved because a visible collection channel says little about its share of the packaging placed on the market during the same period. If the claim remains "we run this program," substantiation is close. If the same program is used to imply that the packaging problem of the brand portfolio has been solved, the evidence becomes thin relative to the message.

The same logic applies to Unilever's #GenerasiPilahPlastik, although the evidence base is richer. The campaign educates consumers to sort packaging and choose alternatives that are recyclable or use recycled material. Unilever's broader waste communication also provides recycled-plastic product examples and collection figures, while its refill trials have generated data on reach and estimated plastic savings (Unilever Indonesia, n.d., 2023, 2025). This combination reduces claim-evidence distance because campaign language can be connected to specific actions. Yet the marketing system still has to protect against portfolio projection. A bottle made with recycled material supports a claim about that bottle; it cannot silently become evidence that the whole brand or company has eliminated virgin plastic.

AQUA's plastic narrative reveals a temporal version of the same problem. #BijakBerplastik mixes current programs with future commitments: the consumer page describes collection efforts and also presents ambitions about recyclability and recycled content (AQUA, n.d.). The company later reported specific recovery activity, including the 1,400 metric tons managed with Rekosistem in 2024 (Danone Indonesia, 2024). Marketing can legitimately communicate both progress and ambition. Risk rises when the grammar of a campaign makes a target sound like an achieved property. The evidence architecture therefore needs to preserve tense as carefully as scope. A future circularity objective is not yet a current package attribute.

Four flagship brands appeared in an activation explicitly framed around sustainability. The event itself used waste-management infrastructure and recycling activities (Indofood, 2025). Those facts substantiate the sustainability of the activation more directly than they substantiate environmental qualities of Indomie, Pop Mie, Indomilk, or Chitato Lite. Indofood's corporate packaging pages provide separate evidence about waste reduction and packaging innovation, but the bridge from those corporate measures to individual event brands is not automatic (Indofood, n.d.-a). The campaign therefore illustrates boundary stretch: a legitimate event-level action can lend environmental meaning to participating brands even when the supporting corporate evidence sits at another level.

Table 1 Claim Layer, Evidence Layer, and the Main Evidentiary Tension

Case	Consumer-facing claim layer	Closest public substantiation	Main claim-evidence tension
Unilever Indonesia	Refill shopping; #GenerasiPilahPlastik; recycled-plastic examples	Refill trial reach/savings; product examples; waste-program data	Strong when product/program boundary is retained; portfolio projection remains possible
Danone-AQUA	#BijakBerplastik; circular packaging and collection commitments	Program targets; reported collection volume; packaging communication	Current results and future ambitions need a clear temporal and portfolio boundary
Indofood	IdeaFest sustainability activation involving flagship brands	Event waste-management actions; corporate plastic-reduction roadmap; packaging example	Event-level action can lend green meaning to brands without product-level evidence
Paragon/Wardah	Halal Green Beauty; Beauty Moves You	Conceptual criteria and corporate explanations of green beauty	Umbrella brand meaning is broader than visible product-by-product coverage
Garudafood	Packaging-waste dropbox and public participation	Defined collection sites and follow-up waste-management activities	Program is concrete, but material scale is difficult to judge without a portfolio denominator

Case	Consumer-facing claim layer	Closest public substantiation	Main claim-evidence tension
Nutrifood	Sustainable-living communication and green collaborations	Food-loss/waste program data; education and circular-economy activities	Organizational/program evidence is stronger than any implied product-level greenness

Wardah creates the strongest case of portfolio projection because the environmental term is embedded in brand philosophy rather than confined to one campaign. The homepage displays Halal Green Beauty next to descriptors such as natural and cruelty free, while the Beauty Moves You campaign speaks of sustainable processes in product innovation (Wardah, 2021; Wardah, n.d.). The breadth of the brand promise makes product mapping important. Public corporate material explains the concept, but a visitor cannot readily trace the green criteria through the whole product range. This is not the same as having no evidence. It is evidence dispersed at a different level from the brand signal in public view. Research on greenwashing perceptions shows why such inconsistency can matter: audiences often respond to the apparent relationship between environmental wording and the product, not to the total amount of sustainability activity disclosed elsewhere (Sun & Shi, 2022; Tu et al., 2024).

