

REVIEW

# Corporate Social Irresponsibility, Greenwashing, and Consumer Skepticism: A Systematic Literature Review on Impacts, Strategies, and Stakeholder Response

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Corporate Social Irresponsibility (CSI), greenwashing, and consumer skepticism have become pressing concerns in today's business landscape. While companies increasingly adopt Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives to enhance their public image, many engage in greenwashing, misleading stakeholders about their environmental practices.

**Methodology:** This study explores the intricate interplay between Corporate Social Irresponsibility (CSI), greenwashing, and consumer skepticism by synthesizing insights from 54 peer-reviewed articles using the PRISMA framework. The review draws data from the Scopus database and Google Scholar, analysing key themes, trends, and stakeholder responses to greenwashing and irresponsible corporate practices.

**Results:** Findings reveal that companies often report symbolic CSR and employ deflection strategies to obscure socially irresponsible behaviours. Consumer responses include diminished brand trust, increased negative word-of-mouth, and loyalty shifts toward authentic, sustainable brands. Practical strategies for mitigating skepticism include transparent CSR reporting, issuing green bonds, and fostering social media engagement.

**Novelty and contribution:** This study's novelty lies in its integrated analysis of CSI, greenwashing, and consumer skepticism. It contributes a comprehensive framework for understanding how deceptive CSR practices influence consumer perceptions and stakeholder engagement.

**Practical and social implications:** The implications extend to corporate strategies and academic research, emphasizing the need for genuine CSR practices and transparent communication.

**Keywords:** Corporate social irresponsibility, greenwashing, consumer skepticism, corporate social responsibility, consumer protection

## 1 Introduction

Corporate social irresponsibility (CSI) refers to a company's actions that harm the long-term interests of its stakeholders (Valor et al., 2022). In today's business environment, cases of CSI are increasingly visible. Notable

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examples include the Boeing 737 MAX disaster, which resulted in 346 deaths and cost the company over \$18 billion (Gelles, 2020), and McKinsey's controversial involvement in the opioid crisis, which led to a \$573 million settlement with U.S. authorities (Valor et al., 2022). The growing prevalence of such incidents has also drawn increased academic attention, with leading journals dedicating special issues and sections to the study of corporate irresponsibility (e.g., Antonetti, 2020; Putrevu, McGuire, Siegel, & Smith, 2012).

The term "corporate social irresponsibility" (CSI), which was first used in the 1960s, refers to a series of actions made by businesses that, whether on purpose or by accident, negatively affect stakeholders and society (Jain & Zaman, 2020; Iborra & Riera, 2017). According to research, CSI practices have several detrimental effects on businesses and their stakeholders, including sharp drops in stock market values (Karpoff et al., 2008), lost customers (Sweetin et al., 2013), and harm to a company's reputation (Grappi et al., 2013). Surprisingly, CSI has grown despite these serious detrimental effects (Jain & Zaman, 2020). This trend underscores the need for a deeper understanding of corporate misconduct, particularly in light of major global events such as the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent corporate scandals that followed (Clark et al., 2022).

Greenwashing is defined differently. Although previous researchers have mainly linked greenwashing to environmental problems (Parguel et al., 2011), more recent studies have shown a broader range, connecting it to stakeholder interactions and societal challenges (Li et al., 2015). "The act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service" is what Parguel et al. (2011) defined as "greenwashing." Greenwashing is a well-known strategy businesses use to outperform their competitors (Parguel et al., 2011). Gatti et al. (2019) say greenwashing is a disingenuous social responsibility practice. Changing stakeholder perceptions is the primary goal of greenwashing practices, which enhance a company's reputation and image (Shea & Hawn, 2019; Uyar et al., 2020). However, due to resource constraints and social and stakeholder pressures, businesses may spread CSR information inconsistent with real-world operations (Scheidler et al., 2019). There may be unfavourable outcomes if stakeholders identify these greenwashing techniques in CSR projects.

Growing customer distrust regarding the authenticity of CSR promises is one of the most apparent effects of greenwashing (Mu & Lee, 2023). Additionally, customers' brand impressions (Nyilasy et al., 2014), green trust (Chen & Chang, 2013), and green purchase intentions (Zhang et al., 2018) can also be adversely affected by greenwashing. Empirical research indicates that greenwashing disrupts market order (Fassin & Buelens, 2011), adversely affects a company's financial performance, and can have detrimental repercussions for the company (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013), as well as negatively influencing cumulative abnormal returns (CAR) and corporate reputation (Du, 2015; Seele & Schultz, 2022). Greenwashing can also evolve into machinewashing, which involves conveying or omitting false information about moral AI through language, images, or the AI's underlying algorithm. As a result, greenwashing can potentially reduce corporate social responsibility (CSR), which was once a noble act of charity, to a pointless endeavour (Kawamura & Kusumi, 2020).

Globally, individuals are becoming more cognisant of the deceptive or erroneous environmental claims made by corporations, charity entities, and even governmental bodies regarding their strategies for addressing environmental and climate-related issues. These assertions can enhance the organization's social reputation, foster relationships with customers and employees, or yield short-term profits, all while circumventing the substantial alterations necessary for the rapid mitigation of negative environmental effects (Nemes et al., 2022). However, it should be highlighted that skepticism is a cognitive process that can only be triggered when processing and reception occur intentionally, as is the case with attention. In other words, only if the consumer pays attention to greenwashing appeals will it be possible to activate skepticism towards these practices (Li & Ding, 2024). A natural reaction to perceived deception in business communications regarding sustainability and corporate social responsibility is a loss of consumer trust. Customers' propensity to doubt the intentions behind company statements is reflected in this, especially when they perceive the claims as more marketing gimmicks than sincere attempts to address social or environmental problems. According to studies, this suspicion can have a significant impact on customers' purchasing decisions, as they may stop supporting companies they believe are involved in CSI, such as greenwashing (Dittmann, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023).

For companies seeking to establish strong connections with their stakeholders, the interplay between CSI, greenwashing, and consumer distrust creates a challenging climate. Businesses must carefully manage these dynamics because doing otherwise puts their reputations, as well as the loyalty and confidence of their customers, in

danger. Therefore, comprehending these ideas is crucial to creating solutions that help mitigate the negative consequences of dishonest business activities and promote true corporate responsibility (Şenyapar, 2024; Szwajca, 2022; Andreoli & Minciotti, 2023).

Over the last decade, the concept of corporate social irresponsibility (CSI) has gained increasing importance. In fact, CSI has recently been added to the research agendas of academic and practitioner communities around the world. In contrast, other related concepts—specific behaviors such as bribery, tax evasion, and greenwashing, as well as more general ones like corporate wrongdoing and corporate misconduct have long been the subject of extensive discussion and investigation (Iborra & Riera, 2023). Consumer skepticism, greenwashing, and CSI are often treated as distinct concepts in most of the research now in publication. The repercussions of greenwashing on consumer trust and environmental sustainability, for instance, are highlighted by Şenyapar (2024), although they do not thoroughly examine how more general CSI issues exacerbate these effects. A more integrated approach is needed to analyze how these concepts interact and influence each other, particularly in shaping consumer perceptions and corporate reputations. Hence, the interplay between CSI, greenwashing, and consumer skepticism forms a complex landscape that necessitates a systematic literature review. This review aims to synthesize existing research on the impacts of these phenomena, the corporate strategies, and the responses from various stakeholders. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective frameworks that can guide organizations in fostering authentic CSR practices while mitigating the risks associated with corporate irresponsibility and deceptive marketing strategies. This systematic literature review addresses the highlighted gaps to answer the following research questions.

