

# Green Blushing and Cause Marketing in Pakistani Fashion Advertising Discourse on Instagram

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## Abstract

This empirical study presents green blushing in cause marketing of Pakistani apparel fashion brands in their advertising discourse on Instagram. The paper comprises two videos from leading players in the apparel industry in Pakistan. Multimodal Interaction Analysis is the primary framework (Norris, 2021) to examine the higher lower and frozen-level mediated actions performed in the adverts. Concerning interaction among the social actors, the research also considers the interactive affordances of the Instagram platform, which enables interaction not only between social actors within the video but also with the viewers, who can provide feedback using comments section. The data comprises the anchoring post, video and the comments' section on the video. The response analysis incorporates Hall's (1987) theory of audience reception to evaluate how viewers perceive and respond to the discourse produced and disseminated on Instagram. The findings highlight instances of green blushing concerning Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) sustainability goals. The study suggests that brands should voice their narrative more thoughtfully when planning campaigns to better align with ESG principles and resonate with their audience.

**Keywords:** cause marketing, green blushing, Pakistani apparel, fashion advertising, social media

## Introduction

In recent years, the relevance of sustainable business practices has grown globally, with both consumers and businesses becoming more aware of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) challenges. This transition has resulted in the growth of cause marketing efforts, in which brands associate themselves with social or

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environmental causes to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability. However, in the context of Pakistani fashion firms, there is still a need to understand how these campaigns are implemented in the digital domain and how audiences react to them.

Concepts like greenwashing and green blushing have emerged as a result of the increased emphasis paid in recent years to the relationship between marketing and environmental sustainability. Green blushing is a phenomenon where organizations downplay or understate their true sustainability initiatives out of fear of being accused of greenwashing, whereas greenwashing is the practice of making false or inflated claims about a company's environmental efforts. The purpose of this essay is to examine the effects of green blushing in relation to cause marketing, a tactic that links companies with environmental and social problems in order to improve customer loyalty and brand reputation.

Businesses must successfully convey their environmental credentials as consumers place a greater emphasis on sustainability when making purchases. However, there may be a reluctance to fully report sustainability results due to the difficult balance between promoting these programs and avoiding allegations of greenwashing. This cautious attitude could unintentionally make it more difficult for a business to interact meaningfully with customers that respect authenticity and openness. This study will analyze the reasons behind green blushing and show how it may affect consumer trust, business reputation, and the sustainability movement as a whole.

This study clarifies how businesses might deal with the difficulties posed by green blushes in cause marketing by thoroughly examining case studies and recent research. The ultimate goal of the results is to offer strategic insights to businesses looking to improve their sustainability messaging and build sincere relationships with eco-aware customers.

This study focuses on green blushing in cause marketing, the strategic use of sustainability themes in marketing without making meaningful changes to inform audiences of their environmental, social and governing contributions in the company's corporate social responsibility projects in Pakistani fashion firms' cause marketing campaigns. Specifically, the article investigates how these firms use social media platforms such as Instagram to promote their CSR activities in advertising campaigns and what caveats are present. The study investigates how marketers

deliver their corporate social responsibility messages without highlighting sustainability concerns and actions. The analysis of two adverts from renowned Pakistani fashion brands using the Multimodal Interaction Analysis framework (Norris, 2021) reveals green blushing (Adamkiewicz et al., 2022; Szabo & Webster, 2021). It also looks into how Instagram's interactive features enable users to connect with and provide input on content. It further categorizes the audience interpretation through their analyzing their comments into dominated-hegemonic reading, negotiated reading, and oppositional reading through audience reception theory of Hall (1987). Majorly audiences have dominated-hegemonic reading of the messages.

## Review of the Literature

According to Kotler and Lee (2008), cause-marketing involves a partnership between a business and a nonprofit organization for mutual benefit. This partnership not only enhances brand reputation, but also fosters consumer loyalty by aligning corporate values with social causes. Research indicates that effective cause marketing can lead to increased sales and improved customer relationships (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). For instance, studies have shown that consumers are more likely to purchase products from brands that support causes they care about (Ellen et al., 2000).