Nutrifood demonstrates another kind of distance because much of its environmental communication concerns sustainable living and organizational programs rather than claims that a packaged food or drink is greener. Its food-loss and waste page reports a Reduce-Donate-Recycling approach and gives quantities for emission reduction and surplus-product donations (Nutrifood, 2023). That is comparatively strong substantiation for the program described. NutriClass and the Nutrimart-Avoskin collaboration use environmental language in more promotional settings, but they do not necessarily claim that Nutrifood's entire product portfolio has superior environmental performance (Nutrifood, 2022, 2024). The risk would increase if those engagement activities were allowed to carry a broader product inference. As written, much of the communication is better understood as values-based brand participation than as product greenness.

The comparison also shows why "thin evidence" cannot be measured by page count. A firm may publish numerous environmental numbers and still leave a particular claim weakly substantiated. One relevant figure can be more useful than twenty unrelated indicators. Information credibility research reaches a similar conclusion from the consumer side: the persuasiveness of green information depends on whether it is credible and useful for evaluating the environmental proposition, not simply on the presence of sustainability language (Higueras-Castillo et al., 2024). A marketing manager working from a sustainability report forward may therefore select the strongest number available even when it answers a different question from the one implied by the campaign.

Claim-evidence proximity was strongest when the same object appeared on both sides of the communication. A recycled-content claim linked to the named bottle is easier to trace than a company-wide aspiration linked to a single product example. A collection campaign with a dated quantity is easier to substantiate than an open-ended statement about circularity. These differences are consistent with experimental work showing that consumers distinguish among outright environmental lies, partial truths, and organizations taking more credit than the underlying action warrants (de Jong et al., 2020). The documentary cases cannot tell us how Indonesian consumers interpreted each message, but they show where interpretation is given more room to outrun evidence.

No organization fell uniformly into a single risk condition. Unilever and AQUA have relatively close evidence for some packaging messages and wider gaps around portfolio-level circularity. Wardah has a broad environmental identity supported by real conceptual and program material but less visible product-by-product coverage. Indofood has measurable corporate targets beside event-level marketing that can create cross-level association. Garudafood's collection program is concrete but difficult to evaluate materially without a denominator. Nutrifood's program evidence is often stronger than any product-level environmental inference that a reader might attach to its sustainable-living language. This within-case variation is why labeling a company a "greenwasher" would be methodologically crude.

Consumer research helps explain the commercial stakes without converting documentary risk into observed consumer harm. Greenwashing perceptions can raise confusion and perceived risk while weakening trust (Tarabieh, 2021). Trust also mediates brand engagement and word-of-mouth in green purchasing contexts (Guerreiro & Pacheco, 2021), and perceived greenwashing has been associated

with poorer eco-friendly product purchase responses (Shojaei et al., 2024). The Indonesian documentary evidence cannot establish those outcomes. It does identify the communication structures that make them more plausible. A broad signal with narrow substantiation gives skepticism more room to develop than a claim whose evidence can be followed with little interpretive work.

Greenwashing risk, then, is not concentrated only in obviously vague words. Highly specific claims can also fail when the number is detached from the relevant boundary. An impressive recovery tonnage may refer to one partnership, one period, or one geography. A percentage target may be corporate while a consumer encounters it beside a specific brand. The more precise number can create confidence while masking the mismatch of scope. This is why claim specificity has a double edge and why green marketing requires more than inserting metrics into promotional copy (Janssen et al., 2022).

3. Green Marketing Needs an Evidence Architecture

Evidence architecture begins before copywriting. A marketing team deciding to say "recyclable," "circular," or "green" is choosing an information boundary as well as a phrase. The substantiation process should therefore run backward from the likely meaning of the claim. What exactly is being promised, which product or activity does it cover, and what public evidence answers that proposition? This is different from asking sustainability staff for an attractive fact after the campaign concept has already been approved. The latter process encourages semantic expansion because a technically correct corporate metric is recruited to support a simpler but broader marketing story. The cases suggest that this distance can be reduced without turning consumer communication into a sustainability report. Digital channels already allow a short surface claim to lead to deeper substantiation. AQUA can keep #BijakBerplastik memorable while separating achieved collection results from future packaging ambitions. The surface message can stay simple without hiding the support.

Unilever can promote refill convenience while linking interested consumers to trial scale and plastic-saving estimates. Wardah can retain Halal Green Beauty as an umbrella philosophy while making the application of green criteria easier to trace across product groups. The communication remains concise; the evidence beneath it becomes layered rather than hidden.

