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Marketing campaigns for sustainable consumption: Germany and South Korea in comparative perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study falls within SDG Focus Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production — Target 12.8: Ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development; Target 12.6: Encourage companies to adopt sustainable

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practices and sustainability reporting; Target 12.5: Substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.

This study examines the comparative approaches to marketing campaigns for sustainable consumption in Germany and South Korea, focusing on how each country's cultural values, creative strategies, and regulatory environments shape the communication of sustainability messages. The research analyzes campaign methodologies, consumer engagement techniques, and measurable outcomes across diverse sectors including retail, food, finance, and environmental conservation. A comparative analysis was conducted examining primary and secondary sources including award-winning campaigns, industry reports, and institutional documentation covering recent developments to 2025-2026.

Germany presents a landscape where sustainability marketing is characterized by educational clarity, institutional credibility, and integration with established environmental certification systems. Recent data from Kantar's Sustainable Behaviours Ad Tracker reveals that 5.8% of German television advertisements feature sustainable behaviours, positioning Germany among the top five markets globally for sustainability representation in advertising . Campaigns demonstrate sophisticated approaches to communicating complex environmental concepts. The "Beige ist besser" campaign by WEPA, which won the German Brand Award in the inaugural "Circular Brand of the Year" category, successfully transformed the perception of recycled hygiene paper through creative, accessible messaging across multiple channels, proving that "how much enthusiasm a product like toilet paper can generate when attitude and design go hand in hand" . The Blue Angel ecolabel's social media initiative "Reel easy" demonstrates the power of authentic, point-of-sale content, filming in actual retail stores to show consumers the diversity of certified products available in everyday shopping contexts . Seasonal campaigns like "CO2nachten," developed with Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND), address peak consumption periods by offering twenty-five concrete, actionable ideas to reduce emissions during Christmas . The VielfaltMenü collaboration with Green City Solutions and climAD exemplifies integrated sustainability, combining digital out-of-home advertising with active moss-based air filters that filter and cool surrounding air, achieving measurable impact of 315 million litres of air processed during the campaign period .

South Korea presents a contrasting yet equally dynamic landscape where sustainability marketing is characterized by creative boldness, cultural resonance, and measurable behavioural outcomes. According to Kantar's global ad tracker, South Korea leads all markets with 14% of advertisements featuring sustainable behaviours, nearly triple the global average of 5.3% . The "Money Dream" campaign by the.WATERMELON agency demonstrates exceptional innovation by addressing the environmental problem of 608.5 million discarded banknotes annually, transforming them into eco-friendly pillows that tap into the Korean cultural belief that "sleeping on money brings happiness and riches." The campaign generated 303 million hits, increased app downloads by 284%, and successfully created a recycling market where none existed before . The "Lifeguard Snack" initiative by GS25 and Cheil Worldwide reimagines convenience store chip bags as floating rescue devices, incorporating maritime rescue expertise and achieving sell-out within one week while addressing water safety education . WWF-Korea's "Animal trash fashion" campaign uses AI-generated imagery to portray wildlife entangled in plastic waste as a fashion narrative, strategically targeting Gen Z and young millennials in high-traffic Seoul locations to spark viral sharing . Heineken's "Rooftop Revival" responds to urban isolation research showing 53% of Seoul residents believe the city prioritizes productivity over connection, transforming unused rooftops into social spaces and attracting over 8,000 applicants . Industry-wide initiatives like the Food and Beverage Carton Alliance campaigns in Germany demonstrate collaborative approaches to consumer education, with immersive installations and influencer partnerships .

Both countries demonstrate significant commitment to marketing sustainable consumption, yet with distinct strategic orientations. Germany's strength lies in educational clarity, institutional credibility, and measurable environmental impact, yet faces challenges of maintaining consumer engagement with rational, fact-based messaging. South Korea's strength lies in creative boldness, cultural resonance, and viral potential, yet faces challenges of ensuring that creative concepts translate into sustained behavioural change. Neither country has fully resolved the tension between capturing consumer attention and driving fundamental shifts in consumption patterns, though both offer valuable models for different dimensions of sustainability communication.

Effective marketing campaigns for sustainable consumption require: (1) clear, credible messaging that resonates with target audiences; (2) integration of sustainability into core brand identity rather than peripheral initiatives; (3) creative approaches that make sustainable choices appealing and

accessible; (4) measurable outcomes that demonstrate environmental and business impact; (5) cultural relevance that connects sustainability to local values; (6) multi-channel strategies that reach consumers across touchpoints; (7) partnerships with credible institutions to enhance message authority; and (8) continuous innovation to maintain consumer engagement.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable consumption marketing, advertising campaigns, Germany, South Korea, circular economy, consumer behaviour, environmental communication, SDG 12, creative strategy, behavioural change.

RÉSUMÉ (French Version)

Cette étude examine les approches comparatives des campagnes marketing pour la consommation durable en Allemagne et en Corée du Sud, en se concentrant sur la manière dont les valeurs culturelles, les stratégies créatives et les environnements réglementaires de chaque pays façonnent la communication des messages de durabilité. La recherche analyse les méthodologies de campagne, les techniques d'engagement des consommateurs et les résultats mesurables dans divers secteurs, y compris la vente au détail, l'alimentation, la finance et la conservation de l'environnement. Une analyse comparative a été menée en examinant des sources primaires et secondaires, y compris des campagnes primées, des rapports sectoriels et des documentations institutionnelles couvrant les développements récents jusqu'en 2025-2026.

