

Forum: Environmental Commission (EC)
Issue: Preventing Greenwashing through Social Accountability
Student Officer: Georgia Papaioannou
Position: President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates of the Environmental Commission,

My name is Georgia Papaioannou, I am 16 years old and I am IB year 1 student at HAEF Athens College. This year, it is my utmost pleasure to serve as the President of the Environmental Commission of PSMUN and as the expert chair on the topic of “Preventing Greenwashing through Social Accountability”. The EC was the first committee I ever attended as a delegate and beginner in the MUN world. I know how exciting, yet, nerve-wracking a conference can be as a beginner so I hope that this study guide will help you familiarize yourself with this topic and assist you in navigating your research. I wish that reading this “manual” will guide you through productive lobbying and fruitful debate. However, it must be noted that it should not be your only source of information and you should conduct research on your own. Regardless, if you encounter any problems while researching or if you do not understand some parts of the guide, do not hesitate to contact me at georgiapap456@gmail.com.

Yours Truly,

Georgia Papaioannou

INTRODUCTION

The topic of climate crisis has been extensively discussed in recent years, with companies and corporations being held accountable for their significant impact on the issue. Even though they are not the sole contributor, companies and corporations have impacted climate change to a significant extent. These entities have utilized unsustainable production and distribution practices, contributing to the exacerbation of the climate crisis. Despite their practices, companies have attempted to present a more environmentally conscious image through a practice known as "greenwashing." This tactic involves concealing harmful environmental practices through misleading marketing techniques, often in the form of advertisements, campaigns, or products.

Corporations have been able to do this undisturbed for many years; however, recently there has been increasing awareness of the role such companies play in the aggravation of the climate crisis.

Many times, companies create a “façade” of eco-friendly practices in order to appeal to a wider audience and maximize their sales. Greenwashing could be considered a form of false marketing, meaning that companies are trying to sell products under misleading claims, making it very difficult to detect unless serious investigation by an official committee is conducted.

Greenwashing is prevalent across various industries, from fashion to transportation, making it difficult for consumers to distinguish between genuine eco-friendly products and those falsely marketed. Despite some efforts to combat greenwashing, there is a need for further action to address the issue. To prevent companies from participating in such practices, social accountability must be exercised through actions such as boycotting environmentally harmful products, advocating against greenwashing and promoting corporate social responsibility. This year's theme, "Pacifism and Injustice", is related to the topic as social accountability allows individuals to address injustice in a peaceful manner.



Figure 1 Greenwashing surrounded by vague «buzzwords» companies use to make their advertisements sound “environmentally friendly”

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Greenwashing

“When a company claims to be environmentally conscious for marketing purposes but actually is not making any sustainability efforts...”¹

¹ “What Is Greenwashing, and How Do You Spot It?” *Business News Daily*, www.businessnewsdaily.com/10946-greenwashing.html.

Social Accountability

“...an approach toward building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e., in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations that participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability.”²

Injustice

“Unfair treatment – a situation in which the rights of a person or a group of people are ignored.”³

Injustice is often associated with unfair treatment of a legal nature. This is important in regards to this issue since there is often legal grounds for prosecuting companies and corporations that use greenwashing as a marketing strategy. However, this issue must also be evaluated from a collective moral standpoint and the injustice greenwashing constitutes to the environment must also be examined.

Sustainability

The formal definition of sustainability, as emphasized by the United Nations is: “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”⁴

Since many businesses frequently use this word without considering about what it truly implies, it is crucial to explain sustainability. This is why it is seen as a "buzzword" that businesses use to appeal to a larger audience of consumers rather than spending the effort to develop a product that is sustainable.

Multi-National Corporation (MNC)

“... a company that has business operations in at least one country other than its home country... Generally, a multinational company has offices, factories, or other facilities in different countries around the world as well as a centralized headquarters which coordinates global management. Multinational companies can also be known as

² Malena, Carmen, et al. “Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice.” *Social Development Papers: Participation and Civic Engagement*, World Bank, Dec. 2004, documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/327691468779445304/pdf/310420PAPER0So1ity0SDP0Civic0no1076.pdf.

