



GREENWASHING AS A MARKETING STRATEGY IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT: This paper summarizes the concept of greenwashing, a marketing strategy companies use to make false or exaggerated environmental claims about their products and attract consumers interested in the sustainability of the products they buy. Greenwashing has become more common as consumers have become more environmentally conscious, so companies are trying to capitalize on this trend. However, greenwashing can have negative effects on both consumers and the environment, as it can lead to confusion and mistrust among consumers and encourage the production and consumption of products that are not sustainable. As such, it is important for consumers to be aware of greenwashing and to look for evidence to support companies' environmental claims. Additionally, companies can take steps to be more transparent and honest in their ecological claims, build consumer trust, and promote truly sustainable practices.

Keywords: greenwashing, eco-fashion, fashion, sustainability, ecology, marketing.

GREENWASHING KAO MARKETING STRATEGIJA U MODNOJ INDUSTRIJI

APSTRAKT: Ovaj rad rezimira koncept greenwashinga, marketinške strategije koju kompanije koriste kako bi dale pogrešne ili preuveličane ekološke tvrdnje o svojim proizvodima i kako bi privukle potrošače koji su zainteresovani za održivost proizvoda koje kupuju. Greenwashing (zeleno -eko pranje) je postalo sve češće od kako su potrošači postali ekološki svesniji stoga kompanije nastoje da iskoriste ovaj trend. Međutim, zeleno pranje može imati negativne efekte i na potrošače i na životnu sredinu, jer može dovesti do konfuzije i nepoverenja među potrošačima i podstaći proizvodnju i potrošnju proizvoda koji zapravo nisu održivi. Kao takav, važno je da potrošači budu svesni zelenog pranja i da traže dokaze koji podržavaju ekološke tvrdnje kompanija. Pored toga, kompanije mogu preduzeti korake kako bi bile transparentnije i poštenije u svojim ekološkim zahtevima i kako bi izgradile poverenje kod potrošača i promovisale istinski održive prakse.



Ključne reči: *greenwashing, eko moda, moda, održivost, ekologija, marketing.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry is under increasing scrutiny for its negative impact on the environment and workers' rights. While some companies have taken steps to address these issues, others have engaged in a practice known as "greenwashing," where they make false or misleading claims about their products' environmental or ethical benefits [1]. This paper will explore greenwashing in the fashion industry, including its definition, examples, and reasons for its persistence.

"Greenwashing," "fake green marketing," or "eco-manipulation" are terms that refer to the act of making exaggerated or false claims about the environmental benefits of a product or service [2]. In the fashion industry, greenwashing often takes the form of false claims about product sustainability or the ethical treatment of workers [3]. For example, a company may claim that its clothing is made from organic cotton when, in reality, only a small percentage of the clothing is made from organic materials. Another common example of greenwashing in the fashion industry is using vague terms, such as "eco-friendly" or "sustainable," which give consumers a false impression of the product's environmental impact.

The persistence of greenwashing in the fashion industry is a pressing issue with significant implications. One key factor is the lack of consumer awareness about environmental and ethical issues, which makes it easier for companies to make false claims [4]. Moreover, the absence of stringent regulations that force companies to meet their environmental or ethical obligations exacerbates the problem. Even when regulations are in place, they are often challenging to enforce. Furthermore, many companies see greenwashing as a profitable strategy, capitalizing on consumers' growing interest in environmentally and socially responsible products, even if their claims are baseless [4].

After all, greenwashing is a major problem in the fashion industry, where companies make false or misleading claims about the environmental or ethical benefits of their products and thereby cause consumers to suffer significant losses, especially financial ones [5]. While greenwashing persists for several reasons, consumers must be informed and vigilant to hold companies accountable for their claims [6]. Consumers who are highly involved in environmental protection are likely to base their opinions about the advertised product on arguments rather than emotional aspects, while consumers who are less engaged in the environment are likely to rely on emotions and feelings to form their opinions [7]. In addition, governments and industry organizations should work together to create regulations that prevent greenwashing and ensure that companies are transparent about the environmental and ethical impacts of their products [8]. Doing so can help build a more sustainable and ethical fashion industry that benefits consumers and the planet.

However, greenwashing is widespread in the fashion industry, and consumers must know how companies can mislead them. When shopping for clothing, it's important to look for products with third-party certifications, such as Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) or Fair Trade Certified, which assure that the product was produced in an environmentally and socially responsible manner [9]. In addition, consumers can research the sustainability



practices of specific companies, such as using environmentally friendly materials, labor practices, and carbon footprint, to understand their impact on the environment better.

2. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ECO FASHION, SUSTAINABLE FASHION, SLOW FASHION, AND GREENWASHING

In general, it is important for consumers to be informed and discerning and to support companies that have demonstrated a commitment to sustainability and ethical practices. This, in turn, will encourage more companies to adopt sustainable practices and reduce the prevalence of greenwashing in the fashion industry.

"Eco-fashion" refers to clothing and fashion accessories made environmentally sustainable, using materials and production methods that minimize their environmental impact [10]. Eco-fashion may also consider social and ethical factors, such as fair labor practices when producing its products. The goal of eco-fashion is to create clothing that is both fashionable and sustainable, and that addresses the environmental and social impacts of the fashion industry [11].

"Sustainable fashion" refers to the design, production, retailing, and disposal of clothing, footwear, and accessories in a manner that minimizes negative impact on the environment and maximizes social responsibility [10]. This includes considering factors such as using environmentally friendly materials, reducing waste, improving working conditions for those in the supply chain, and ensuring that products can be reused, repaired, or recycled at the end of their life.

Sustainable fashion takes a holistic approach and considers the entire life cycle of a product, from the procurement of raw materials to the disposal of the final product. It recognizes the environmental and social challenges facing the fashion industry, such as water pollution, climate change, and labor exploitation, and seeks to address these challenges through innovative and responsible practices.

Sustainable fashion aims to create a more responsible, ethical, and environmentally friendly fashion industry and provide consumers with fashionable and sustainable clothing. Slow and sustainable fashion are concepts often used interchangeably, but important differences exist.

"Slow fashion" refers to a movement that prioritizes quality over quantity and encourages consumers to buy smaller, better-made clothes that should last for many years. The focus is on slowing down the fast-paced, trend-driven fashion cycle and, instead, on producing and consuming clothing more mindfully and sustainably [12]. The production process is slower and often involves traditional hand-crafting techniques and methods, resulting in garments with a higher level of craftsmanship and attention to detail.

On the other hand, sustainable fashion encompasses a much wider range of practices and issues, including environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and ethical production. It aims to reduce the fashion industry's negative impact on the environment, such as water pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and waste, and improve the working conditions of those involved in the supply chain. This often involves using environmentally friendly materials, such as organic cotton, recycled polyester, and biodegradable materials, and reducing waste through circular business models, such as clothing rentals and repair services [13].



While slow and sustainable fashion share some common goals and values, sustainable fashion is a more comprehensive approach encompassing a wider range of issues and considerations. Slow fashion is an important aspect of sustainable fashion, but it's only one piece of a bigger puzzle. Both concepts offer valuable solutions to the fashion industry and enable consumers to make more responsible and environmentally friendly choices regarding their clothing.

In short, the key difference between eco-fashion and green fashion is that eco-fashion is sustainable and socially responsible, while green wash fashion is only advertised as such. "Greenwashing fashion," on the other hand, refers to clothing and accessories that are advertised as environmentally sustainable or socially responsible but actually do not meet these standards. Consumers can help reduce the prevalence of green fashion by supporting eco-fashion and being informed and discerning about the environmental and social impact of the products they purchase.

3. EXAMPLES OF GREENWASHING IN MARKETING

Here are some common examples of greenwashing in marketing [14]:

- Vague or meaningless terms: Using terms such as "eco-friendly" or "sustainable" without any clear definition or certification to support these claims.
 - Hidden compromises: Making an environmental claim for a product but neglecting to mention other aspects of the product's production or use that harm the environment.
 - Lesser of two evils: Emphasizing the product's environmental benefits but neglecting that the product still significantly impacts the environment.
 - Misrepresentation: Making false or exaggerated claims about the environmental benefits of a product.
 - Eco-washing of a small fraction: The claim that the product is environmentally friendly, but only a small part meets this standard.
 - Irrelevant claims: Making an environmental claim not directly related to the product, such as using recycled packaging paper, but ignoring the product's environmental impact.
 - Misdirection: Emphasizing environmental benefits but neglecting to mention the product's other, more important, ecological impacts.
- Lack of transparency: Companies can make environmental claims without providing information or supporting evidence, making it difficult for consumers to assess a product's environmental impact.