- i. How do firms engage in greenwashing while neglecting social responsibility practices?
- ii. How do stakeholders, particularly consumers, respond to greenwashing practices linked to Corporate Social Irresponsibility?
- iii. What strategies do corporations employ to mitigate consumer skepticism arising from perceived greenwashing and irresponsible behaviours?
- iv. What are the long-term impacts of consumer skepticism on brand trust and loyalty in companies identified with greenwashing and Corporate Social Irresponsibility?

This research offers a novel contribution by synthesizing fragmented literature on the intersection of corporate social irresponsibility, greenwashing, and consumer skepticism. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on individual aspects of these phenomena, this systematic review provides an integrated perspective on their interconnected impacts, mitigation strategies, and stakeholder responses. It contributes to the academic discourse by proposing a framework for understanding how greenwashing influences consumer behaviour and stakeholder engagement, thereby advancing knowledge in corporate ethics and sustainability practices.

## **2 Methodology**

Higgins et al. (2019) describe a systematic review as a research approach that addresses specific research questions by providing an accurate and current summary of primary studies. The systematic literature review (SLR) method is a well-established strategy for evaluating and synthesizing existing evidence on a particular topic. It offers a structured and transparent process for identifying and assessing relevant studies (Madanaguli et al., 2022). This review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). Specifically, the PRISMA 2020 checklist was employed, as it is designed to ensure rigor and transparency in conducting systematic literature reviews (Tugwell & Tovey, 2020; Bamiro et al., 2024).

### **2.1 Database**

The first step in the literature search process was selecting an appropriate database—Scopus. This database was chosen because it is one of the largest and most comprehensive sources of indexed scientific and academic publications, making it suitable for systematic literature reviews. According to Rosário and Raimundo (2024), Scopus offers extensive journal coverage across multiple disciplines, providing a broad and integrated view of global scholarly output beyond traditional journal articles. It is widely recognized as one of the premier abstract and citation databases, containing about 70 million records and over 21,600 peer-reviewed journals from more than 4,000 international publishers across diverse scientific fields (Moher et al., 2015; Salisu et al., 2024).

Scopus also supports both basic and advanced search functions, allowing users to refine results using Boolean operators and filters such as document type, date, subject area, author, and publication recency (Bamiro et al., 2024; Salisu et al., 2024). Its global reach and multidisciplinary scope make it particularly valuable for transdisciplinary studies, though it has a slight bias toward English-language publications. The choice of Scopus was therefore aligned with the study's international and multidisciplinary focus (Rosário & Raimundo, 2024).

In addition to Scopus, Google Scholar was used to identify supplementary publications relevant to the research questions. However, because Google Scholar includes non-peer-reviewed materials and lacks consistent indexing standards, its use was limited to supporting searches within the study's defined methodological boundaries.

## 2.2 Search Parameters and Search Process

The article search on the Scopus database utilized three categories of keywords. The keyword "corporate social responsibility" was consistently employed across all searches to expand the search results and include more relevant articles. The first category included the keywords: "corporate social irresponsibility," "corporate social responsibility," and "greenwashing." The second category used keywords such as "corporate social irresponsibility," "corporate social responsibility," and "consumer skepticism." The final category focused on the keywords "greenwashing" and "consumer skepticism." Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the search process and keyword combinations.

Following the PRISMA guidelines, we catalogued every record's title, abstract, keywords, and research type. It was challenging to identify pertinent articles because many of the titles lacked enough information. We conducted a comprehensive abstract evaluation to identify articles that addressed our study questions and excluded those that did not meet our requirements. Afterward, studies were vetted in two stages: a full-text review was conducted following an evaluation of titles and abstracts. Fifty-four publications that met the inclusion criteria were identified through this meticulous method, serving as the foundation for our inquiry. The PRISMA flow diagram summarizing the selection process is presented in Figure 1.

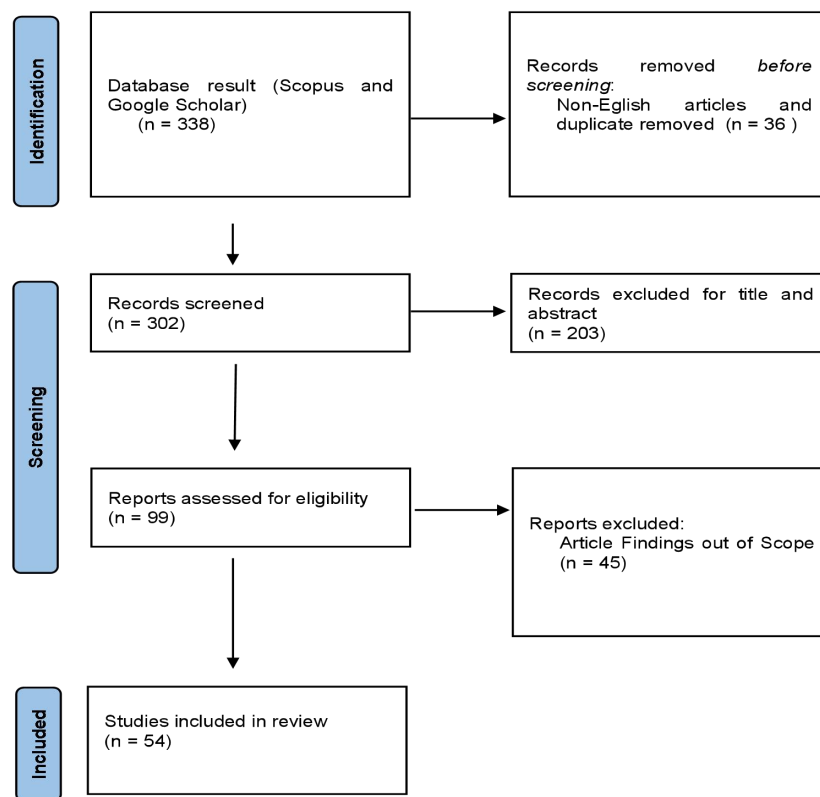
**Table 1** Keywords utilization and search process on Scopus database

Keywords (Title-Abs-Key)	Search results	Final inclusion	Search filter
Corporate AND social AND irresponsibility "OR" corporate AND social AND responsibility "AND" greenwashing	204	29	Articles and English language
Corporate AND social AND irresponsibility "OR" corporate AND social AND responsibility "AND" consumer AND skepticism	70	11	Articles and English language
Greenwashing "AND" consumer AND skepticism	32	9	Articles and English language
Total	306	49	

The additional five articles were included from a Google Scholar search to bring the total to 54.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

This phase involved an analysis of the evolution of the subject's research interests over time, the principal research areas explored, the countries where the theme has garnered significant attention, the major publications on the topic, the theories employed, and the seminal papers along with their authors. The data analysis consists of the following components: articles and analyses of identified clusters, year of publication, scientific category, nations of authors, and the most pertinent sources.