³ “Injustice.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/dictionary/injustice.

⁴ “Sustainability.” *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability.

international, stateless, or transnational corporate organizations or enterprises. Some may have budgets that exceed those of small countries.”⁵

Environmentally Friendly

Methods that are not harmful towards the environment or are actively trying to improve it.

The primary objective of tackling this issue should be to effectively develop ecologically favorable alternative ways that greenwashing corporations claim to be using.

Climate Guilt

“...the shame that results when one realizes how their specific behavior has not met their personal or societal expectations to help protect and preserve the environment.”⁶

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

“It refers to companies that consider the interests of the society by taking responsibility for the impact of their decisions and activities on customers, employees, communities and the environment.”⁷

Fast Fashion

Fast fashion is essentially an extreme response to the rapidly changing trend cycle and the consumer craving for “trendy” clothing at increasingly lower prices. Over the last 20 years, fast fashion companies have used cheap, exploitative labor and questionable environmental practices in order to make clothes so they keep up with consumer demand and keep their prices better than those of their competitors.

Carbon Footprint

“A carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases (including carbon dioxide and methane) that are generated by our actions (or the actions of a company/corporation).”⁸

⁵ Chen, James. “Multinational Corporation: Definition, How It Works, Four Types.” *Investopedia*, Investopedia, 8 Oct. 2022, www.investopedia.com/terms/m/multinationalcorporation.asp.

⁶ Heyl, Julia Childs. “What to Do If You Feel Guilt about Climate Change.” *Verywell Mind*, Verywell Mind, 12 June 2022, www.verywellmind.com/what-to-do-if-you-feel-guilt-about-climate-change-5295979.

⁷ Peter Simpson, Alex Smith, “Business Management for the IB Diploma” Second Edition, Cambridge University Press, 2015

⁸ “What Is Your Carbon Footprint?” *The Nature Conservancy*, www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/carbon-footprint-calculator/.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Types of Greenwashing

Greenwashing refers to the deceptive practice of presenting a product or company as environmentally friendly, when it is not. There are five major classifications of greenwashing: vague terminology, misleading imagery, false associations or questionable certification labels, selective disclosure, and fabricated data

Vague terminology

Vague terminology involves the use of buzzwords such as "eco-friendly" or "non-toxic," which lack a clear definition, allowing companies to make false or misleading environmental claims. Misleading imagery involves using images that depict environmental friendliness, without any actual measures being taken to be environmentally conscious. This ambiguity is purposeful as the consumer is essentially encouraged to interpret these terms in any way they understand. By using vague terminology, companies can defend themselves by arguing that they did not expect that the audience would interpret them in such a way. Thus, the company can claim that they bear no responsibility for the consumer's "misunderstanding" of its marketing.

Misleading imagery

Misleading imagery involves using images or symbols related to the environment or eco-friendliness in advertisements, product designs, packaging, etc., without actually implementing such practices in reality. This can happen through advertising, product designs, packaging, and so on.

False associations or questionable certification labels

False associations and questionable certification labels result from the use of biased or unreliable data to support environmental claims. Companies may only present data that supports their environmental agenda, while ignoring or hiding data that contradicts their claims. In some cases, companies have gone as far as destroying data from their own research facilities to fit their environmental narrative.

Selective disclosure and fabricated data

The final two categories, selective disclosure and fabricated data, are closely connected. Selective disclosure involves hiding information about the environmental impact of a company's practices to avoid damaging sales, while fabricated data involves outright lying about environmentally friendly processes. Both of these practices can be harmful, while it is widely accepted that fabricated data should be illegal.

Motives behind Greenwashing

The increased popularity of sustainability and sustainable living since the early 2000s has created an opportunity for companies to capitalize on consumer interest in environmentally-friendly products. The growing concern about the impact of climate change has led consumers to seek out ways to reduce their own carbon footprint, and companies have responded by offering products marketed as "sustainable." However, the primary motivation for companies is to maximize profits, often at the expense of the environment. This has resulted in the use of cheaper, less environmentally-friendly production methods, which are marketed as "sustainable" and sold at a premium price. Additionally, greenwashing is often seen as a way for companies to stay competitive and maintain their market position through aggressive marketing strategies.

