Sustainable Development During the Infodemic.

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Introduction of research

People now have access to an enormous amount of information, correct and incorrect, that they never had access to before, much of which is without any kind of expert intermediation (Vicario et al., 2019). "Infodemic" has been coined as the descriptor of this phenomenon. As a consequence, misinformation has increasingly become a challenge; for example, in 2016, the Oxford Dictionaries announced "post-truth" as the word of the year. Further, the World Economic Forum has placed misinformation as the core technological and geopolitical risk globally. How misinformation impacts sustainable development is a topic of emerging research interest. Misinformation has been directly attributed to biodiversity harm and failed conservation efforts (Ford et al., 2021). For example, "misplaced conservation" describes when conservation resources are extended to unsuitable activity due to evidence and cooperation being roadblocked by misinformation and polarization. This in turn influences actions that directly harm biodiversity, disrupts partnerships, delegitimize science, and misinforms the public, making it harder to actually do the work that is needed. While there may be good intentions behind these conservation efforts, outcomes, rather than intentions, are the arbitrator of conservation success. Good intentions do not excuse easily foreseen or managed harm.

The cosmetics sector is no exception, like many other industries, misinformation has dominated the landscape. This is inclusive of messaging around sustainability. Companies recognize the growing demand for more *green* products and are shifting how they communicate (Riccolo, 2021). Unfortunately, to meet this growing market demand, many companies have turned to greenwash (Krafft & Saito, 2014). According to the European Commission (EC), greenwashing is defined as companies giving their consumers a false impression of environmental impact or benefits, as related to their products or services. Ultimately, *greenwashing misleads the public and does not give due advantage to companies who are pursuing sustainability, leading to a less green economy*. In a recent website sweep by the EC, published in January 2021, half of the green claims made on the websites assessed had insufficient information for consumers to judge the accuracy of the claim. In 37% of cases, the claims were vague and general, in 59% of cases, there was no easily accessible evidence to support the claims made, and in 42% of cases, authorities had reason to believe the claims were false or deceptive. For example with respect to "clean," it is often assumed that materials marketed as such are more "sustainable" when in fact often the environmental impacts are greater. Greenwashing is increasing in the cosmetics industry, fueled by market demand and a lack of regulation enforcement to address sustainability-related claims.

This presentation will be a literature review on how misinformation and information uncertainty is impacting sustainable development in the cosmetics sector. It will analyze sector trends, certifications, and emerging regulations, and how they align with scientific evidence. The presentation will conclude with recommendations to the industry for steps to overcome the misinformation challenge, notably in investment in effective science communication.

References

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About the speaker

Jen Novakovich is a cosmetic scientist and science communicator, founder of the science communication platform The Eco Well. She holds two bachelor of science degrees, a diploma in cosmetic chemistry, a master's of science in environmental practice, and further graduate studies on the policy and science of climate change. She completed the latter with the Independent Beauty Association with a focus on emerging sustainability legislation in the USA that will impact the cosmetics industry. Through The Eco Well's science communication platform, she's interviewed hundreds of scientists from diverse fields, regularly moderates industry panel events, and has launched several large-scale science communication conferences. She currently serves on the Next Gen Advisory Committee with the Society of Cosmetic Chemists, and the Supply Chain and Sustainability Resource Committee by the Independent Beauty Association.