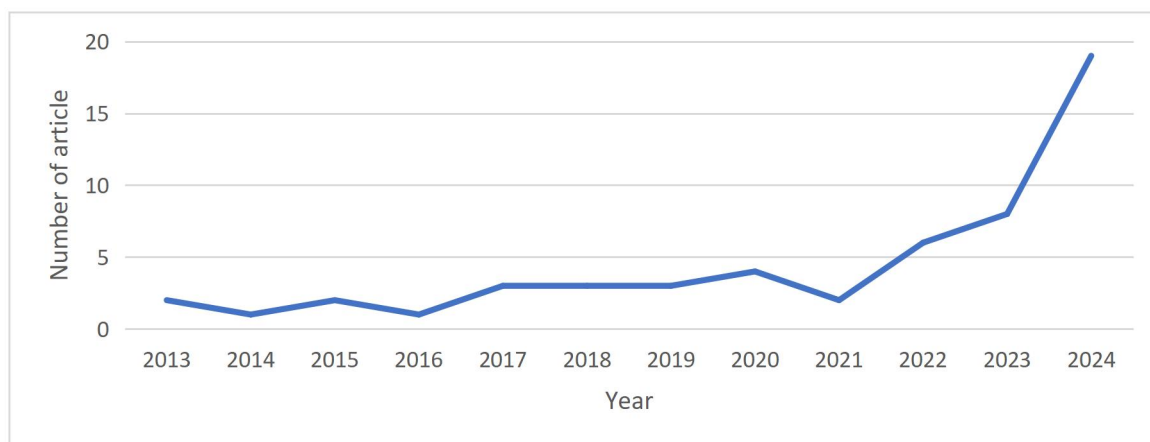
**Figure 1** PRISMA flow chart

### 3 Results

The results include relevant information on the selected studies, such as publication year, journal of publication, geographical scope, methods used, study focus, and theories used. The profile enabled us to identify the publication trends, prominent outlets, and contexts studied, along with the prevailing methodological approach.

#### 3.1 Trends in publication over the years

Figure 2 illustrates the evolution in articles published on the relationship between the three concepts under review: corporate social irresponsibility, greenwashing, and consumer skepticism.



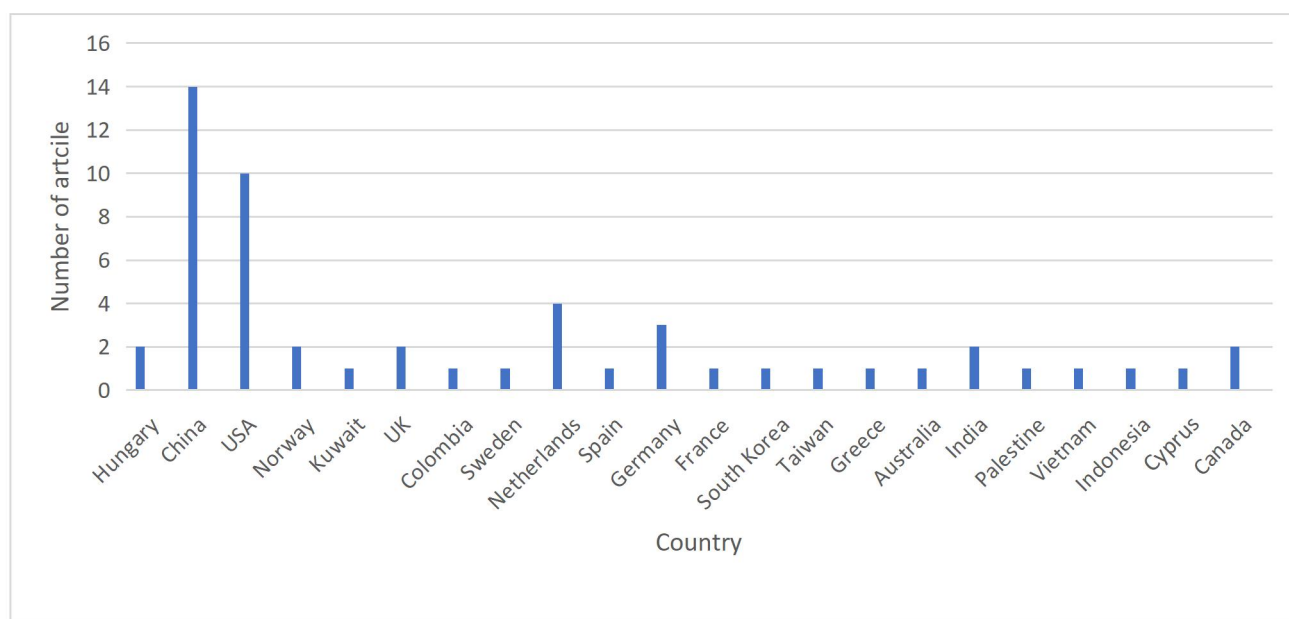
**Figure 2** Trends in publication over the years

A definite upward trend in publications is depicted in the figure, indicating that researchers are becoming more interested in greenwashing, corporate social irresponsibility, and consumer skepticism about businesses. This increased attention underscores the growing importance of these concerns in recent years. Specifically, 35% of the examined publications were released between 2013 and 2020, while the remainder (65%) were released between 2021 and 2024. This trend highlights the increased scholarly attention in the latter period, which was probably prompted by changes in regulations, public discourse, and consumer awareness of corporate accountability. Interestingly, 2024 had the most publications, with 19 articles published that year, signaling a peak in scholarly interest. This is followed by 2023, which had 8 articles, further emphasizing the surge in research activity within this timeframe. The steady increase in publications over the years underscores the growing urgency and significance of addressing these issues in the corporate and academic landscapes.

### 3.2 Publications by authors' country

Twenty-one countries were recognized as contributing to the body of research on consumer skepticism, greenwashing, and corporate social irresponsibility based on the first author's country of affiliation. With 14 pieces, China is by far the largest contributor, as seen in Figure 3, underscoring its important influence on the conversation surrounding these topics. The United States is in second place with ten articles in the field.

On the other hand, none of the other nations publish more than five pieces, making their contributions smaller. This distribution highlights a concentration of academic work in certain areas, such as China and the US, where concerns about corporate irresponsibility, greenwashing, and the corporate landscape have garnered significant attention. As a reflection of the geographical diversity of interest in these subjects, the authors of these publications are primarily affiliated with organizations in North America, Europe, and Asia. A publication by Gutiérrez et al. (2024) is noteworthy for its unusual affiliation with a Colombian university, suggesting that studies on these topics are not limited to traditional academic hubs but are also expanding to other areas.



**Figure 3** Distribution by author's country of affiliation

### 3.3 Authors affiliations

An analysis of the affiliations of first authors was conducted to gain insights into their primary focus areas concerning the three key concepts under investigation: corporate social irresponsibility, greenwashing, and consumer skepticism. Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of these affiliations, revealing the disciplinary diversity of researchers contributing to this field. Notably, a significant majority of the first authors, 39 out of 54, have affiliations rooted in business and administration. These findings underscore that these issues are predominantly studied within the

context of business practices, management strategies, and corporate ethics, aligning with the practical and theoretical implications these topics hold for organizational behavior and policymaking. In addition, three authors are affiliated with technology-related fields, indicating an emerging interest in exploring how technological advancements, such as digital transparency and social media platforms, influence corporate accountability, greenwashing tactics, and consumer perceptions.