L'Allemagne présente un paysage où le marketing de la durabilité est caractérisé par la clarté éducative, la crédibilité institutionnelle et l'intégration avec des systèmes de certification environnementale établis. Les données récentes du Sustainable Behaviours Ad Tracker de Kantar révèlent que 5,8 % des publicités télévisées allemandes présentent des comportements durables, positionnant l'Allemagne parmi les cinq premiers marchés mondiaux pour la représentation de la durabilité dans la publicité . Les campagnes démontrent des approches sophistiquées pour communiquer des concepts environnementaux complexes. La campagne "Beige ist besser" de WEPA, qui a remporté le German Brand Award dans la catégorie inaugurale "Circular Brand of the Year", a réussi à transformer la perception du papier hygiénique recyclé grâce à une communication créative et accessible sur plusieurs canaux, prouvant "combien d'enthousiasme un produit comme le papier toilette peut générer quand l'attitude et le design vont de pair" . L'initiative

de médias sociaux "Reel easy" du label écologique Ange Bleu démontre la puissance d'un contenu authentique sur le lieu de vente, filmant dans des magasins de détail réels pour montrer aux consommateurs la diversité des produits certifiés disponibles dans les contextes d'achat quotidiens . Les campagnes saisonnières comme "CO2nachten", développées avec l'organisation environnementale BUND, abordent les périodes de consommation de pointe en offrant vingt-cinq idées concrètes et actionnables pour réduire les émissions pendant Noël . La collaboration VielfaltMenü avec Green City Solutions et climAD illustre la durabilité intégrée, combinant la publicité numérique extérieure avec des filtres à air actifs à base de mousse qui filtrent et refroidissent l'air ambiant, atteignant un impact mesurable de 315 millions de litres d'air traités pendant la période de campagne .

La Corée du Sud présente un paysage contrasté mais tout aussi dynamique où le marketing de la durabilité est caractérisé par l'audace créative, la résonance culturelle et des résultats comportementaux mesurables. Selon le tracker publicitaire mondial de Kantar, la Corée du Sud mène tous les marchés avec 14 % des publicités présentant des comportements durables, soit près du triple de la moyenne mondiale de 5,3 % . La campagne "Money Dream" de l'agence the.WATERMELON démontre une innovation exceptionnelle en s'attaquant au problème environnemental de 608,5 millions de billets de banque jetés annuellement, les transformant en oreillers écologiques qui exploitent la croyance culturelle coréenne selon laquelle "dormir sur l'argent apporte le bonheur et la richesse". La campagne a généré 303 millions de visites, augmenté les téléchargements d'applications de 284 % et a réussi à créer un marché du recyclage là où aucun n'existait auparavant . L'initiative "Lifeguard Snack" de GS25 et Cheil Worldwide réinvente les sacs de chips des supérettes comme dispositifs de sauvetage flottants, intégrant l'expertise en sauvetage maritime et atteignant la rupture de stock en une semaine tout en abordant l'éducation à la sécurité aquatique . La campagne "Animal trash fashion" de WWF-Corée utilise des images générées par IA pour représenter la faune sauvage empêtrée dans les déchets plastiques comme une narration de mode, ciblant stratégiquement la génération Z et les jeunes millennials dans des lieux très fréquentés de Séoul pour susciter le partage viral . La campagne "Rooftop Revival" de Heineken répond aux recherches sur l'isolement urbain montrant que 53 % des résidents de Séoul estiment que la ville privilégie la productivité plutôt que les liens sociaux, transformant des toits inutilisés en espaces sociaux et attirant plus de 8 000 candidats . Des initiatives à l'échelle de

l'industrie comme les campagnes de la Food and Beverage Carton Alliance en Allemagne démontrent des approches collaboratives d'éducation des consommateurs, avec des installations immersives et des partenariats avec des influenceurs .

Les deux pays démontrent un engagement significatif en faveur du marketing de la consommation durable, mais avec des orientations stratégiques distinctes. La force de l'Allemagne réside dans la clarté éducative, la crédibilité institutionnelle et l'impact environnemental mesurable, mais fait face à des défis pour maintenir l'engagement des consommateurs avec un message rationnel et factuel. La force de la Corée du Sud réside dans l'audace créative, la résonance culturelle et le potentiel viral, mais fait face à des défis pour garantir que les concepts créatifs se traduisent par un changement comportemental durable. Aucun des deux pays n'a pleinement résolu la tension entre capter l'attention des consommateurs et induire des changements fondamentaux dans les modes de consommation, bien que tous deux offrent des modèles précieux pour différentes dimensions de la communication sur la durabilité.

Des campagnes marketing efficaces pour la consommation durable nécessitent : (1) un message clair et crédible qui résonne avec les publics cibles ; (2) l'intégration de la durabilité dans l'identité de marque centrale plutôt que dans des initiatives périphériques ; (3) des approches créatives qui rendent les choix durables attrayants et accessibles ; (4) des résultats mesurables qui démontrent l'impact environnemental et commercial ; (5) une pertinence culturelle qui relie la durabilité aux valeurs locales ; (6) des stratégies multicanal qui atteignent les consommateurs à travers tous les points de contact ; (7) des partenariats avec des institutions crédibles pour renforcer l'autorité du message ; et (8) une innovation continue pour maintenir l'engagement des consommateurs.

MOTS-CLÉS : Marketing de consommation durable, campagnes publicitaires, Allemagne, Corée du Sud, économie circulaire, comportement du consommateur, communication environnementale, ODD 12, stratégie créative, changement comportemental.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The transformation toward sustainable consumption patterns represents one of the most urgent challenges of our time. As the impacts of climate change intensify and resource constraints become more apparent, the need to shift consumer behaviour toward environmentally responsible choices has never been greater. SDG 12 explicitly addresses this through Target 12.8, calling for ensuring that "people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development." Marketing campaigns occupy a critical position in this effort, serving as the primary channel through which sustainability messages reach consumers and influence their purchasing decisions.

This study examines two countries that offer illuminating perspectives on marketing campaigns for sustainable consumption: Germany and South Korea. Both nations are economic powerhouses with sophisticated advertising industries, yet their cultural contexts, creative traditions, and approaches to sustainability communication differ fundamentally, providing valuable comparative insights.