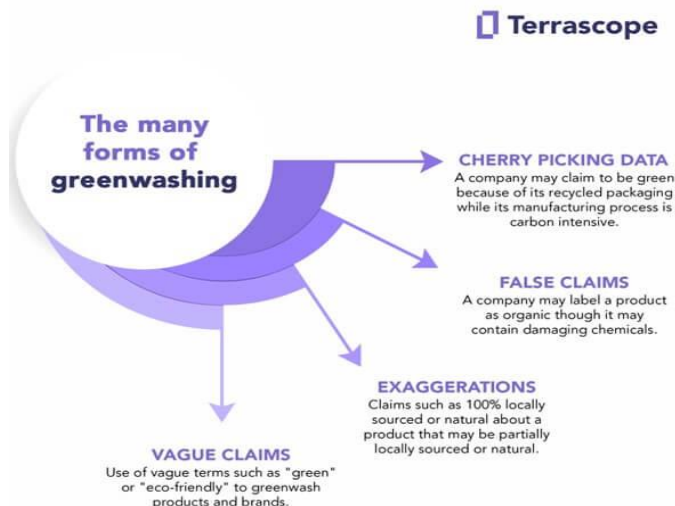


Figure 1: Research conducted by the Terrascope team on different forms of greenwashing [15]

Consumers should look for products with third-party certifications, such as the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) or Fair Trade Certified, ensuring that the product is environmentally and socially responsible.

Greenwashing is a global problem that affects many countries. According to advertising firm Ogilvy and Mather, greenwashing has grown in the past decade to epidemic proportions [16]. The effects of greenwashing can be seen in countries with weak laws and countries with strong regulations and rules, where companies may seek to exploit loopholes or avoid liability [17].

However, some countries and regions are particularly vulnerable to the effects of greenwashing due to weak environmental regulations, limited consumer awareness, and lack of access to reliable information. For example, developing countries with rapidly growing economies like China and India may be more susceptible to greenwashing. They may need more regulatory and institutional frameworks to ensure companies are accountable for their environmental impact [18]. In addition, countries that rely heavily on extractive industries, such as mining and logging, may also be particularly vulnerable to ecological leaching, as companies in these industries may seek to offset their environmental impact by making false or misleading claims about their sustainability practices.

For example, a brand might release a limited edition of clothing with an empowerment message but take no concrete steps to address issues such as underpayment or exploitation of workers in their supply chain. Critics argue that this "waddling" in fashion can lead to tokenism or the appropriation of cultural symbols and dilute the impact of genuine activism

and activism in the fashion world. Consumers are becoming more aware of these practices and demanding greater accountability and transparency from fashion brands in their actions, not just words [19].

Several fashion companies aim to be environmentally conscious, "eco-conscious," or "sustainable." Some examples include:

- Patagonia (Patagonia) [20]: Known for its commitment to environmental activism and sustainability, Patagonia uses environmentally friendly materials and manufacturing processes and supports ecological causes through its activism program and grants.

- Everlane (Everlane) [21]: This brand is focused on transparency and sustainability, using sustainable materials such as organic cotton and Tencel lyocell and disclosing their carbon footprint and factory location.

Stella McCartney (Stella McCartney) [22]: Stella McCartney is a pioneer in sustainable fashion, using innovative materials such as vegan leather, organic cotton, and recycled polyester. It also promotes environmentally responsible practices in its supply chain.

- Allbirds (Allbirds) [23]: Allbirds use environmentally friendly materials, such as recycled plastic bottles and eucalyptus trees.

These are just a few examples of the many companies in the fashion industry making efforts to be environmentally conscious. Consumers can support these companies by choosing to buy from them and seeking information about the environmental and social practices of the brands they buy from.

4. EXAMPLES OF GREENWASHING IN FASHION, CASE STUDY H&M

Fast fashion brands H&M, Zara, and Uniqlo are among the companies that have been linked to greenwashing over the years. [24] These fashion brands contribute to huge amounts of textile waste caused by clothing. According to fashion nonprofit ReMake, 80% of discarded textiles globally are incinerated or landfilled, and only 20% are reused or recycled [25].

Fast fashion brands also habitually tout their green initiatives widely despite it being a small part of their business. For example, in 2019, H&M launched its eco-friendly clothing line called "Conscious." The company claims to use organic cotton and recycled polyester. However, this line is a marketing tactic to make themselves appear more environmentally friendly. When looking at H&M's "Conscious" line, its mission statement says: "Shop our selection of sustainable fashion pieces that make you both look and feel good" [25]. However, there is no single legal definition for marketing words such as "sustainable," "green," or "environmentally friendly." H&M was then criticized by the Norwegian Consumer Authority for misleading marketing of their Conscious Collection because "the information provided regarding sustainability was not sufficient, especially considering that the Conscious Collection is advertised as a collection with environmental benefits" [25].



Figure 2: Conscious Collection, a fake environmentally conscious collection of the fashion house H&M [30]

The greenwashing lawsuit against H&M highlights how the brand misled the public with false sustainability marketing. This investigation was conducted by the news outlet Quartz regarding its sustainable practices [26].