### ❖ Greenwashing

Greenwashing refers to deceptive practices where companies exaggerate or misrepresent their environmental efforts to appear more sustainable than they are. Delmas and Burbano (2011) define greenwashing as a form of misleading communication that can damage consumer trust when exposed. The prevalence of greenwashing has been linked to the growing consumer demand for sustainable products, leading companies to engage in misleading marketing tactics (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). This practice not only misleads consumers but also undermines genuine sustainability efforts by creating skepticism towards all environmental claims (Peattie & Crane, 2005).

### ❖ Green Blushing

Emerging from the concerns surrounding greenwashing is the concept of green blushing, which describes the hesitance of companies to promote their authentic sustainability initiatives due to fear of being accused of greenwashing. Research by

Boulstridge and Carrigan (2000) indicates that this phenomenon can lead organizations to understate their genuine efforts in sustainability, thereby limiting their engagement with socially conscious consumers. Companies may fear a backlash for perceived insincerity, resulting in a paradox where those committed to sustainability choose not to communicate their efforts adequately (Good Carts). This reluctance can hinder a meaningful consumer engagement and diminish the potential benefits of cause marketing.

The relationship between cause marketing, greenwashing, and green blushing is complex. While cause-marketing offers an avenue for brands to connect with consumers on social issues, it also raises the stakes for authenticity in messaging. Companies must navigate the delicate balance between promoting their initiatives and avoiding accusations of insincerity or deception. The fear of being labeled as engaging in greenwashing may lead to green blushing, where brands downplay their contributions rather than risk negative perceptions (Made by Extreme).

#### ❖ **Green marketing or sustainable marketing**

Since 1975 when American Marketing Association (AMA) held the event Ecological marketing (Alexa et al., 2022) concerns for environment became the center of fashion and marketing and advertising with various names green marketing or sustainable marketing. Green marketing defined by AMA as ‘the study of marketing activities’ positive and negative aspects on pollution, energy depletion and non-energy resource depletion’ involves changes in products, production processes, packaging, and advertising (Alexa et al., 2022). Bodger and Monks (2010) state that the use of terms like ‘carbon neutral’, ‘organic’, ‘sustainable’, ‘green’, ‘natural’, ‘biodegradable’, ‘eco-friendly’ has become fashionable. The awakening of consumers regarding greenness (Bodger & Monks, 2010) has posed challenges for corporations (Lu et al., 2022) and in order to seek a sustainable image they may advertise their ‘greenness’ instead of reducing environmental and social impact and hence resulting in greenwashing (Alexa et al., 2022).

#### ❖ **Corporate social responsibility**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), a critical aspect of sustainability ensuring corporations minimize harm to society and contribute to social improvement while generating profit (Nayak et al., 2020) is gaining widespread attention among modern public and corporate discourses on sustainability and research agendas (Breitbarth & Harris, 2008). CSR is broadly based on the concept that business is a

part of society. Nayak et al., (2020) argues that various definitions make it challenging for corporations to understand and implement CSR concepts effectively. However, CSR broadly involves accountability, adhering to government laws and regulations, and operating ethically, exceeding statutory requirements.

Jones (1980) explored CSR and its practical implications for corporations and emphasized the need for corporations to consider the impact of their actions on society and the environment, enhance their reputation, and implement the doctrine without government extension. Kotler and Lee (2008) added a key element of discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources for community wellbeing. Lindgreen and Swaen (2010) defined CSR as the application of social and ethical principles to businesses, as well as the requirement for organizations to define their responsibilities in society. It also emphasizes that CSR has progressed from an idea to reality, with many organizations adhering to and demonstrating their commitment to CSR. However, the finest conceptualizations of CSR are still in their infancy, and prescribed ways to CSR perplex theorists while entirely eluding practitioners.

Kotler and Lee (2008)'s classification of CSR initiatives include cause promotion, cause-related marketing (CRM), corporate social marketing (CSM), corporate philanthropy, community volunteering, and socially responsible business practices. Riaz (2023) states that CSR has been referred to as the social license to legitimize commercial activity, particularly on a global scale when businesses are frequently accused of heartless capitalism.