Germany represents a market where sustainability marketing is deeply integrated with established environmental institutions and characterized by educational clarity. The Blue Angel ecolabel, Germany's government-certified environmental label, has operated for decades and provides a trusted framework for communicating product sustainability . German campaigns often emphasize factual information, measurable outcomes, and partnership with credible environmental organizations. The "CO2nachten" Christmas campaign, developed with Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND), exemplifies this approach by offering twenty-five concrete, actionable ideas for reducing emissions during the peak consumption holiday season . Recent data shows Germany ranks among the top five global markets for sustainability representation in television advertising .

South Korea presents a contrasting landscape where sustainability marketing is characterized by creative boldness, cultural resonance, and viral potential. Korean campaigns frequently leverage cultural beliefs—such as the traditional notion that sleeping on money brings good fortune—to drive engagement with sustainability messages . They employ cutting-edge technologies including AI-generated imagery and integrate sustainability into unexpected product innovations, such as chip bags designed as floating rescue devices or discarded banknotes transformed into pillows . South Korea leads all global markets with 14% of advertisements featuring sustainable behaviours, nearly triple the world average .

The contrast between Germany and South Korea illuminates critical questions for SDG 12 and sustainable consumption: How do different cultural contexts shape the communication of sustainability messages? What creative strategies prove most effective in driving consumer engagement and behavioural change? How can campaigns balance educational clarity with emotional resonance? And what can countries learn from each other's approaches to sustainability marketing?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainability Marketing: Theoretical Foundations

Sustainability marketing represents an evolution beyond traditional marketing paradigms, integrating environmental and social considerations into core marketing strategy rather than treating them as peripheral concerns. Effective sustainability communication must navigate the tension between raising awareness of environmental problems and offering hopeful, actionable solutions that consumers can embrace without feeling overwhelmed.

Research demonstrates that successful sustainability campaigns share certain characteristics: credibility through third-party certification or partnership with trusted institutions; clarity in communicating environmental benefits; creativity that makes sustainable choices appealing rather than sacrificial; and measurability that demonstrates tangible impact.

2.2 Germany: Educational Clarity and Institutional Credibility

The German Sustainability Advertising Landscape: Germany's approach to sustainability marketing is characterized by integration with established environmental certification systems and a preference for clear, factual communication. According to Kantar's Sustainable Behaviours Ad Tracker Q3 2025 update, Germany ranks among the top five markets globally for the proportion of advertisements featuring sustainable behaviours, with 5.8% of television ads incorporating sustainability messaging—significantly above the global average of 5.3% .

German campaigns frequently leverage institutional partnerships to enhance credibility. The "CO2nachten" Christmas campaign, developed by Scholz & Volkmer in conjunction with Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND), exemplifies this approach . The campaign addresses the problem of excessive CO2 emissions, which nearly double during Christmas due to increased consumption, by offering twenty-five sustainable ideas to reduce emissions. The microsite format allows for clearly structured information delivery, making complex environmental data accessible to consumers.

The Blue Angel's Social Media Innovation: The Blue Angel ecolabel, Germany's government-certified environmental label, has demonstrated how established certification systems can adapt to contemporary media environments. The "Reel easy" initiative, launched in autumn 2025, produced a series of social media clips filming in actual retail stores—drugstore chain dm, REWE supermarket, and toom DIY store—to document the diversity of certified products available at the point of sale .

The campaign's strategic focus on "the where" as well as "the what" reflects sophisticated understanding of consumer decision-making. By showing real shopping experiences from the perspective of a normal purchase, the reels make sustainable choices feel accessible and normal. The initiative explicitly invites retailers with broad Blue Angel product ranges to participate, aiming to feature them in future content .

Circular Economy Branding: The "Beige ist besser" Campaign: WEPA's "Beige ist besser" (Beige is Better) campaign represents a breakthrough in communicating circular economy principles to consumers. The campaign, developed with creative agency KRAVT, aimed to

educate consumers and convince them of the value of hygiene papers made from recycled cardboard .

The campaign's success was recognized with two German Brand Awards in June 2025: in the "Brand Communication – 360° Campaign" category, and notably as the first-ever winner of the "Circular Brand of the Year" category, newly created to recognize exceptional focus on circular economy and sustainability. Peter Poprady, Director Marketing & Business Development at WEPA, emphasized the campaign's achievement: "With 'Beige ist besser', we succeeded in communicating a product that requires explanation in a creative, bold, yet approachable and target-group-appropriate way—from billboards to social media to promotional campaigns. We were able to show how much enthusiasm a product like toilet paper can generate when attitude and design go hand in hand" .

The campaign's multi-channel approach and its success in generating enthusiasm for a mundane recycled product demonstrate that sustainability messaging can be both educational and emotionally engaging.

Measurable Environmental Impact: The VielfaltMenü Campaign: The collaboration between VielfaltMenü, Green City Solutions, and climAD exemplifies how sustainability marketing can deliver measurable environmental impact beyond message exposure. VielfaltMenü, a company committed to "quality, diversity and a responsible use of resources," partnered with climAD's digital out-of-home advertising network, which features CityBreeze units with active moss modules on the rear side of digital screens .

These moss modules filter and cool surrounding air, meaning that while the front of the screen displays brand communication, the back is actively improving local air quality. Over the course of the VielfaltMenü campaign, a total of 315,072,000 litres of air were filtered and cooled, resulting in less fine dust and noticeably fresher air in the immediate surroundings .

Markus Grube, Managing Director of VielfaltMenü, articulated the company's sustainability philosophy: "For us, sustainability means living responsibility – every day, in everything we do." The campaign demonstrates that sustainability marketing can transcend symbolic communication to deliver tangible environmental benefits.

