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Green Communication in Environmental Campaigns: A Study of Commercial Brand Strategies for Millennials and Gen Z

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the green communication strategies used by commercial brands in environmental campaigns and evaluate how Millennials and Gen Z respond to these messages. The research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis of digital campaigns of several commercial brands and in-depth interviews with respondents from Millennials and Gen Z. The results show that green communication strategies that emphasize sustainability storytelling, transparency, and interactive participation on social media are more effective in building engagement and loyalty of young consumers. Millennials tend to value long-term brand consistency on environmental issues, while Gen Z demands more instant transparency and direct interaction. This study confirms that message authenticity is a determining factor in the success of environmental campaigns as well as strategic differentiation in building a sustainable brand image.

Keywords: Green Communication, Environmental Campaigns, Millennials and Gen Z, Brand Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues are increasingly receiving global attention as the impacts of climate change, air and water pollution, and the degradation of natural resources become increasingly worrying (Saxena, 2025). This phenomenon not only threatens the sustainability of the ecosystem, but also has a direct impact on human health, economic stability, and the quality of life of the community (Husni & Remiswal, 2024). Climate change, with its extreme symptoms such as rising temperatures, floods, and droughts, further emphasizes the urgency of collective action at both the local and international levels. Similarly, pollution from industrial activity, transportation, and excessive consumption exacerbates environmental damage and accelerates biodiversity



loss. Therefore, environmental issues are now a key agenda item in global policy, encouraging countries, companies, and individuals to pay greater attention to sustainable development practices.

Green communication is an important strategy in conveying environmental messages effectively, especially in the context of increasing public awareness of sustainability issues (Apliansyah et al., 2025). Through a communication approach that emphasizes environmentally friendly values, messages about the importance of preserving nature, reducing excessive consumption, and supporting sustainable products and services can be conveyed more persuasively. This strategy plays a significant role in influencing public behavior, especially among younger consumers such as millennials and Gen Z, who are known to be more critical of social and environmental issues (Marpung et al., 2025).

By utilizing various digital media, green communication-based campaigns aim not only to educate but also to inspire concrete actions, such as choosing environmentally friendly products, supporting sustainable brands, and adopting a green lifestyle. Therefore, green communication is not just a means of conveying messages, but also a strategic instrument in building collective awareness, fostering concern, and encouraging social transformation toward more sustainable practices (Syawaldi et al., 2025).

Millennials and Gen Z are the dominant consumer segments in today's global market, with characteristics that differentiate them from previous generations (Wibowo & Ayuningtyas, 2024). These two generations demonstrate a higher level of concern for environmental and sustainability issues, so their consumption preferences tend to favor products and brands that demonstrate a real commitment to environmentally friendly practices. They are also more critical of the phenomenon of greenwashing, which is a company's attempt to simply polish a green image without authentically implementing sustainable practices. This critical attitude makes Millennials and Gen Z more selective in choosing brands, and demands transparency and consistency from corporate communication strategies (Al Akromi, 2024).

In addition, another important characteristic is their close connection to the digital world, especially social media, which is the main means of building interactions with brands (Nadya et al., 2024). Through digital platforms, they not only consume information but also play an active role in disseminating, critiquing, and even shaping public opinion regarding a brand's environmental commitments. Therefore, a deep understanding of this generation's consumption behavior and communication patterns is key for companies in designing green communication strategies that are relevant, credible, and have a real impact (Ardianto et al., 2025).

Many commercial brands are now starting to utilize environmental campaigns not solely as a form of social responsibility, but also as a branding and marketing strategy to build a more relevant image with younger consumers. With Millennials and Gen Z's growing awareness of sustainability issues, brands see a strategic opportunity to integrate eco-friendly values into

their identities (Ghouse et al., 2024). Environmental campaigns packaged through green communication not only strengthen a company's reputation but also serve as a means of differentiation amidst increasingly fierce market competition. Through this approach, brands seek to foster emotional connection with younger consumers, who tend to be more loyal to companies that demonstrate an authentic commitment to sustainability.

Furthermore, using environmental campaigns in marketing strategies allows companies to achieve a dual benefit: raising social awareness while expanding market reach through values perceived as meaningful by the target audience. However, the challenge facing brands is maintaining consistency and credibility, as younger consumers are increasingly critical of greenwashing practices and demand concrete evidence for sustainability claims (D'Attoma & Ieva, 2022).

However, the effectiveness of green communication in shaping the perceptions, attitudes and loyalty of young consumers has not been explored in depth in academic literature (Jahari et al., 2022). Although more and more commercial brands are adopting green communication strategies, research examining the extent to which these messages actually influence critical awareness, consumption preferences, and emotional engagement of young consumers remains limited. Most existing studies focus on green marketing practices in general, without highlighting the specific dynamics of Millennials and Gen Z, who possess unique characteristics, such as a tendency to be critical of greenwashing and active engagement on social media.