An investigation by the news outlet "Quartz" [28] revealed the company's untrue claims that most of its clothes are better for the environment, thanks to sustainable practices. This world-leading clothing company produces around five billion garments annually. According to the fashion label, its products are made from 50% or more sustainable materials [27].

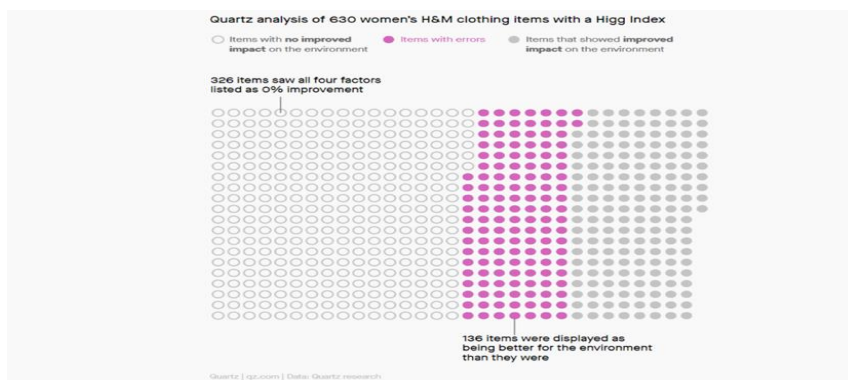


Figure 3: The Higue Index is a tool designed to assess the environmental impact of a product throughout its life cycle, from design to disposal. A Quartz investigation found that H&M's self-reported Higg Index scores were often inaccurate [28]

The greenwashing lawsuit cites examples of H&M misleading customers with false advertising. For instance, one sustainability profile sold by H&M "claims the dress is made with 20% less water on average," when an independent investigation by news outlet Quartz found that the dress "was made with 20% more water [27]. The plaintiff claims that the

Swedish company failed to comply with environmental standards and that its products were more environmentally harmful than others.

It is further said that the fashion house tapped into the sentiment of environmentally conscious customers willing to pay more for sustainable products.

The H&M lawsuit also reveals that the company blatantly lied about its Conscious Choice label, which is said to contain "at least 50% sustainable materials, such as organic cotton and recycled polyester" [29]. In reality, the products consist of undeniably unsustainable materials, such as polyester, which are not sustainable because polyester does not decompose, sheds toxic microfibers, and cannot be recycled [30].



Figure 4: the label of the company H&M, through which an eco-friendly product is suggested to consumers. Conscious Choice [30]

Similar practices of deceiving customers through greenwashing have been discovered by other global fashion brands, such as Zara and Adidas [31], according to the environmental organization Earth.Org. Also, green brand initiatives are increasingly the focus of marketing campaigns. They advertise a lot, but it is only a small part of their business, which is irrelevant to the nature around us. Fortunately, customers are undoubtedly becoming more aware of the negative environmental impacts of the clothing industry and are opting for sustainable brands and products. Thus, more and more customers are discovering the dubious motives behind sustainable marketing.

Platforms that address the problem of greenwashing in Serbia and beyond can be found most easily on Instagram. Those are platforms for discussing sustainability, "The FFM platform," "re. Gekko," which encourages discussion about the consequences of the textile industry, or "Mašina," which deals with social criticism and discusses the position of textile workers and the harmful effects of fashion on the environment.

5. CONCLUSION

After all, greenwashing is a marketing strategy that can significantly affect both customers and the environment. On the one hand, it can lead customers to believe they are making environmentally conscious choices when, in fact, they are not. This can result in a lack of



trust in companies and confusion among consumers about which products are truly environmentally friendly. On the other hand, these eco-manipulations can also have negative effects on the environment itself because they can encourage the production and consumption of products that are not sustainable.

Overall, companies must be transparent and honest in their environmental claims to build trust with customers and ensure that their products positively impact the environment [32]. In addition, consumers can take steps to educate themselves about eco-washing and seek certifications and verifications from reputable organizations to ensure that the products they are purchasing are truly eco-friendly. By working together, we can fight greenwashing and make informed decisions that benefit us and the environment.

However, there are steps consumers, organizations, and governments can take to combat greenwashing and promote sustainable and responsible practices. Consumers can learn about the environmental impact of the products they buy and support companies that have demonstrated a commitment to sustainability and ethical practices. Organizations can work to develop and implement standards and certifications that ensure environmental claims are credible and transparent. Governments can strengthen environmental regulations and enforcement and provide consumers with access to reliable information about the environmental impact of products [33].

By taking these steps, we can help reduce the prevalence of greenwashing and create a more sustainable and just world for current and future generations. We must be informed, vigilant, and persistent in our efforts to combat greenwashing and promote sustainability to create a world that is not only greener but fairer for all.

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