Industry Collaboration: The Food and Beverage Carton Alliance Campaigns: The Food and Beverage Carton Alliance's German campaign, "Think Inside The Box," created by the Fachverband Kartonverpackungen für flüssige Nahrungsmittel (FKN), exemplifies industry-level collaboration on sustainability messaging. The campaign featured a 3.5-metre-high walk-in carton mounted on a catamaran cruising through Berlin's government district on the Spree river .

Inside the installation, visitors discovered 18 bold messages showcasing the environmental benefits of cartons. The immersive installation sparked dialogue among policymakers, NGOs, and industry leaders about packaging innovation and circular economy goals, demonstrating how creative campaigns can influence policy discourse as well as consumer behaviour .

Table 1: German Sustainability Marketing Campaigns

Campaign	**Organization/Agency**	**Key Strategy**	**Measurable Outcome**
CO2nachten	Scholz & Volkmer / BUND	Christmas-focused emissions reduction	25 actionable sustainable ideas
Beige ist besser	WEPA / KRAVT	Recycled paper education	German Brand Award: Circular Brand of the Year 2025
Reel easy	Blue Angel	Authentic point-of-sale social media	Multi-retailer participation
VielfaltMenü	Green City Solutions / climAD	Moss-filtered DOOH advertising	315 million litres air filtered
Think Inside The Box	FKN	Walk-in installation for policymakers	Industry-policy dialogue

2.3 South Korea: Creative Boldness and Cultural Resonance

The Korean Sustainability Advertising Landscape: South Korea stands as a global leader in sustainability advertising. According to Kantar's Sustainable Behaviours Ad Tracker, South Korea tops the market rankings with 14% of advertisements featuring sustainable behaviours—nearly

triple the global average of 5.3% and significantly ahead of second-place Romania . This leadership reflects a sophisticated advertising industry that has embraced sustainability as a core creative opportunity rather than a constraint.

Korean campaigns are characterized by creative boldness, cultural resonance, and measurable business outcomes. Agencies like the.WATERMELON and Cheil Worldwide have developed international reputations for campaigns that seamlessly integrate sustainability messages with compelling brand narratives.

The Money Dream Campaign: Transforming Waste into Cultural Symbol: The "Money Dream" campaign by Seoul-based agency the.WATERMELON represents one of the most innovative sustainability marketing initiatives globally. The campaign addressed the environmental problem of South Korea's 608.5 million discarded or unfit banknotes annually—enough to create a stack seven times higher than Mount Everest—none of which were being recycled .

The agency's creative solution was to transform these discarded banknotes into pillows, combining ground banknote waste with eco-friendly material to create a new type of pillow filling, using roughly five million won (approximately 3,500 euros) in banknotes per pillow. The concept tapped into the traditional Korean belief that "sleeping on money brings happiness and riches," with the Korean word for "dream" sounding like the word for "giving/bringing," suggesting that the pillow may bring luck and wealth .

The campaign's results were extraordinary:

- 303 million hits generated
- 17 million video views in the first month
- 469 media reports, including coverage from The New York Times, Bloomberg, and Fox News
- App download rate increased by 284%
- Active users increased by 118%
- Recycling rate for unfit banknotes increased from zero to seven per cent

The campaign demonstrates how sustainability messaging can drive exceptional business results when it taps into cultural resonance and offers consumers tangible, desirable products.

Lifeguard Snack: Product Innovation for Public Safety: The "Lifeguard Snack" campaign by GS25 convenience store chain and Cheil Worldwide reimagined a mundane product category—chip bags—as life-saving equipment. Developed over four months in cooperation with maritime rescue experts, the snack bags were designed to float and serve as rescue devices in water emergencies .

Key features included:

- Bright orange colour matching rescue buoys
- Grips on both sides for holding with both hands
- A hole for attaching a rope
- Cartoon-like instructions on the back for easy understanding

The campaign targeted consumers in their 20s to 40s accompanied by children under nine, addressing the statistic that 30% of drowning accident patients are children below that age. Distributed free through stores near creeks, rivers, and beaches, the Lifeguard Snacks sold out within one week .

Sung Jun Kim, Marketing Director at GS25, explained the campaign's strategic intent: "As a leading convenience store chain in Korea, we planned Lifeguard Snack at the ESG level so that our customers can have fun in the water more safely. We will continue to carry out various CSR activities as a safety platform for everyone" .

The campaign demonstrates how sustainability marketing can integrate social responsibility (water safety) with environmental considerations (product design) while driving store visits and positive brand perception.

Animal Trash Fashion: AI-Generated Environmental Advocacy: WWF-Korea's "Animal trash fashion" campaign, created with Cheil Worldwide, uses AI-generated imagery to raise awareness about plastic pollution's impact on wildlife. The campaign portrays animals—sea turtles and seals—entangled in plastic waste through a narrative style typically seen in fashion films, with

litter portrayed as "wearable items designed by humans that are directly harming the lives of wild animals" .

Strategic elements include:

- AI-generated visuals on a 20m x 60m super-large outdoor screen in Seoul's Gwanghwamun area
- Targeting Gen Z and young millennials through shareable content
- Placement in high-traffic areas to encourage organic social sharing
- Part of WWF-Korea's "No plastics in nature" initiative

Park Minhye, Executive Director of WWF-Korea, emphasized the campaign's timing: "With AI, 'Animal trash fashion' depicts the dire reality of the plastic crisis, in which 79% of globally produced plastics are being thrown away. Our work will be a step toward raising public awareness on plastic pollution" .

Dahoon Son, Account Executive at Cheil Korea, noted the campaign's strategic ambition: "For 'Animal trash fashion', our core ambition was to transcend traditional awareness. By leveraging AI's visual power in iconic urban spaces, we created highly shareable content. We're proud to see it sparking conversations and driving real change in public perception of plastic pollution" .

Rooftop Revival: Addressing Urban Isolation Through Sustainability: Heineken's "Rooftop Revival" campaign in Seoul addresses the intersection of urban sustainability and social connection. Research commissioned by Heineken found that 53% of Seoul residents believe the city is designed for productivity rather than connection, and 37% believe there are too few social spaces—despite Seoul having one of the highest proportions of flat rooftops, many unused .