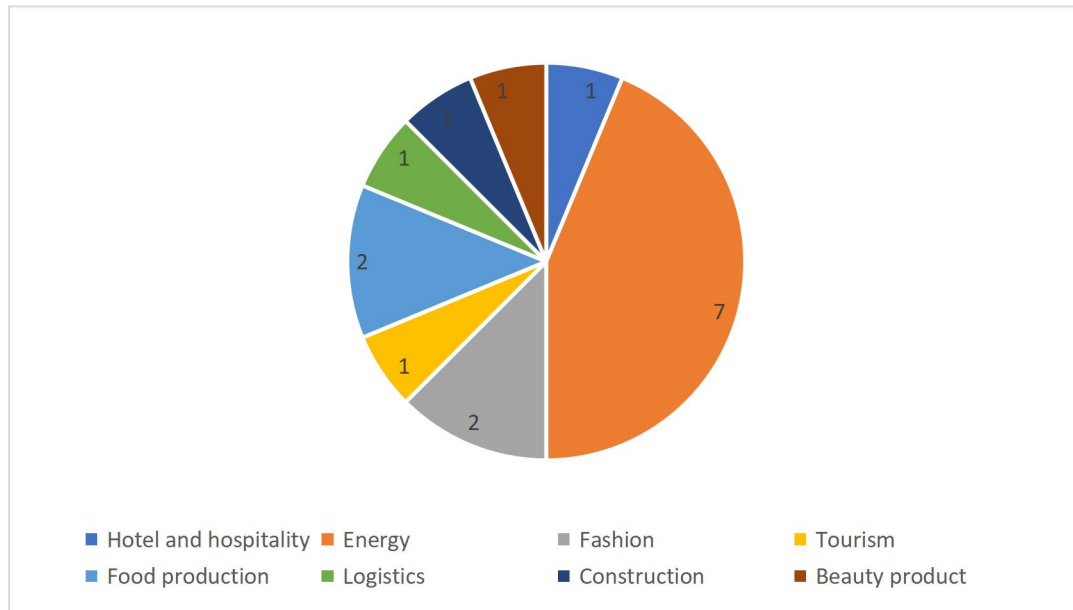
**Table 2** Author affiliation

Author affiliation	Number of articles	Author affiliation	Number of articles
Business and administration	39	Agriculture	1
Psychology	1	Education	1
Environmental science	1	Architecture	1
Engineering	1	Social sciences	4
Technology	3	Media and communication	2

The table also reflects a diverse range of other affiliations, encompassing disciplines such as agriculture, media and communications, and psychology, among others. This variety highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the research, with scholars from diverse fields contributing unique perspectives to the understanding of these complex issues. For instance, agricultural affiliations may focus on greenwashing in sustainable farming claims (Gider & Hamm, 2019), while psychology researchers may delve into consumer decision-making and skepticism (De Vries et al., 2015). Similarly, media and communications scholars might explore the role of narratives and marketing in shaping public perceptions of corporate behaviour (Christis & Wang, 2021). Summarily, the analysis of author affiliations reveals that while business and administration dominate the discourse, the topic has garnered attention across multiple disciplines, emphasizing its broad relevance and the need for collaborative, cross-disciplinary research approaches.

### 3.4 Contribution by industry

To shed light on the industry's most closely studied aspects for consumer skepticism, greenwashing, and corporate social irresponsibility, the current study also analyzed the industries examined in the reviewed papers. Eight different industries were identified, as shown in Figure 4. The energy sector was the most often examined, with seven articles concentrating on it. Given the energy sector's substantial environmental effect and its involvement in climate change, which frequently exposes it to increased public and scholarly scrutiny, its prominence is unsurprising. Hotel and hospitality, fashion, tourism, food manufacturing, logistics, construction, and the beauty goods industry are among the other businesses that have been highlighted. Each industry presents unique challenges and opportunities concerning ethical practices and sustainability. For instance, the fashion and beauty industries have faced increased criticism for their environmental footprint and issues such as misleading sustainability claims. At the same time, the food production and logistics sectors are frequently scrutinized for transparency in supply chains and ethical sourcing practices.



**Figure 4** Distribution of reviewed articles by industry

### 3.5 Theoretical contribution

In terms of the theoretical frameworks employed, we found that the research drew on theories from a variety of fields, including behavioral theories such as ABC attitude theory, psychological contract theory, sociological theories, and strategic management theories like signalling theory. This suggests that the field has a strong theoretical underpinning from several functional branches of sociology and management. The main theories influencing the debate over consumer skepticism, greenwashing, and corporate social responsibility are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3** Theoretical framework used in CSI, greenwashing, and consumer skepticism

Theories	Authors
Psychological contract theory	Sun & Shi (2022)
Signaling theory	Karaman et al. (2021), Uyar et al. (2020)
Influential discounting behavior theory	Rahman et al. (2015)
Principal-agent theory	Ling et al. (2024)
Cognitive dissonance theory	De Jong et al. (2018)
Responsibility theory	Jin et al. (2024)
Attribution theory	Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017), Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013)
Construal Level Theory	Connors et al. (2017)
ABC attitude theory	Liao and Wu (2024)
Information asymmetry theory	Li and Ding (2024)

In addition to the aforementioned approaches, scholars have linked other prominent theories to the three concepts under investigation. For example, De Jong et al. (2018) employed cognitive dissonance theory to investigate the effects of greenwashing on consumers. This theory suggests that individuals experience psychological discomfort when their beliefs or actions are inconsistent, prompting them to resolve this dissonance in various ways. Signalling theory, as explored by Karaman et al. (2021), has been used to explain how firms communicate their corporate social responsibility (CSR) performance. According to this theory, firms with stronger CSR initiatives tend to disclose extensive information about their activities to signal their commitment to stakeholders.

This is especially relevant in the context of greenwashing, as the theory also highlights information asymmetry in reporting systems, where corporate managers selectively disclose information (Uyar et al., 2020). Attribution theory



provides insights into consumer skepticism by examining how individuals attribute causality to events or actions. Leonidou and Skarmas (2017) argued that consumers tend to interpret corporate motives behind CSR initiatives as egoistic, stakeholder-driven, or values-driven. Skarmas and Leonidou (2013) further demonstrated that egoistic and stakeholder-driven attributions fuel skepticism, whereas values-driven attributions reduce it. This theory is critical for understanding why some CSR efforts fail to resonate with consumers and are perceived as disingenuous. Construal level theory, as applied by Connors et al. (2017), posits that consumer skepticism toward CSR can lead individuals to adopt a low-level construal mindset when processing information related to corporate social irresponsibility.

Based on internal governance theory, firms with shorter managerial decision horizons are more likely to engage in greenwashing, prioritizing superficial environmental claims to achieve immediate gains while neglecting meaningful social responsibility practices that require long-term investments (Yu et al., 2024).