The present selection of the fashion campaigns refers to the corporate social responsibility of the apparel corporations in Pakistan and the research analyses how these organizations are contributing to achieving sustainability. The selected campaigns are from Maria B cares and Sapphire textile industry.

## Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative method to analyze cause marketing initiatives for Pakistani fashion businesses on social media. The study focuses on two videos from Pakistan's leading garment businesses, chosen for their popularity and industry reach. The methodology consists of two major components: video analysis and audience reception analysis. The videos were analyzed using the Multimodal

Interaction Analysis framework (Norris, 2021), which takes into account the integration of several semiotic modes, including visual, audio, and gestural aspects. The examination concentrated on mediated actions, interaction and identity production. The study used Hall's (1987) encoding/decoding theory to investigate how the videos were received by the audience. This idea was utilized to better understand how viewers interpret and respond to the videos' sustainability messages. Instagram's interactive features, such as comments and reactions, were analyzed to determine audience feedback and engagement with the advertisements. By merging these two streams of research, the study provides insights into how Pakistani garment businesses use social media advertising to promote cause related marketing messages, as well as how audiences evaluate these efforts.

The purposive sample selection justifies its relevance to the theme of cause marketing, sustainability ESG goals and selection of the garment retailers is based on their popularity among the larger population of buyers. Maria B is a renowned designer also known as the Coco Channel of Pakistan and Sapphire is the most popular brand catering the needs of middle-income bracket consumers.

❖ **Data Analysis**

❖ **Maria B Cares**

The selected campaign has been posted by Maria on December 31, 2022 and comprises of two different videos encompassing ten different projects of Maria B Cares an initiative of Maria B designers. The anchoring caption as follows introduces the projects:

❖ **Maria B. Lists 10 major projects completed by Maria B. Cares in 2022.**

*Our humble contribution for disaster management, poverty alleviation, environment, education and human empowerment is a vow to serve Pakistan to the best of our capacity.*

*Alhamdulillah for this journey.*

*#servingPakistan #wrapup2022 #mariab #CSR #humanempowerment #humandevelopment #povertyalleviation #environment #greenenergy #education #socialresponsibility*

Maria B. Cares concludes 2022 by outlining ten main initiatives as their modest contribution to disaster relief, poverty alleviation, environment, education, and human empowerment as a pledge to serve Pakistan to the best of their abilities. It

further expresses the divinity for this voyage. The hashtags mention CSR for human development and empowerment.

Maria B communicates to her consumers and viewers on her social media account Instagram through lives and sharing recorded visual uploads. She greets the audience in an Islamic way and informs the audience about Maria B Cares that this project has been to very close her heart as it provides her contentment for serving humanity and the country. She recaps the year 2022 and presents the initiatives of Maria B Cares as a CSR of her business and these initiatives include distribution of the Holy Quran during the holy month of Ramadan; solar powered water wells across Pakistan especially in draught affected regions Baluchistan, Cholistan and Tharparker; flood relief work ration, food, and medical camps; distribution of 5000 stitched suits with sanitary napkins for flood affected women; provided Liberation loans in conjunction with Akhuwat Foundation; clothes bank support with Akhuwat managed by Khawaja Sira community; to impart education to the deserving talented youth seven scholarships to universities NAMAL, Akhuwat university and five to girls' cadet college Mardan; three boys from the marginalized communities were hired and trained selected from child protection bureau; Kahani day at underprivileged schools; daily Langar (free food distribution center) to 100 needy people every day and Khunsa/Intersex fund for the deprived and marginalized community.

These human development initiatives for poverty alleviation through liberation loans helping the poor, educating the needy and deprived communities, hiring human resources from relegated segments of society like Intersex/Khawaja Sira and children raised in child protection bureau and feeding the hungry and extending support to the country at the time of natural calamities like draught and flood have not only contributed to the well-being of several but also taken care of the sustainability as well. All the three sub-categories of sustainability environmental, social and economic have been fulfilled by these initiatives as solar powered water wells fulfil the green energy initiatives along with providing water resources to the highly deprived regions in Pakistan Cholistan and Tharparker. Similarly, reusable sanitary napkins are also eco-friendly sustainable products distributed by the corporation to help socially and economically disadvantaged women. Interest free liberation loans, allowing the poor to pay off their debts, intersex fund, and seven educational scholarships for girls of underdeveloped regions like Mardan, hiring

Khawaja sira for the clothes bank, socially deprived boys are economically and socially sustainable projects.