The campaign transformed unused urban rooftops into social spaces, with locations revealed via satellite imagery marked by a red star. Over 8,000 people applied to attend events featuring performances, workshops, and food tastings. Each event centered around the traditional Korean Peyong-Sang—a wooden platform for outdoor socializing—reinterpreted with a modern design featuring Heineken's red-star parasol equipped with icebox and Bluetooth speaker space .

Nabil Nasser, Global Head of Heineken, articulated the campaign's philosophy: "We may not be able to redesign entire cities, but we can inspire people to rethink the spaces around them. By

reviving overlooked rooftops into vibrant hubs, we're creating places where people can connect, create, and celebrate together" .

While not explicitly framed as "sustainability," the campaign addresses sustainable urban development by activating underutilized spaces and fostering social connection—addressing what researchers call the "proximity paradox" of dense cities where physical proximity coexists with social isolation.

Table 2: South Korean Sustainability Marketing Campaigns

Campaign	**Organization/Agency**	**Key Strategy**	**Measurable Outcome**
Money Dream	the.WATERMELON	Banknote recycling + cultural belief	284% app downloads; 7% recycling rate created
Lifeguard Snack	GS25 / Cheil	Product as rescue device	One-week sell-out; water safety education
Animal Trash Fashion	WWF-Korea / Cheil	AI-generated viral advocacy	20m x 60m screen takeover; social sharing
Rooftop Revival	Heineken / LePub	Urban space activation	8,000+ applicants; 53% city connection issue addressed

2.4 Comparative Dimensions: Educational Clarity vs. Creative Resonance

The comparison between Germany and South Korea illuminates several critical dimensions of sustainability marketing:

Message Strategy: German campaigns emphasize educational clarity, factual information, and institutional credibility. Partnerships with established organizations like BUND and the Blue Angel provide authority . South Korean campaigns emphasize creative boldness, cultural

resonance, and emotional engagement. The Money Dream campaign's use of traditional beliefs about money and dreams creates emotional connection .

Measurable Impact: German campaigns frequently quantify environmental impact—315 million litres of air filtered, 18 policy messages delivered . South Korean campaigns frequently quantify business outcomes—284% app download increase, 303 million hits, one-week sell-out .

Consumer Engagement: German campaigns often rely on rational appeal and information delivery—twenty-five actionable ideas, product diversity at point of sale . South Korean campaigns often rely on emotional resonance, viral potential, and cultural relevance—sleeping on money brings luck, chip bags as rescue devices .

Institutional Context: German campaigns leverage established environmental infrastructure—the Blue Angel label celebrating its decades of operation, partnerships with major environmental NGOs . South Korean campaigns leverage the creative sophistication of the Korean advertising industry, with agencies like Cheil and the.WATERMELON winning international recognition .

Target Audience: German campaigns often address general consumers through mass media and point-of-sale . South Korean campaigns frequently target younger demographics (Gen Z, millennials) through shareable content and social media .

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the key characteristics of German marketing campaigns for sustainable consumption, and how do educational clarity, institutional credibility, and measurable impact shape their approach?
2. What are the key characteristics of South Korean marketing campaigns for sustainable consumption, and how do creative boldness, cultural resonance, and viral potential shape their approach?
3. How do the two countries compare in terms of message strategy, consumer engagement techniques, measurable outcomes, and integration with broader sustainability frameworks?

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative analysis methodology to examine marketing campaigns for sustainable consumption in Germany and South Korea. The research design integrates secondary analysis of award-winning campaigns, industry reports, institutional documentation, and quantitative advertising data to develop comprehensive understanding of campaign strategies, creative approaches, and measurable outcomes in both countries.

Research Design: The comparative approach is appropriate for examining how different cultural contexts, advertising traditions, and market characteristics shape sustainability marketing. Germany and South Korea were selected as cases that offer complementary insights: both are advanced economies with sophisticated advertising industries, yet their approaches to sustainability communication differ fundamentally.

Data Sources: Primary and secondary sources analyzed include:

- Red Dot Design Award documentation of German and Korean campaigns
- Kantar Sustainable Behaviours Ad Tracker Q3 2025 data
- German Brand Award documentation of WEPA's "Beige ist besser" campaign
- Marketing-Interactive coverage of Korean campaigns (GS25, Cheil, WWF-Korea)
- Blue Angel social media initiative documentation
- Green City Solutions case study of VielfaltMenü campaign
- Branding in Asia coverage of Heineken's Rooftop Revival
- Food and Beverage Carton Alliance European campaign documentation

Analytical Framework: The comparative framework examines four dimensions:

1. **Message Strategy:** Content, framing, and communication approach
2. **Creative Execution:** Techniques, channels, and aesthetic choices
3. **Measurable Outcomes:** Environmental impact, business results, and consumer engagement
4. **Cultural Integration:** Resonance with local values and beliefs

5. RESULTS

5.1 Germany: Educational Clarity and Institutional Integration

Quantitative Advertising Data: According to Kantar's Sustainable Behaviours Ad Tracker Q3 2025 update, Germany ranks among the top five global markets for the proportion of advertisements featuring sustainable behaviours, with 5.8% of television ads incorporating sustainability messaging . Television leads other media at 5.8%, compared to digital (3.6%) and print/out-of-home (3.3%) globally, though Germany's strong performance across media reflects mature sustainability communication infrastructure.

The Blue Angel's Point-of-Sale Strategy: The Blue Angel ecolabel's "Reel easy" initiative demonstrates sophisticated understanding of consumer decision-making. By filming in actual retail stores during normal operating hours, the campaign captures the authentic shopping experience. The strategic focus on "the where"—showing consumers exactly where they can find certified products in dm, REWE, and toom stores—addresses the practical barrier of identifying sustainable options at the point of purchase .