However, understanding the effectiveness of green communication in this context is crucial to determine whether the strategies used by brands merely serve as symbolic image-building or are truly capable of driving sustainable consumer behavior change. Thus, there is significant research room to examine how environmental messages are constructed, delivered, and received by young consumers, as well as their impact on brand loyalty (Topcuoglu et al., 2022).

Previous studies on sustainability and green marketing generally still focus on a general approach, without paying specific attention to how brand communication strategies are implemented in the context of environmental campaigns (Nath & Siepong, 2022). In fact, the role of green communication as a medium that not only conveys messages but also builds brand image and identity is increasingly relevant amidst growing concern among young consumers about sustainability issues.

Furthermore, existing research focuses more on the quantitative influence of green marketing on consumer purchasing behavior, while studies that delve deeper into the perceptions, attitudes, and engagement levels of consumers, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, are still relatively limited. This indicates a research gap that needs to be filled to understand how young consumers interpret environmental messages and how this influences their long-term relationships with brands (Abu et al., 2020).

Furthermore, there is still a paucity of research that comparatively examines commercial brands' strategies in communicating environmental

campaigns and assesses their effectiveness in building trust and ecological identity among young consumers. Yet, Millennials and Gen Z are dominant segments that have a significant influence on market trends and are capable of determining the direction of consumer behavior transformation toward sustainability (Green et al., 2019).

The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to integrate environmental communication perspectives with commercial branding strategies, thus not only discussing the general aspects of green marketing but also emphasizing how sustainable messages are constructed and communicated by brands. The research focuses on the Millennial and Gen Z generations as digital-natives who have a central role in determining market trends and are known to be critical of environmental issues. Through an empirical approach, this study provides an analysis of how green communication strategies influence the perceptions, engagement, and loyalty of young consumers. In addition, this study offers a strategic mapping that can serve as a reference for companies in designing more authentic environmental communications, so that they do not fall into greenwashing practices but are able to build authentic, sustainable green branding.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how commercial brands implement green communication in environmental campaigns and to identify the responses and perceptions of Millennials and Gen Z generations towards these communication strategies. This study also aims to assess the extent to which the implementation of green communication influences the level of engagement, brand image formation, and loyalty of young consumers. Furthermore, this study seeks to provide recommendations for effective environmental communication strategies for commercial brands in building authentic and sustainable long-term relationships with young consumers.

METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to analyze the green communication strategies implemented by commercial brands in environmental campaigns and evaluate the responses of the Millennials and Gen Z generations to these messages (Putri & Febriyanti, 2024). The research data was obtained through content analysis of digital campaigns of several commercial brands purposively selected based on their involvement in environmental issues, including social media, official websites, and digital-based promotional materials. In-depth interviews were also conducted with Millennials and Gen Z respondents selected using purposive sampling techniques to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their perceptions, attitudes, and level of involvement in green communication campaigns. This research was conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia, as a representative metropolitan city with a high level of digital penetration, making it relevant to explore young consumers' interactions with social media-based campaigns. The research period lasted six months, from January to June 2025, covering the stages of data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the results.

Data analysis was carried out through stages of reduction, categorization, and interpretation with reference to key themes such as sustainability storytelling, transparency, and interactive participation. This approach was chosen so that the research could deeply explore the meaning and effectiveness of environmental messages conveyed by brands while understanding the dynamics of young consumers' preferences towards sustainability issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that green communication strategies implemented by commercial brands are generally carried out through sustainability storytelling using social media, digital advertising, and interactive campaigns. Brands often use visual elements such as the color green, natural symbols, and sustainability messages to strengthen their eco-friendly image in the minds of consumers. Furthermore, collaboration with influencers and young environmental activists has proven to be an effective strategy in expanding the reach of their messages while also providing social legitimacy for the brand. This communication approach is increasingly relevant because Millennials and Gen Z tend to pay more attention to sustainability issues than previous generations.

The younger generation's response shows a positive tendency towards sustainability messages, especially when brands demonstrate consistency and authenticity in their practices. Millennials and Gen Z value transparency, such as through sustainability reports, transparency regarding raw materials, and information related to carbon footprints. However, they also show high skepticism towards greenwashing practices, so campaigns that are not supported by concrete evidence have the potential to damage a brand's image. Furthermore, this study found that green communication delivered through interactive digital platforms—such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube—and involving consumer participation through challenges or user-generated content, is more effective in building engagement and loyalty. When implemented consistently and authentically, this strategy has an impact on increasing brand trust, encouraging young consumers to recommend products, and strengthening the ecological brand image as an added value in building brand identity among Millennials and Gen Z.