Product attributes and program stories also need different proof. A material claim is close to the product, so the evidence should identify the component and scope. A waste-collection campaign is an intervention, which makes participation and recovery data relevant but leaves materiality unanswered unless the denominator is visible. An umbrella brand idea reaches across products and therefore needs a map of coverage rather than one heroic example. Treating these forms as if they were interchangeable is what allows a small but genuine initiative to carry more environmental meaning than it can reasonably support. The problem is structural, not merely linguistic.

Marketing and sustainability functions consequently have to share responsibility for claim approval. Sustainability specialists know the data boundaries but may write for reporting audiences. Marketers know how consumers will encounter the message but are rewarded for compression and distinctiveness. Neither side can protect credibility alone. A workable review asks the evidence owner to state the narrowest defensible proposition and asks the marketing team to state the broadest interpretation the final wording permits. The gap between those two readings is more useful than a generic checklist of forbidden words. The organizational level matters particularly for diversified groups. Indofood's corporate plastic roadmap can guide genuine change across the business, yet individual brands enter the market with their own meanings and audiences. Garudafood can invite consumers into packaging recovery without implying that collection alone resolves the footprint of all packaging it sells. Research on green marketing increasingly treats credible environmental communication as an integrated organizational capability rather than a promotional technique (Vangeli et al., 2023).

Nutrifood's sustainable-living initiatives contribute to organizational identity without automatically transforming every HiLo, Tropicana Slim, or NutriSari product into a green product. Evidence architecture is therefore partly a mapping task: corporate evidence has to show where it legitimately reaches the brand, campaign, or product claim that borrows from it.

Stronger substantiation does not guarantee stronger persuasion. Consumers may care more about price, taste, convenience, beauty performance, or health benefits, and training people to search aggressively for deception can even create generalized advertising distrust (Wilson et al., 2022). The

purpose of evidence architecture is not to make every shopper audit the brand. It is to ensure that a claim can survive scrutiny when scrutiny occurs. Green marketing can still use emotion and identity. Social media engagement around sustainability can support brand relationships (Kong et al., 2021), and green communication can influence purchasing when it connects with consumer values (Nekmahmud et al., 2022). Credibility gives those effects a more stable base.

The same architecture can prevent a common temporal mistake. Targets are useful marketing material because they communicate ambition, but they should remain visibly prospective. Current achievements need a period, and pilot results need the word "pilot" or an equally clear boundary. A campaign can show progress without making completion sound present. This is especially relevant when sustainability stories are repeatedly repurposed across websites, events, social posts, and brand pages. The evidence may be accurate at publication and misleading after its time reference disappears. The credibility problem is created by reuse rather than by the original data.

Brand-risk management offers a better way to understand the managerial payoff. Once consumers perceive greenwashing, restoring trust is difficult and can require more than issuing another sustainability message (Wang et al., 2020). Skepticism can also spill over from one claim to subsequent environmental advertising. Marketing teams therefore have an incentive to make the claim-evidence relationship boringly clear even when the campaign itself is creative. The Indonesian cases show that firms do not need to stop communicating environmental work. They need to stop asking one piece of evidence to perform several jobs at once.

This approach also keeps green marketing separate from legal compliance. A claim may be legally permissible and still be strategically unwise if its evidentiary support is difficult to trace. Conversely, a cautious claim can be commercially credible even when the underlying sustainability program is modest. The management question is whether the signal says what the evidence can carry. In markets where green claims are increasingly common, that discipline may matter more for differentiation than adding another environmental adjective to the brand vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

Across the six consumer-brand organizations, the strongest environmental communication was not necessarily backed by the largest volume of sustainability information. It was the communication in which the marketed object and the evidence referred to roughly the same thing. Refill trials and recycled-content statements are comparatively traceable when tied to dated results. Wider identities such as green beauty or sustainable living demand more because their meaning can move beyond one product or initiative. The cases therefore support a relational definition of thin evidence: substantiation becomes thin when it is narrower than the claim it is asked to carry.

For marketing management, the implication is practical. Environmental evidence should be designed into the claim process from the beginning. The likely meaning of the consumer-facing statement has to be compared with the scope of the supporting data before the communication is released, while digital channels can provide deeper evidence without making headline copy cumbersome. Sustainability marketing does not become credible by sounding cautious or by publishing more metrics. It becomes easier to defend when the promise and proof share the same boundary.

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