### **3.6 Data extraction and citation**

Table 3 presents the data extraction table, which provides a detailed summary of the reviewed articles and their respective authors. It includes information such as the authors, their countries of affiliation, each author's research contributions, and the number of citations their work has received. Notably, the article with the highest citation count is "Gray Shades of Green: Causes and Consequences of Green Skepticism" by Leonidou and Skarmas (2017), which has been cited 1,063 times. This high citation count underscores the article's significant impact and influence on the field of research concerning corporate social irresponsibility, greenwashing, and consumer skepticism.

### **3.7 Keywords analysis**

Hotspots and trends in the study topics are identified through keyword analysis, which is crucial for understanding advancements in the field. The analysis utilizes VOSviewer's overlay and network visualization features to identify the most popular study topics and discern keyword patterns over time (Santos et al., 2024). The writers retained only the keywords that appeared at least 10 times (128 keywords) using the "full counting" method. The three terms that were judged to be most pertinent were consumer, social responsibility, and corporate greenwashing. The keyword analysis revealed three primary clusters. The relationship between the keywords can be investigated based on these three categories. Four clusters are shown in Figure 5, each defined by complementary components. Consumers' skepticism of CSR and greenwashing is associated with Cluster 1 (red). Consumer skepticism, corporate hypocrisy, CSR activity, and CSR skepticism are some of the key terms included. One of the primary issues that prompted researchers to concentrate on this subject may have been the importance of stakeholder views, especially those of consumers, and the resulting attitudes toward corporate greenwashing activities. The company's corporate greenwashing practices fall under the second cluster (green). This cluster contains keywords associated with the economy, enterprise, and greenwashing behaviour. China is another significant keyword in this cluster. Figure 3 shows that China has the most significant number of authors' affiliations. Most research was conducted in China, according to the keywords analysis.

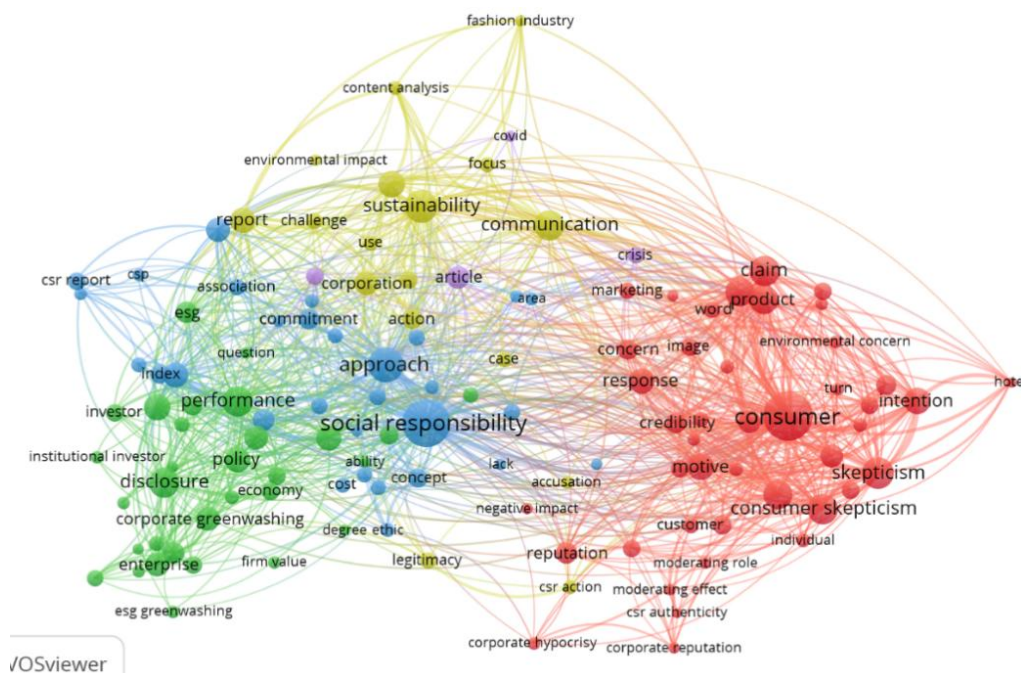
**Table 3** Data extraction table

S/N	Authors & (Years)	Country	Industry	Research Focus	Theory	Citation
1	Kundi and Ernszt (2024)	Hungary	Not specified	Greenwashing Policy		0
2	Sun and Shi (2022)	China	Not specified	Consumer greenwashing perception and consumer skepticism	Psychological contract theory	45
3	Lee et al. (2018)	USA	Not specified	Corporate social responsibility strategies		145
4	Løhre et al. (2024)	Norway	Not specified	Greenwashing and consumer skepticism		0
5	Karaman et al. (2021)	Kuwait, Kazakhstan, France, and China	Oil and gas sector	Greenwashing and CSI	Signalling theory	118
6	Rahman et al. (2015)	USA	Hotel and hospitality	Greenwashing and consumer skepticism	Influential discounting behaviour theory	459
7	Ling et al. (2024)	China	Not specified	Greenwashing and CSI	Principal-agent theory	2
8	Ioannou et al. (2023)	UK, Cyprus and Greece	Not specified	Greenwashing and CSI		126
9	Gutiérrez et al. (2024)	Colombia and Spain	Energy	CSI and greenwashing		0
10	Brydges et al. (2022)	Sweden, Australia and Canada	Fashion	CSI and greenwashing		54
11	De Jong et al. (2018)	Netherlands	Not specified	Consumer perspective and CSI	cognitive dissonance theory	301
12	Cao et al. (2024)	China	Not specified	CSI and Greenwashing		0
13	Wang et al. (2023)	China and Japan	Not specified	CSI and Greenwashing strategy		32
14	Christis and Wang (2021)	Netherlands	Not specified	Consumer perspective and CSI		26
15	Wu et al. (2020)	USA and China	Not specified	CSI and Greenwashing		423
16	Xu et al. (2023)	China	Not specified	CSI and Greenwashing		29
17	Mahoney et al. (2013)	USA and Canada	Not specified	CSI and Greenwashing		881
18	Poveda-Pareja et al. (2024)	Spain	Tourism	CSI and Greenwashing		2
19	Gider and Hamm (2019)	Germany	Food production	CSI and Greenwashing		20
20	Uyar et al. (2020)	France, Kuwait and Turkey	Logistics	CSI and Greenwashing	Signaling theories	282
21	Zhang and Zhang (2024)	China	Energy	CSI and Greenwashing		2
22	De Vries et al. (2015)	Netherlands	Energy	CSI and Greenwashing		340