Authenticity as Key

The research confirms that authenticity is key to a successful green communication strategy. Young consumers, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, are highly sensitive in distinguishing brands that are truly committed to sustainability from those that simply exploit environmental issues as a marketing strategy. Therefore, authentic green branding is a fundamental element in building long-term trust and loyalty (Yeeun) Huh & Kim, 2024).

Authenticity is reflected in the consistency between the communicated message and the company's actual practices, for example through supply chain transparency, the use of environmentally friendly materials, and verifiable

sustainability reporting. Without authenticity, environmental campaigns risk arousing consumer skepticism due to allegations of greenwashing, which can ultimately damage the brand's reputation. Therefore, authenticity is not only an added value but also a key prerequisite for an environmental communication strategy to create a real and sustainable impact (Ardiansyah et al., 2024).

Millennials and Gen Z are known as critical generations and have wide access to digital information, so they can quickly detect inconsistencies between the messages communicated by companies and the actual practices carried out (Zahira & Nasution, 2024). This ability is supported by their habit of using social media, online forums, and public reports as sources of information to assess the authenticity of a brand's environmental claims.

When a discrepancy is found between a company's promoted green campaign and its actual actions, this generation not only displays skepticism but also tends to voice criticism openly through digital media, potentially damaging a brand's image. This confirms that young consumers' trust relies heavily on consistency and transparency, so companies can no longer rely solely on marketing rhetoric without concrete evidence. Therefore, maintaining alignment between sustainability communication and implementation is essential for brands to remain relevant and trusted by this market-dominating generation (Septiani et al., 2025).

This is in line with the theory of consumer skepticism regarding corporate communications, which explains that consumers tend to doubt claims or messages conveyed if they are not accompanied by real evidence or consistent experiences (Kim et al., 2019). Consumer skepticism emerges as a form of critical vigilance against the potential for information manipulation or excessive marketing practices, including in the context of green communication. Among Millennials and Gen Z, this level of skepticism is even higher because they are accustomed to the rapid, transparent, and interactive flow of digital information, thus strengthening their ability to identify discrepancies between the company's image and actual practices. Therefore, the success of an environmental communication strategy is largely determined by the brand's ability to present authentic evidence, maintain transparency, and consistently implement the sustainability values it communicates (Yang & Battocchio, 2021).

Social Media as the Main Space

Social media has now become the main space for disseminating environmental messages, because the effectiveness of environmental communication is greatly influenced by digital media which has a wide, fast and interactive reach (Destrian et al., 2025). Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter enable brands to build sustainability narratives more creatively through visual content, short videos, and participatory campaigns. For digital natives like Millennials and Gen Z, social media serves not only as an information channel but also as a space for discussion, advocacy, and the formation of collective identity around sustainability issues.

Through interactive features like likes, shares, comments, and user-

generated content, young consumers can play an active role in spreading messages, critiquing brands, and even helping build their own brand image. This demonstrates that the success of green communication depends not only on the content of the message, but also on how brands leverage the dynamics of social media to create authentic and meaningful engagement (Mayrhofer et al., 2020).

Younger generations tend to connect more with brands through visual, interactive content, and emotional narratives than with traditional, one-way advertising approaches. Engaging visuals, emotionally engaging storytelling, and interactive formats like polls, challenges, and user-generated content have proven more effective at capturing attention and building relationships with young consumers (Ghurab & Ng, 2025).

For Millennials and Gen Z, participatory digital experiences provide a greater sense of engagement because they are not simply recipients of messages but also part of the communication process itself. Emotional narratives linked to sustainability issues, such as stories about environmental impact or a brand's tangible contributions to nature conservation, create deeper personal resonance (Channa et al., 2025). This makes the brand message more believable and memorable, and increases the chances of long-term engagement. Therefore, a communication strategy based on creative and interactive content is more effective in building loyalty among the younger generation than conventional marketing methods.

Participatory communication theory supports the view that consumer engagement plays a crucial role in amplifying campaign messages. Within this framework, audiences are no longer positioned merely as recipients of information, but rather as active actors who shape, interpret, and even disseminate messages. Consumer participation through social media, for example by recreating content, participating in challenges, providing comments, or sharing personal experiences, creates a stronger emotional bond between the brand and the audience (Nariswari et al., 2024).