The campaign's open invitation to retailers with broad Blue Angel product ranges suggests a scalable model for sustainability communication that leverages existing retail infrastructure rather than requiring dedicated campaign resources.

WEPA's Circular Economy Breakthrough: The "Beige ist besser" campaign's recognition as the first "Circular Brand of the Year" winner at the German Brand Award 2025 marks a significant milestone for sustainability marketing. The campaign's success in generating enthusiasm for recycled hygiene paper demonstrates that even mundane product categories can become vehicles for sustainability messaging when approached creatively .

Key success factors include:

- Multi-channel execution (billboards, social media, promotions)
- Bold, confident messaging ("beige is better")

- Integration of sustainability into core brand identity rather than peripheral CSR

Measurable Environmental Impact: The VielfaltMenü campaign's documentation of 315 million litres of air filtered represents a new frontier in sustainability marketing—campaigns that deliver tangible environmental benefits beyond message exposure. By integrating moss-based air filters into digital out-of-home advertising displays, the campaign ensures that every impression is accompanied by measurable environmental improvement .

This approach addresses potential skepticism about "greenwashing" by making environmental benefit intrinsic to the advertising medium itself, not just the message.

Industry-Level Collaboration: The FKN's "Think Inside The Box" campaign demonstrates how industry associations can use creative interventions to influence policy discourse. By placing a walk-in carton installation in Berlin's government district, the campaign engaged policymakers directly in conversation about packaging innovation .

5.2 South Korea: Creative Innovation and Cultural Resonance

Global Leadership in Sustainability Advertising: South Korea's 14% share of advertisements featuring sustainable behaviours, according to Kantar's data, represents global leadership and nearly triple the world average . This achievement reflects both consumer demand for sustainability and advertising industry sophistication.

The Money Dream Paradigm: The.WATERMELON's "Money Dream" campaign establishes a new paradigm for sustainability marketing that could be termed "cultural circularity"—addressing environmental problems through solutions that resonate with deeply held cultural beliefs .

The campaign's success factors include:

Factor	**Implementation**
Cultural Insight	Korean belief that sleeping on money brings luck
Environmental Problem	608.5 million discarded banknotes annually

Creative Solution	Pillows combining ground banknotes with eco-material
Business Objective	Digital banking app subscriptions
Measurable Results	284% app downloads; 7% recycling rate created

The campaign's creation of a recycling market where none previously existed—increasing the recycling rate from zero to seven per cent—demonstrates that marketing can fundamentally change material flows, not just consumer perceptions.

Product Innovation for Public Good: GS25's "Lifeguard Snack" campaign exemplifies "social product innovation"—redesigning an existing product category to address a social problem. The collaboration with maritime rescue experts ensured functional effectiveness, while the free distribution through stores near water bodies ensured accessibility for those most at risk .

The campaign's success in selling out within one week demonstrates that consumers value products that serve social purposes, even when the primary function (snack) remains unchanged.

AI-Powered Environmental Advocacy: WWF-Korea's use of AI-generated imagery in "Animal trash fashion" addresses the practical challenge of depicting wildlife suffering without harming animals in production. The strategic placement in high-traffic Seoul locations and targeting of Gen Z and young millennials for social sharing reflects sophisticated understanding of contemporary media consumption .

The campaign's framing of plastic pollution as "fashion" creates cognitive dissonance that drives engagement—the juxtaposition of beautiful imagery with disturbing content encourages viewers to confront uncomfortable truths.

Urban Sustainability Through Social Connection: Heineken's "Rooftop Revival" campaign addresses the often-overlooked social dimension of sustainability. The research showing 53% of Seoul residents feel their city prioritizes productivity over connection, and 37% believe there are too few social spaces, documents a sustainability gap in urban development that transcends environmental metrics .

By transforming unused rooftops into social spaces, the campaign demonstrates that sustainability includes the quality of urban life and social connection, not just environmental protection.

5.3 Comparative Analysis

Table 3: Comparative Summary—Germany and South Korea

Dimension	**Germany**	**South Korea**
Sustainability Advertising Rate	5.8% (TV) — top five globally	14% — global leader
Message Strategy	Educational clarity, factual information	Creative resonance, emotional engagement
Key Partners	Established institutions (BUND, Blue Angel)	Creative agencies (Cheil, the.WATERMELON)
Measurable Focus	Environmental impact (air filtered, policy dialogue)	Business outcomes (app downloads, sales, recycling rate)
Consumer Touchpoints	Point-of-sale, retail integration	Viral content, social media, urban installations
Campaign Examples	CO2nachten, Beige ist besser, Blue Angel reels	Money Dream, Lifeguard Snack, Animal Trash Fashion
Innovation Type	Process innovation (moss-filtered advertising)	Product innovation (rescue snack, banknote pillows)
Cultural Integration	Institutional trust, certification systems	Traditional beliefs, cultural symbols

Key Differences:

1. **Message Strategy:** German campaigns emphasize educational clarity and factual information, leveraging institutional credibility from organizations like BUND and the Blue Angel. South

Korean campaigns emphasize creative resonance and emotional engagement, leveraging cultural beliefs about money and dreams.

2. **Measurable Focus:** German campaigns frequently quantify environmental impact (315 million litres of air filtered) and policy engagement. South Korean campaigns frequently quantify business outcomes (284% app downloads, one-week sell-out) and behavioural change (7% recycling rate created).
3. **Innovation Type:** German campaigns demonstrate process innovation, such as integrating moss filters into advertising displays. South Korean campaigns demonstrate product innovation, redesigning chip bags as rescue devices or banknotes as pillows.
4. **Consumer Touchpoints:** German campaigns emphasize point-of-sale integration and retail partnerships, meeting consumers where they already shop. South Korean campaigns emphasize viral content and social media, designed for sharing and amplification.
5. **Cultural Integration:** German campaigns leverage institutional trust and certification systems built over decades. South Korean campaigns leverage traditional beliefs and cultural symbols for immediate resonance.