Greenwashing and Corporate Social Responsibility

Greenwashing and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) are closely related concepts in the business world. CSR refers to the actions that companies take to meet the expectations of society and align their interests with social and environmental concerns. Companies often use CSR as a marketing tool to connect with their customers and convey a positive image by addressing relevant social issues, including environmental sustainability.

However, the practice of greenwashing can undermine the concept of CSR by presenting false or misleading claims about a company's environmental impact. Companies may use greenwashing as a way to profit from consumers' growing concerns about the environment by presenting themselves as environmentally conscious, even if their practices are not sustainable.

While the prevalence of greenwashing is a cause for concern, there are also companies that genuinely engage in CSR practices that benefit the environment. These companies are taking steps towards reducing their carbon footprint and moving towards becoming emission neutral, demonstrating that it is possible to align business interests with environmental sustainability.⁹

Greenwashing in the Fashion Industry

Fast Fashion Worsening the Situation

The fast fashion industry is one of the major contributors to pollution and greenhouse gas emissions globally. Some estimates suggest that it contributes between 5% and

⁹ Claudio Ventura, et al. "Corporate Social Responsibility and the Risk of Greenwashing: SmartGreen Post: News about the Environment." SmartGreen Post | News from the Environment, 10 Jan. 2021, <https://www.smartgreenpost.com/2021/01/11/corporate-social-responsibility-and-the-risk-of-greenwashing/>.

10% of all greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁰ Overall, the fashion industry has done very little to reduce or even measure their carbon footprint. Despite its significant impact, the fashion industry has made limited efforts to reduce its carbon footprint, or even to measure it.

By and large, this is partly a result of the absence of effective textile-to-textile recycling. Despite the claims made by some companies about recycling unsold or returned clothes, the process is often not managed, as the clothes are not made of the same components, making it challenging to recycle them. As a result, clothes that are no longer in style or malfunctioning are often discarded and left to decompose in landfills for extended periods.

Additionally, the trend cycle in fashion is moving at an unprecedented pace due to the widespread access to social media, and the demand for "micro trends" is higher than ever. This leads to companies manufacturing clothing at a record pace to keep up with the trend cycle, producing even more carbon emissions, and consumers discarding clothing more frequently, as clothes are no longer considered trendy just a few months after their purchase.