23	Xiao et al., (2022)	China	Not specified	Greenwashing and consumer skepticism		27
24	de Jong et al. (2020)	Netherlands	Not specified	Greenwashing and consumer skepticism		259
25	Xia et al. (2023)	China	Not specified	CSI and Greenwashing		74
26	Li et al. (2024)	China	Not specified	CSI and Greenwashing		1
27	Jin et al. (2024)	China	Energy	CSI and Greenwashing	Responsibility theory	6
28	Ulusoy and Barretta (2016)	USA	Not specified	Greenwashing and consumer skepticism		74
29	Yu et al. (2024)	China	Not specified	Greenwashing and CSI		2
30	Jung and Lee (2022)	South Korea and USA	Fashion	CSI and consumer skepticism		14
31	Arli et al. (2019)	USA, New Zealand and Ireland	Not specified	CSI and consumer skepticism		85
32	Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017)	Uk and Greece	Not specified	CSI and consumer skepticism	Attribution theory	565
33	Yang and Hsu (2017)	Taiwan	Not specified	CSI and consumer skepticism		36
34	Moreno and Kang (2020)	USA	Not specified	CSI and consumer skepticism		75
35	Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013).	Greece and UK	Food	CSI and consumer skepticism	Attribution theory	1063
36	Magee (2022)	USA	Not specified	CSI and consumer skepticism and greenwashing		6
37	Connors et al. (2017)	USA and Canada	Not specified	CSI and consumer skepticism	Construal Level Theory	192
38	Skard and Thorbjørnsen (2014)	Norway	Not specified	CSI and consumer skepticism and greenwashing		192
39	Chung (2018)	USA	Not specified	CSI and consumer skepticism		12
40	Bögel (2019)	Germany	Not specified	CSI and consumer skepticism		75
41	Polonsky et al. (2024)	Australia Canada and India	Not specified	Consumer skepticism and consumer skepticism		3
42	Liao and Wu (2024)	China	Energy	Consumer skepticism and greenwashing	ABC attitude theory	1
43	Adil et al. (2024)	India, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia and Australia	Cosmetics	Consumer skepticism and greenwashing		4
44	Zaid et al. (2024)	Palestine	Not specified	Consumer skepticism and greenwashing		1
45	Li and Ding (2024)	China	Construction	Consumer skepticism and greenwashing	Information asymmetry theory	4
46	Nguyen-Viet and Nguyen (2024)	Vietnam	Beauty products	Consumer skepticism and greenwashing		10
47	Singh et al. (2022)	India	Not specified	Consumer skepticism and		16

				greenwashing		
48	Promaleissy and Handriana (2024).	Indonesia	Not specified	Consumer skepticism and greenwashing		1
49	Wang and Walker (2023)	China and Canada	Not specified	consumer skepticism and greenwashing		7
50	Gorovaia and Makrominas (2024)	Cyprus	Not specified	Greenwashing and CSI		6
51	Bothello et al. (2023)	Canada, UK and Netherlands	Not specified	Greenwashing and CSI		59
52	Dorfleitner and Utz (2023)	Germany	Not specified	Greenwashing and CSI		14
53	Oppong-Tawiah and Webster (2023)	Canada	Oil and gas and automotive	Greenwashing and CSI		20
54	Keresztúri et al. (2024)	Hungary and Latvia		Greenwashing and CSI		2

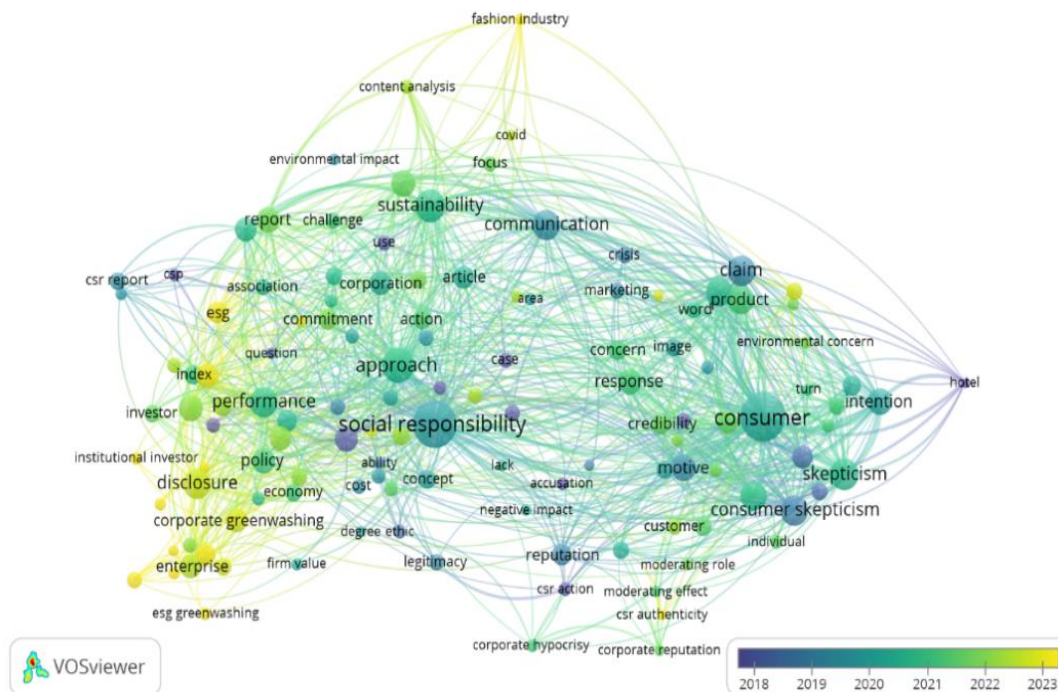
The existence of this cluster suggests that certain businesses may engage in greenwashing practices to preserve their brand value. The third cluster (blue) is associated with the firms' social responsibility. Terms like ethics, CSR disclosure, concept, CSR performance, and CSR report are included. This cluster encompasses various strategies employed by businesses to demonstrate their social responsibility.



**Figure 5** Keyword analysis

The overlay plot (Fig. 6) depicts the trends in keyword evolution throughout time. In this picture, the blue portions represent earlier studies, while the yellow parts show more recent research. The graphic reveals emerging hotspots in the industry, such as corporate greenwashing (29 mentions in 2022), sustainable development (21 mentions in 2021), disclosure (83 mentions in 2022), corporate reputation (18 mentions in 2021), and environmental concern (15

mentions in 2021). These findings imply a growing recent emphasis on how corporations might uphold a positive corporate image by embracing socially responsible practices.



**Figure 6** Network visualization

## 4 Discussions

#### 4.1 How firms engage in greenwashing while neglecting social responsibility practices

Greenwashing and social responsibility are two important keywords that were identified by VOS viewer on the relationship between the three concepts under investigation. The relationship between these two concepts involves how firms present false social responsibility claims to conceal their social irresponsibility and greenwash their customers. Findings from this study identified the use of decoupling and deflection techniques by firms to shift their consumers' attention away from their socially irresponsible behavior. Gorovaia & Makrominas (2024) found that socially irresponsible companies typically publish lengthier, more positive, and more regularly available reports. They also use these reports to disseminate more extensive, but less readable, environmental content. Additionally, adding more environmental content to the report while lowering its readability highlights attention deflection and dissociation. According to Bothello et al. (2023), companies that display symbolic communication about corporate social responsibility (CSR) without taking concrete steps are engaging in greenwashing. They can project a socially conscious image while ignoring real CSR activities, thanks to this CSR decoupling, running the risk of negative impressions and potential performance damage.

Dorfleitner and Utz (2023) both point out how companies use false Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) scores to engage in greenwashing while neglecting their social responsibility practices. By focusing on soft ESG data and green marketing costs, businesses engage in greenwashing, creating the appearance of environmental commitment while neglecting genuine CSR initiatives. This disparity highlights the variation in the appearance of their operations and their green environmental performance (Dorfleitner & Utz, 2023).