This involvement not only increases the message's reach but also strengthens brand legitimacy because the message it communicates receives social support from the consumer community itself. Therefore, environmental campaigns based on participatory communication are more likely to generate authentic engagement, build trust, and encourage behavioral transformation toward sustainable consumption (Wang et al., 2020).

Differences in Characteristics of Millennials vs Gen Z

Millennials are showing a tendency to consider long-term sustainability before deciding to be loyal to a brand. For this generation, loyalty is built not only through product quality or competitive pricing, but also through a brand's commitment to environmentally friendly and socially responsible business practices (Prabandaru & Ahmadi, 2025).

They consider a brand's consistency in implementing sustainability strategies, such as the use of sustainable raw materials, waste management, and

³transparency in the supply chain, as important indicators for determining whether a brand is worthy of long-term support. With this perspective, Millennials are more selective in building emotional connections with brands, and the loyalty they form tends to be stronger and more sustainable when they believe the brand is truly contributing positively to the environment and society (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021).

Gen Z differs from previous generations in that they demand more instant transparency and direct interaction through social media. This generation is accustomed to the rapid flow of information and open access, so their expectations of brands are clear, real-time information, from the origins of raw materials to their sustainability practices. They are not afraid to ask questions, criticize, and even challenge brand claims openly in the digital space (Syarifah et al., 2025).

Therefore, direct interaction through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or Twitter is crucial in building trust and engagement with Gen Z (Putra et al., 2025). Brands that respond quickly, transparently, and authentically will more easily build emotional connection with this generation. Conversely, delays or unclear communication can create skepticism and damage the brand's image in the eyes of Gen Z, who are highly critical and vocal in the digital public sphere (Wibowo et al., 2025).

The implications of the findings of this study indicate that environmental communication strategies must be adapted to generational segmentation so that messages can be conveyed more effectively (Cassar, 2025). Millennials, who place a greater emphasis on long-term sustainability values, tend to respond positively to brands that consistently demonstrate a tangible commitment through transparent sustainability reports, ethical business practices, and ongoing social contributions. Conversely, Gen Z demands instant transparency and direct interaction through social media, making real-time, responsive, and participatory communication strategies more relevant in reaching them.

Thus, brands need to adopt different approaches: Millennials are more reassured by evidence of long-term consistency, while Gen Z is more tied to interactive communication and immediate disclosure of information. Adapting strategies based on these generational segments is crucial for building trust, increasing engagement, and strengthening loyalty among young consumers towards brands that are truly committed to sustainability.

Green Communication as Brand Differentiation

In an increasingly competitive market, green communication can no longer be viewed simply as an added value, but has become a key differentiating factor in brand positioning. Young consumers, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, increasingly demand that brands demonstrate a real commitment to sustainability, making communication that emphasizes eco-friendliness a strategic element for creating differentiation (Salam et al., 2024).

Brands that are able to integrate sustainability values into their identity and communication narrative will have stronger appeal and a competitive

advantage compared to competitors that focus solely on product quality or price. Thus, green communication plays a role not only in building a positive image but also in strengthening consumer loyalty and expanding market share by positioning themselves as authentic, responsible, and relevant brands that meet the demands of the younger generation (Bhat et al., 2024).

Companies that fail to demonstrate consistency in implementing sustainability values tend to lose the trust of young consumers (Yuan et al., 2024). Millennials and Gen Z, who have a high level of skepticism towards greenwashing practices, are able to quickly identify discrepancies between communication messages and the reality of company practices. Such inconsistencies not only damage brand credibility but also impact the decline in previously established consumer loyalty and engagement. Losing trust from young consumers has serious consequences, given that this group is a dominant market segment and a key actor in shaping public opinion through social media. Therefore, consistency between environmental communications and the actual implementation of sustainability practices is not only an ethical requirement but also a vital business strategy for maintaining a company's reputation and competitiveness in an increasingly competitive market.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that green communication is a crucial strategy for commercial brands in building a positive image while increasing engagement with young consumers, with message authenticity a key factor in the success of environmental campaigns. Millennials and Gen Z have been shown to be highly critical of indications of greenwashing, demanding consistency between messages and actual practices. Interactive digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are more effective than traditional media, particularly through participatory approaches and storytelling that appeal to consumers' emotional side. Millennials tend to value consistency and the long-term impact of brands on sustainability issues, while Gen Z places greater emphasis on instant transparency, authenticity, and direct interaction. Therefore, consistent, evidence-based green communication not only strengthens brand trust but also increases engagement and loyalty among young consumers, making it a strategic differentiation tool in an increasingly competitive market. For future research, it is recommended that the study be expanded with a cross-cultural comparison approach or longitudinal analysis to understand the dynamics of consumer perceptions of green communication within evolving social, economic, and technological contexts.

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