Although the brand has not voiced sustainability in their campaign, being green blusher (Adamkiewicz et al., 2022; Szabo & Webster, 2021) but these initiatives fulfil the sustainability guidelines. These philanthropic corporate contributions are not mere charity projects according to Kotler and Lee (2008) classification of CSR, these fall under the category of socially responsible business practices because the brand have hired employees from the ostracized communities and have been economically contributing to uplift the economically and socially deprived people. However, the garment manufacturing and production practices of the company are neither mentioned nor known for their sustainability.

The mediational means and modes of this campaign include primarily visual and verbal modes. Verbal modes incorporate bilingual approach with code mixing of Urdu and English in speech and English only for re-entextualisation for captioning images and videos. Video-in-video embedding and separate video and images embedding techniques are incorporated for the compilation of this videography. The social actors comprise various socio-economic backgrounds encompassing a privileged Maria B as the main speaker, and her daughter in the Kahani project and the underprivileged male and female workers in the factory sewing, packing, Khawaja sira/intersex working for the clothes bank project, three young boys from child protection bureau who have been hired after training, young hungry children in the draught and flood affected regions praying and waiting for food, hungry men gathered for the free distribution of lungar. However, I could not find camera manipulation in their representation.

#### ❖ Interaction

Maria B has been interacting with her audience through verbal and gestural means and the interaction beyond the video in comments have been analyzed employing Hall's audience reception and mainly the interpretations are dominated-hegemonic appreciating the campaign and thinking if other businesses can contribute this country can be developed and aspiring for more people who can teach religion through their actions.



Very good initiative...i didnt know maria b was doing this...if only all businesses could invest in kindness and civic duty this country would be domething else on the global horizon...

You guys doing very good job ♡

More power to you! We need more people like you who can preach kindness and Islam through their actions ♡

That's why we love your work, Beauty with Brain. MashAllah

The negotiated readers are a few and there are only these two mentioned below. These are the viewers who decoded the message appreciated the effort but had been complaining about the product quality and the pricing.

Aoa you doing good job but sorry to say the fabric you use is very cheap and for that dresses are very expensive over priced 😞

Good work 🌟 but please don't mention again doesn't look good.and your dress price is expensive quality not as much

The last category of oppositional readers is hardly visible, I could find one complaining about the stuff.

Ur basic dresses stuff are not good

The next campaign is from sapphire on CSR but this campaign is based on a project of the Hunarmand's company visit.

#### ❖ Identity

Maria B's social identity as a philanthropic, entrepreneurial, professional being is reflected in her body language and her speech. However, her personal relational identity as a mother comes to surface when she mentions her daughter Fatima's project as a cute initiative. She asserts her religious identity in greeting and starting off with her Quran distribution project.

#### ❖ Sapphire

The last campaign on CSR has been uploaded by Sapphire on their account on April 13, 2023 with a detailed anchoring caption to highlight their collaboration with the [www.hunarfoundation.org](http://www.hunarfoundation.org) to empower Pakistan's impoverished youth.

*This Ramadan, we're excited to share our collaboration with @thehunarfoundation, an incredible non-profit organization that aspires to empower the underprivileged youth of Pakistan. With this initiative, SAPPHIRE aims to facilitate the students of @thehunarfoundation by providing them with access to on-the-job trainings focused on the process of creating an apparel collection. Our shared goal here is to create equal opportunities for these talented students to acquire and hone practical skills that would enable them to become suitable for competitive employment opportunities, taking them one step closer to the possibility of a better and brighter future for them and their families.*

*#sapphire #sapphirepk #sapphireonline #sapphirepakistan #sapphirexthehunarfoundation #thehunarfoundation*

The anchoring post can be segmented into three parts introduction of the collaboration and the NGO, Sapphire's objectives and the shared goal of Sapphire and the partner NGO for this initiative. Sapphire's aim is to help students at @thehunarfoundation by giving them access to on-the-job trainings centered on the process of generating an apparel collection. The common goal is to provide equal opportunities for these talented students to acquire and hone practical skills that will qualify them for competitive employment opportunities, bringing them one step closer to the possibility of a better and brighter future for themselves and their families. However, the hashtag has simply credited sapphire and Hunnar foundation. The hashtag does mention the CSR as an initiative.