According to Oppong-Tawiah and Webster (2023), businesses that make false or inflated environmental claims in their communications, particularly on social media, while ignoring genuine corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts,

engage in greenwashing. This deception aims to enhance their reputation without undertaking significant, long-term measures. Low transparency promotes greenwashing, in which profit-driven companies engage in dishonest environmental policies, impeding informed consumer choices while raising corporate social responsibility expenditures (Wu et al., 2020).

Xia et al. (2013) found that only 13.6% of corporations declared environmental penalties during the study period. The study focused on greenwashing behavior and corporate social irresponsibility among listed companies in China. The decision to greenwash environmental performance is mostly influenced by the need for future funding and investment, and greenwashing is more common among businesses with higher debt levels. According to research by Jin et al. (2024) on a Chinese fintech company, companies engage in greenwashing when they prioritize superficial environmental claims, such as purchasing carbon sinks, over implementing significant emission reduction measures. Furthermore, Cao et al. (2024) argue that the Green Credit Policy, which was designed to encourage sustainable development by restricting financing for polluting projects among Chinese enterprises, has inadvertently led to corporate greenwashing. Listed firms have utilized green narratives to circumvent the policy's funding restrictions, resulting in a faster increase in positive environmental disclosures than actual environmental investments.

#### **4.2 How stakeholders, particularly consumers, respond to greenwashing practices linked to Corporate Social Irresponsibility**

The major stakeholders affected by greenwashing due to corporate social irresponsibility are consumers. Consumers are increasingly distrustful of greenwashing practices, which can lead to a loss of brand trust, negative word-of-mouth, and a shift in consumer loyalty to more genuinely sustainable competitors. Consumers demand transparency and accountability as they become more knowledgeable, often turning to third-party certifications and scrutinizing environmental claims. This growing awareness can also trigger regulatory actions against companies engaging in deceptive practices, ultimately harming the brand's reputation and long-term success. According to a study by Loannou et al. (2023), the American Consumer Happiness Index (ACSI) from 2008 to 2016 showed that perceived greenwashing—when businesses advertise green product innovation (GPI) without taking appropriate action—has a detrimental effect on consumer happiness. Rather than low levels of implementation, the primary cause of this adverse effect is business policies that are more widely implemented than they are. The notion that consumers are discerning and react badly to dishonest green marketing tactics is further supported by a study by Adil et al. (2024) on greenwashing behaviour by skincare companies, which shows that greenwashing dramatically reduces purchase intention. In addition, Zaid et al.'s (2024) research indicates that greenwashing harms consumers' intentions to make environmentally friendly purchases, with green brand love and loyalty acting as mediators in this relationship. This effect, however, does not seem to be impacted by green skepticism.

Regarding greenwashing associated with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSI), skepticism and perceptions of corporate hypocrisy significantly impact stakeholders, especially consumers. When consumers doubt a company's environmental promises, they might experience consumer mistrust, brand boycotts, and fury. In addition to harming a company's reputation, this skepticism increases the sense of corporate irresponsibility and hypocrisy, which erodes consumer trust and long-term brand loyalty (Arli et al., 2019).

Fuelled by inaccurate or deceptive environmental claims, green skepticism causes customers to change their green behaviour negatively by becoming more wary and less confident in green product offerings. This distrust is exacerbated by the proliferation of greenwashing word-of-mouth, in which customers express their opinions and experiences with greenwashing, eventually deters customers from doing business with companies that use dishonest environmental marketing strategies. This supports the notion that false promises seriously change consumer behaviour toward green products and undermine confidence, increasing the likelihood that consumers would steer clear of or move from companies thought to engage in greenwashing (Singh et al., 2022).

According to a study by Lee et al. (2018), stakeholders, especially consumers, react to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) greenwashing by splitting into knowledgeable and ignorant groups. In an unregulated market, brown businesses may make money by using greenwashing to trick ignorant customers. In contrast, knowledgeable customers choose to do business with truly green companies even if they charge more.

### **4.3 The long-term impacts of consumer skepticism on brand trust and loyalty in companies identified with greenwashing and Corporate Social Irresponsibility?**

Greenwashing perceptions significantly reduce green purchasing intentions, as consumers feel betrayed when their expectations of corporate environmental responsibility are violated. This perceived betrayal partially mediates the negative impact on purchase intentions, eroding trust and diminishing loyalty (Sun & Shi, 2022). Customers are more inclined to forgive and place less blame on the business when they believe that CSR is being done with sincerity. This lessens the impact of the incident and lessens the sense of self-interest (Jung & Lee, 2022). Greenwashing also positively influences brand avoidance, which is partially mediated by brand hypocrisy, according to an empirical study by Xiao et al. (2020). This means that customers intentionally avoid the brand as a result of greenwashing. Arli et al. (2019) also point out that skepticism might cause a person to question what a company is saying, just as perceptions of corporate dishonesty can affect consumer views.

In the long run, consumer skepticism of CSR erodes brand loyalty and confidence, especially when it is connected to greenwashing and corporate social irresponsibility. Increased skepticism, harm to retailer equity, weakened customer resistance to adverse information, and GWWOM are all consequences of egoistic and stakeholder-driven motivations (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). According to Promalessy and Handriana (2024), greenwashing has a considerable favourable impact on negative green word-of-mouth and green skepticism. Negative green word-of-mouth is significantly improved by green skepticism.

According to a study by Rahman et al. (2015) on consumer skepticism and greenwashing in the hotel sector, skepticism deters customers from participating in sustainability initiatives. It lowers the possibility that they will return. Customers' distrust is still a significant obstacle, even with serious environmental concerns, suggesting that dishonest environmental practices can damage client relationships regardless of eco-consciousness.

De Jong et al. (2018) observed a minimal significant difference in buying interest between brown and green firms, contrasting the findings above. According to the study, greenwashing organizations scored much worse than outspoken green and silent green organizations in purchasing interest, performing similarly to silent brown organizations. There were no discernible effects of product type or interaction. In general, greenwashing has no real competitive advantage (purchase interest), presents a serious threat (perceived integrity), and offers few advantages (perceived environmental performance).

### **4.4 Strategies employed by corporations to mitigate consumer skepticism arising from perceived greenwashing and irresponsible behaviours**

This study highlights various strategies firms employ to mitigate consumer skepticism related to perceived greenwashing and irresponsible practices. Key approaches include publishing detailed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports, issuing green bonds, and maintaining active social media engagement. The findings emphasize that these strategies are most effective when accompanied by critical disclosures. For instance, CSR reports should be standalone documents better to communicate a firm's commitment to social responsibility. To show true social and environmental responsibility, companies frequently use signalling tactics by publishing stand-alone CSR reports (Mahoney et al., 2013). Strong-performing companies employ these reports as reliable indicators of their sincere dedication (Karaman et al., 2021; Uyar et al., 2020).