Key Similarities:

1. **Sophisticated Advertising Industries:** Both countries possess world-class advertising industries capable of producing award-winning, internationally recognized work.
2. **Integration of Sustainability into Core Strategy:** In both countries, leading campaigns integrate sustainability into core brand identity rather than treating it as peripheral CSR.
3. **Measurable Results:** Both countries' campaigns demonstrate commitment to measuring and documenting results, whether environmental, business, or behavioural.
4. **Multi-Channel Execution:** Campaigns in both countries utilize multiple channels—television, social media, out-of-home, retail—to reach consumers across touchpoints.
5. **Recognition and Awards:** Campaigns from both countries receive significant industry recognition, indicating peer validation of creative and strategic excellence.

6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Two Models of Sustainability Communication

The comparison between Germany and South Korea reveals two distinct but equally valid models of sustainability communication. Germany's approach might be termed "institutional-educational"—leveraging trusted institutions, clear factual information, and integration with existing retail infrastructure to make sustainable choices accessible and understandable. South Korea's approach might be termed "creative-cultural"—leveraging creative boldness, cultural resonance, and viral potential to make sustainable choices desirable and engaging.

Neither model is inherently superior; each reflects the characteristics of its market. Germany's strong environmental movement, long-established certification systems, and consumer trust in institutional information create fertile ground for educational approaches. South Korea's dynamic advertising industry, tech-savvy population, and cultural emphasis on novelty and sharing create fertile ground for creative approaches.

6.2 The Role of Measurable Outcomes

Both countries demonstrate sophisticated commitment to measuring campaign outcomes, but the metrics differ in revealing ways. German campaigns emphasize environmental metrics—litres of air filtered, policy dialogue generated—that speak to sustainability professionals and institutional stakeholders. South Korean campaigns emphasize business metrics—app downloads, sales, media impressions—that speak to commercial stakeholders while demonstrating that sustainability drives business results.

The Money Dream campaign's creation of a recycling market where none existed before (zero to seven per cent) represents a particularly powerful outcome, demonstrating that marketing can fundamentally change material flows. The VielfaltMenü campaign's documentation of air filtration represents an equally powerful outcome, demonstrating that advertising infrastructure itself can deliver environmental benefits.

6.3 Cultural Resonance as Engagement Driver

South Korean campaigns demonstrate that cultural resonance can dramatically amplify engagement with sustainability messages. The Money Dream campaign's success depended on tapping into the traditional belief that sleeping on money brings good fortune—a belief that has nothing to do with sustainability but everything to do with why consumers wanted the pillows .

This insight has important implications for sustainability marketing globally. Rather than treating sustainability as a separate domain requiring its own motivational framework, effective campaigns can connect sustainability to existing cultural values, beliefs, and aspirations. The challenge is to do so authentically, without exploiting cultural elements for commercial purposes.

6.4 Institutional Trust as Foundation

German campaigns demonstrate that institutional trust provides a powerful foundation for sustainability communication. The Blue Angel's decades of operation have built consumer recognition and trust that new certification schemes cannot replicate . Partnerships with established organizations like BUND provide credibility that purely commercial campaigns lack .

For markets developing sustainability communication infrastructure, Germany's experience suggests that building trusted institutions and certification systems provides long-term benefits that transcend individual campaigns.

6.5 Implications for SDG 12

The findings have important implications for achieving SDG 12 targets:

Target 12.8 (Information and awareness for sustainable development): Both countries demonstrate that marketing campaigns can effectively increase consumer awareness and information about sustainable choices. Germany's point-of-sale strategies ensure information is available when and where consumers make decisions . South Korea's viral campaigns ensure information spreads through social networks .

Target 12.6 (Encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices): Campaigns in both countries demonstrate that sustainability can be integrated into core business strategy rather than peripheral CSR. WEPA's circular economy positioning and GS25's ESG-driven product innovation show companies embedding sustainability into their business models.

Target 12.5 (Substantially reduce waste generation): Multiple campaigns directly address waste reduction. Germany's "Beige ist besser" promotes recycled materials . South Korea's Money Dream campaign created a recycling market for banknotes . The Food and Beverage Carton Alliance campaigns promote recyclable packaging .

Target 12.2 (Sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources): The VielfaltMenü campaign's integration of moss filters demonstrates how marketing infrastructure itself can contribute to resource efficiency and environmental improvement .

7. CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis of marketing campaigns for sustainable consumption in Germany and South Korea reveals profound insights into how different cultural contexts, advertising traditions, and strategic orientations shape the communication of sustainability messages. The two countries, with their distinct approaches to creativity, measurement, and consumer engagement, each illuminate critical dimensions of effective sustainability marketing for the 21st century.

Germany's approach is characterized by educational clarity, institutional credibility, and measurable environmental impact. Campaigns leverage trusted institutions like the Blue Angel ecolabel and Friends of the Earth Germany to deliver clear, factual information about sustainable choices . The "Beige ist besser" campaign successfully transformed consumer perception of recycled hygiene paper through creative, multi-channel communication, earning recognition as the first "Circular Brand of the Year" . The VielfaltMenü collaboration with Green City Solutions demonstrates that advertising infrastructure itself can deliver measurable environmental benefits, filtering 315 million litres of air during the campaign period . Industry-level initiatives like the FKN's "Think Inside The Box" installation engage policymakers directly in conversations about

packaging innovation and circular economy goals . Germany's 5.8% sustainability advertising rate positions it among global leaders .