Now the mediated actions and the mediational means of the video reflect the various stages of garment manufacturing and processes of production pattern making, cutting, sewing, embroidery, hemming, accessorizing with tassels, buttons, packaging the finished product before supplying it to the retail store. The visiting students from Hunnar Foundation and their teachers were all females; however, the working staff in the factory to demonstrate them were all males.

The employees of the factory briefed them of the various sections, oriented them with the manufacturing and demonstrated the students cutting, sewing and packaging and other related processes. The students learned the techniques and were given hands-on-training on the machines to hone their skills. Female teachers and students have been showing keen interest in learning the processes of manufacturing. They are shown keenly observing asking questions and participating in the workshops.


### ❖ Identity

The identity of the managerial ranked male workers is visible in their selection of western casual wear and the labourers are wearing shalwar kameez. The students were wearing uniform white shirt with black trousers and black scarf, however some of them were wearing abayas and hijab as well. Some of the teachers were also observing a veil and wearing abaya. This reflects that the lower socio-economic class in Pakistan observes the religious dress code of covering their head with scarf, or dupatta, wearing abaya or observing veil are less prevalent in the upper socio-economic strata of the society.

### ❖ Interaction

Interaction within the video can be analyzed through gaze, proximity and gestures. The social actors have been interacting through language and gestures, but language cannot be heard as it has been overlaid with background music. However, feedback that the consumers and viewers have given them have mainly dominating readers who appreciated the effort whereas just a few are oppositional but there is no negotiating reading. The following examples are appreciative remarks that admired the effort and liked the designs as well.

Good. Effort keep it up  

Very good effort I am a big fan of sapphire all variety are superb very nice clr and designs 

However, the oppositional reader has not referred to the video but complained about the designs, colour scheme and the variety of this collection.

Is Barr ap k designs sb boht bykar hn . Colours bhee achy nahi hn . Designs bhee normal Sy hn. Plz Kuch different virity dein . [This time your design are useless.

*Colours are not good as well. Designs are just normal. Please give some different variety]*

According to Kotler and Lee (2008) the present campaign falls under the category of community volunteering and cause-marketing because they have invited the audiences to contribute to the cause of Hunnar foundation as they get zakat from the public. 'Play your part by donating to their cause and sharing their message.' However, this contributes to the economic and social goals of sustainability supporting the underprivileged strata of the society but has no environmental linkages.

## **Conclusion**

Sustainability has become the primary focus of the fashion world's conscious endeavours to 'go green' and save the planet. However, the principal challenges of decreasing carbon footprint, environmental contamination in production, dyeing, industrial and supply chain processing, water and energy intake are cumbersome for the fashion industry. Nonetheless, the idea of sustainable fashion has lately entered in the third world country because Pakistan, Bangladesh and India have been substantial manufacturers for the international brands because of low-cost labour (Nayak et al., 2020). The local fashion and textile industries have been involved paying in lip service to their CSR and sustainable goals (Berliner & Prakash, 2015; Sailer et al., 2022) and greenwashing rather than subtly pronouncing their sustainable fashion production through a third party authorization. However, there are some green blushers (Adamkiewicz et al., 2022; Szabo & Webster, 2021) who have intentionally evaded advertising greenness for ethical concerns. Thus, explication of two fashion campaigns from two leading apparel brands of Pakistan display how they have not been voicing for their greenness and are green blushers and the audience analysis reveals that dominated readers have been appreciating them for their cause related marketing but audiences are least not aware of the greenness and green blushing of the firm. However, the study suggests if the brands would voice their effort rightly categorizing them as achievement of ESG goals, it can add more value to their brand positioning in the eyes of the sustainability conscious consumers.

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