Furthermore, CSR reports that businesses include on their products to communicate their social responsibility should be easy for customers to understand and read. Businesses should concentrate on making their CSR information on products more accessible and transparent, as covered in the Gider and Hamm (2019) study. According to the survey, customers may become skeptical if they believe corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives are lacking due to navigational difficulties and unintuitive user interfaces. As a result, businesses should prioritize easy-to-use, transparent platforms that offer thorough, verifiable information about their CSR initiatives (Yang & Hsu, 2017). This strategy can increase positive involvement with ecologically conscious efforts, decrease green skepticism, and restore consumer trust. Similarly, Moreno and Kang (2020) asserted that the tone and authenticity of CSR message delivery are more important than the content itself, highlighting the necessity of open, honest, and coordinated communication tactics to preserve customer confidence and favourably impact retail patronage intentions.

Green bond issuing improves transparency and credibility and fosters customer trust by mandating businesses to publish verifiable environmental, social, and governance (ESG) information (Ling et al., 2024). Additionally, green bonds remove financial barriers, allowing businesses to fund real sustainability projects.

Avoiding persuasive attempts by companies already recognized as socially irresponsible while presenting their CSR reports is another important tactic identified in this study. According to Skard and Thorbjørnsen (2014), businesses with a bad reputation should refrain from utilizing publicity to repair or enhance their image since it may make customers more aware of attempts at persuasion and the lack of alignment between the sponsor and the cause. Companies should refrain from raising customer suspicions and making them aware of their persuasion goal when putting PR methods that involve publicity into practice, particularly if their reputation is not good. On the other hand, Bögel's (2019) research asserted that companies frequently use strategic CSR communication to restore confidence, even in the face of a bad reputation. Transparent and consistent communication may be important in changing attitudes, as evidenced by the findings that a second presentation of CSR information can momentarily boost consumer trust. Similarly, Chung (2018) suggests that businesses might strategically use CSR initiatives in their communication campaigns. According to the research, building trust can be facilitated by emphasizing established CSR projects in apology statements where there is a strong company-CSR match.

This study also found unusual tactics, like matching CSR reports to consumer beliefs about the world. Businesses can deliberately modify their CSR communications to conform to the worldview beliefs of their customers, claims Magee (2022). Businesses may combat skepticism and promote more positive brand attitudes, particularly impressions of brand warmth, by directly addressing these assumptions. According to De Vries et al. (2015), businesses should emphasize their environmental aims and be open and honest about their economic motivations. Customers who are not naturally suspicious may be less likely to suspect greenwashing if business-driven justifications for environmental investments are acknowledged. Businesses can establish credibility and trust by carefully crafting their communication strategy, showcasing a genuine and well-rounded commitment to sustainability.

## **5 Conclusions**

Recent studies have strongly emphasized the relationship between consumer skepticism, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and corporate social irresponsibility (CSI). Greenwashing, or deceiving customers about environmental activities, has become a significant concern as businesses frequently embrace CSR initiatives to improve their public image and satisfy consumer expectations for moral behaviour. This study examined the effects, tactics, and stakeholder reactions associated with corporate social irresponsibility and greenwashing, guided by the PRISMA framework for systematic literature reviews. After a comprehensive search of Google Scholar and the Scopus database, 54 pertinent papers that answered the study questions were found and added to the final review. The findings indicate a notable surge in scholarly interest in these topics, with most articles published between 2021 and 2024.

The analysis of author affiliations revealed a predominant focus from scholars in the business and administration fields, while the energy sector emerged as the most frequently studied industry. A keyword analysis using VOSviewer identified three primary clusters: consumer skepticism, greenwashing, and social responsibility. These clusters underscore the interconnections between these themes and highlight the critical issues explored in the literature. Four key insights emerged from this review. Firstly, firms often employ decoupling and deflection strategies to divert consumer focus from socially irresponsible behaviours. Additionally, some companies produce lengthy, less-readable reports to obscure their actions. Secondly, greenwashing tied to social irresponsibility leads consumers to lose trust in brands, spread negative word-of-mouth, and shift loyalty to competitors perceived as more genuinely sustainable. Thirdly, skepticism resulting from greenwashing and corporate social irresponsibility reduces green purchasing intentions, drives brand avoidance, and exacerbates unfavourable word-of-mouth, ultimately damaging brand trust and loyalty. Fourthly, effective strategies identified in the reviewed literature include publishing transparent CSR reports, issuing green bonds, maintaining active social media engagement, and integrating CSR reporting into product information. This systematic review highlights the growing academic interest in these critical topics and provides actionable insights for firms seeking to align with ethical practices while addressing consumer skepticism. The findings emphasize the importance of genuine, transparent CSR efforts in fostering trust and loyalty among increasingly discerning consumers.



## **Practical Implication**

In light of growing skepticism, this study emphasizes several practical implications for companies looking to uphold moral standards and win back customer trust. Transparency in business communication is essential; companies should prioritize releasing thorough and validated CSR reports that give customers a clear picture of their environmental and social policies. In order to reduce skepticism, strategic communication is also essential. Businesses must create genuine, approachable, and consistent messaging with customer values to prevent being accused of greenwashing. Businesses must also invest in genuine and significant sustainability projects to move beyond token CSR efforts. A genuine commitment to sustainability can be shown by issuing green bonds and adopting open environmental governance procedures. Social media engagement offers businesses a great chance to encourage candid communication with customers, proactively resolve issues, and establish enduring trust. Together, these initiatives can assist businesses in navigating the challenging terrain of consumer mistrust while cultivating favourable brand views.

## **Theoretical Implication**

This study contributes to the theoretical discourse by emphasizing the interconnected nature of Corporate Social Irresponsibility (CSI), greenwashing, and consumer skepticism. It encourages the development of holistic models that integrate these concepts better to understand their interdependencies and collective impact on consumer behaviour. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of behavioural theories, particularly attribution theory and cognitive dissonance theory, in explaining how consumers process and respond to deceptive corporate practices.

The findings also reinforce the growing relevance of signalling theory in CSR communication, as firms seek to convey authenticity amid consumer skepticism. Companies can effectively bridge the gap between their stated values and actual practices by adopting transparent signalling strategies. Additionally, this research underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, integrating insights from business, psychology, and communication studies. Such perspectives are crucial for developing comprehensive frameworks that capture the complexity of consumer responses to greenwashing and irresponsible corporate behaviour.

## **Limitations of The Study And Suggestions for Future Research**

Like all literature reviews, this study has several limitations. First, the research relied solely on Scopus and Google Scholar for article retrieval. In contrast, Scopus is a reputable and comprehensive database; relevant studies from other databases may have been overlooked, potentially limiting the scope of the analysis. Future research could benefit from a more extensive search strategy incorporating multiple databases to ensure a broader literature base. Second, only peer-reviewed journal articles were analysed, excluding other valuable sources such as book chapters, conference proceedings, early-access papers, and editorial materials. Although journal articles provide rigorously vetted knowledge, future studies might consider including these additional sources to capture wider insights and emerging trends. Lastly, the review focused exclusively on English-language articles, which may have excluded significant research published in other languages. While this approach was adopted to avoid misinterpretation and bias, future research could incorporate multilingual analysis involving native language experts to ensure accurate interpretation and a more global perspective.

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The authors certify that they do not have any competing interests to declare

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