South Korea's approach is characterized by creative boldness, cultural resonance, and viral potential. The "Money Dream" campaign transformed 608.5 million discarded banknotes into culturally resonant pillows, increasing app downloads by 284% and creating a recycling market where none existed before . The "Lifeguard Snack" reimagined convenience store chip bags as floating rescue devices, selling out within one week while addressing water safety education . WWF-Korea's "Animal trash fashion" used AI-generated imagery to spark conversation about plastic pollution, strategically targeting Gen Z and young millennials for social sharing . Heineken's "Rooftop Revival" addressed urban isolation by transforming unused rooftops into social spaces, attracting over 8,000 applicants . South Korea's 14% sustainability advertising rate leads all global markets .

Several cross-cutting insights emerge from this comparison:

First, there is no single effective model for sustainability marketing. Germany's institutional-educational approach and South Korea's creative-cultural approach both achieve significant results, suggesting that strategies must be adapted to local contexts, consumer expectations, and market characteristics.

Second, measurable outcomes matter across contexts. Both countries demonstrate sophisticated commitment to documenting results, though the metrics differ—environmental impact in Germany, business outcomes in South Korea. Campaigns that cannot demonstrate results risk being dismissed as "greenwashing."

Third, cultural resonance amplifies engagement. South Korean campaigns demonstrate that connecting sustainability messages to existing cultural beliefs and values dramatically increases consumer engagement. This principle applies across markets, though the specific cultural elements will differ.

Fourth, institutional trust provides foundation. German campaigns demonstrate that trusted institutions and certification systems provide credibility that purely commercial campaigns cannot

replicate. Building such institutions requires long-term investment but pays dividends in consumer trust.

Fifth, integration into core strategy is essential. Campaigns in both countries succeed because sustainability is integrated into core brand identity and business strategy, not treated as peripheral CSR. WEPA's circular economy positioning and GS25's ESG-driven product innovation exemplify this integration.

Sixth, innovation drives engagement. Whether through process innovation (moss-filtered advertising) or product innovation (banknote pillows), campaigns that offer something genuinely new capture consumer attention and generate media coverage.

Seventh, sustainability marketing can deliver both environmental and business results. The Money Dream campaign increased recycling rates while driving business outcomes; the VielfaltMenü campaign filtered air while building brand awareness. Sustainability and commercial success are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing.

For Germany, priorities emerging from this analysis include:

1. Continue leveraging institutional trust while finding ways to inject greater emotional resonance and cultural relevance into sustainability messaging.
2. Build on successful innovations like the Blue Angel's point-of-sale strategy to ensure sustainability information reaches consumers at decision moments.
3. Scale the VielfaltMenü model of advertising infrastructure with environmental benefits, potentially establishing it as a standard for out-of-home advertising.
4. Learn from South Korean campaigns' ability to tap into cultural beliefs and create viral engagement, adapting these insights to German cultural context.

For South Korea, priorities include:

1. Maintain creative leadership while ensuring that campaigns deliver sustained behavioural change, not just initial viral engagement.
2. Build on the Money Dream campaign's success in creating recycling markets by identifying other waste streams amenable to similar approaches.

3. Continue documenting business outcomes alongside environmental impact to demonstrate that sustainability drives commercial success.
4. Share Korean creative approaches with international partners through awards, conferences, and collaborations.

For the international community, the lessons are clear: effective sustainability marketing requires approaches adapted to local context, measurable outcomes that demonstrate impact, integration of sustainability into core strategy, and continuous innovation. Germany's institutional-educational model and South Korea's creative-cultural model both offer valuable insights for markets at different stages of sustainability communication development.

The ultimate measure of success for SDG 12 is not the number of campaigns produced but whether consumers have the information and awareness to make sustainable choices, whether companies adopt sustainable practices, and whether consumption patterns shift toward sustainability. Germany and South Korea, in their different ways, are both working toward these goals.

8. LIMITS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the comparative analysis relies primarily on secondary sources and award-winning campaign documentation rather than primary empirical research. Direct observation of campaign development, interviews with marketing professionals and consumers, and analysis of campaign performance data would provide valuable additional perspectives and ground-truth the findings from published literature. Second, data availability and comparability vary between countries. Germany benefits from extensive documentation through award programs and institutional reporting, while South Korean campaigns are well-documented through international media coverage but with less standardized performance reporting. Third, the study focuses on successful, award-winning campaigns, which may not represent typical sustainability marketing practice in either country. Understanding the gap between best practice and common practice requires additional research. Fourth, the voice of consumers themselves is mediated through campaign metrics rather than captured directly. Future research should prioritize consumer perspectives on what makes sustainability messages effective and engaging. Fifth, the study does not comprehensively address the regulatory environments that

shape sustainability marketing in both countries. Understanding how policy frameworks influence campaign development would provide additional context. Sixth, the transferability analysis is necessarily speculative. While principles can be identified, actual transfer of campaign strategies depends on countless contextual factors including cultural values, media landscapes, and consumer expectations that cannot be fully anticipated. Despite these limitations, the comparative analysis provides valuable insights into marketing campaigns for sustainable consumption, with implications for both countries and for broader efforts to achieve SDG 12.

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10. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author conceived the study, designed the research methodology, conducted the literature review and document analysis, synthesized findings across countries, and drafted the complete manuscript. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy of information presented and interpretations offered.

11. COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential competing interest. No funding was received from organizations with interests in advertising, marketing, sustainability, or related sectors.

12. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

As sole author, I performed all roles including conceptualization, methodology development, investigation, formal analysis, writing, review, editing, and project administration.

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14. DATA AVAILABILITY

All sources analyzed in this study are publicly available documents, including award program documentation, industry reports, media coverage, and institutional publications. Primary sources are cited in the bibliography and accessible through the referenced publications and organizations.

15. DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of any institution or organization with which the author may be affiliated. The analysis is provided for scholarly purposes and should not be construed as marketing advice or policy guidance. Marketing campaigns, advertising practices, and consumer behaviours are subject to change, and readers should consult current sources for specific information about Germany, South Korea, and sustainability marketing.

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