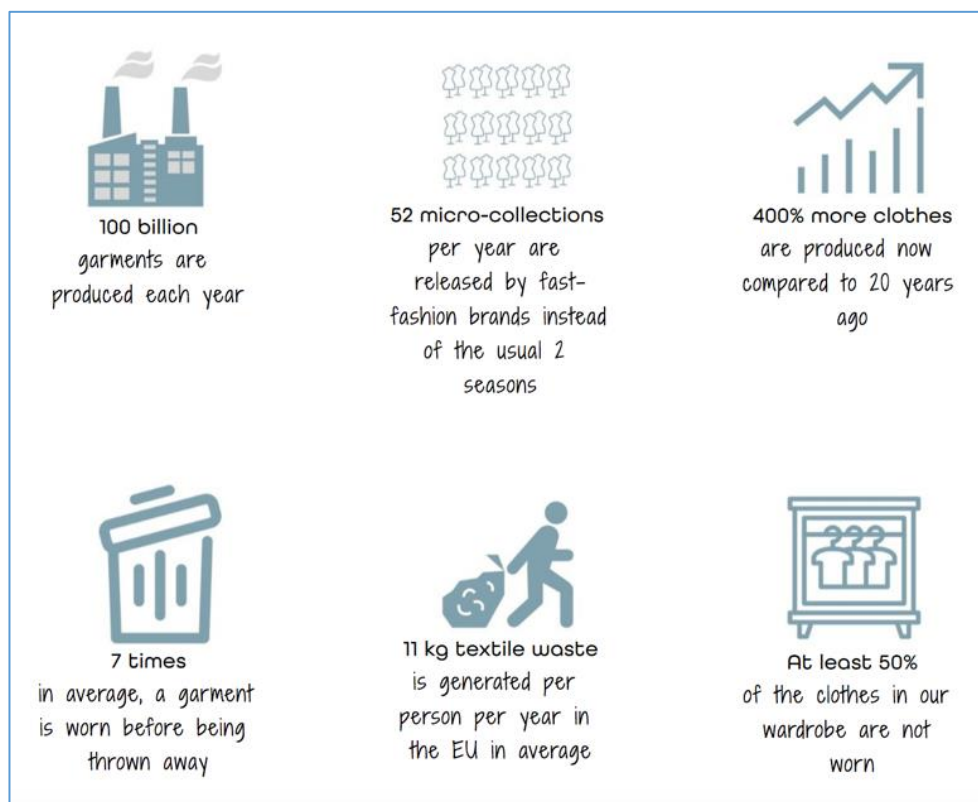


Figure 2 Statistics elaborating on how the fast fashion industry is affecting people's perceptions of clothing

¹⁰ "Fashion & Environment." *SustainYourStyle*, www.sustainyourstyle.org/en/whats-wrong-with-the-fashion-industry.

The fast fashion industry has experienced a decline in garment quality in the past two decades, with clothing designed to be worn only a few times before becoming damaged or appearing worn-out and faded. This is partly due to the use of cheap and environmentally harmful materials in production, as well as an increased frequency of purchases encouraged by fast fashion brands.

Consumers hold a significant amount of power in shaping the fashion industry's practices. By refusing to purchase items produced using harmful materials and processes, fashion companies will be forced to pay attention to customer needs and reform their production methods. This also applies to the issue of greenwashing, where companies make misleading claims about the environmental impact of their products.

Zara

Zara, like many other fast fashion brands, has been criticized for its negative impact on the environment. One of the major issues with Zara's operations is its reliance on non-renewable energy sources, such as fossil fuels, for the manufacturing process. The burning of these fuels contributes to the emission of large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which, in turn, contributes to global warming. Additionally, Zara's promotion of a "buy to wear once" mentality, where clothing is meant to be worn only a few times before being disposed of, results in its clothing being quickly discarded and often ending up in landfills. This is particularly problematic given that some fabrics, such as polyester, take 20-200 years to decompose, which exacerbates the environmental impact of Zara's production cycle.¹¹

Furthermore, Zara has been accused of greenwashing its operations by launching "environmentally friendly" collections that do not actually take any significant measures to reduce the company's carbon footprint or its impact on local habitats. Despite these campaigns, Zara continues to contribute significantly to pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, making it one of the largest contributors to the fashion industry's environmental impact. To address these issues, Zara must take concrete steps to reduce its reliance on non-renewable energy sources and promote sustainable practices in its production and disposal of clothing.

H&M

A comprehensive study conducted by the Changing Markets Foundation found a concerning trend in the environmental claims made by fast fashion companies. Out of

¹¹ Brown, Rachel. "The Environmental Crisis Caused by Textile Waste." *Rr-Lgo-1*, www.roadrunnerwm.com/blog/textile-waste-environmental-crisis.

these companies, the findings revealed that H&M had the highest percentage of misleading or fabricated claims at a staggering 96%.¹²

In 2019, H&M introduced their "Conscious" collection as a supposed solution to their contribution to the negative impact of mass production on the environment. The collection was marketed as being more environmentally friendly due to the use of organic cotton and recycled polyester. It was touted that these materials were more environmentally friendly as they were easier to recycle, and the polyester had already been recycled once. It is important to note that these products were priced higher due to their supposed "green" nature.

Multiple countries, including the Netherlands, launched investigations into H&M's claims, leading to accusations of greenwashing the "Conscious" collection. The



production process of the collection was found to be unchanged or even worse in some cases, leading to a negative impact on the environment. The company was even sued as a result of these accusations, which will be further explored in the study guide.

Greenwashing in the Food Industry

Nestlé

Nestlé, the world's largest food and beverage company, announced its ambitious goal to have 100% recyclable or reusable packaging by 2025. The CEO, Mark Schneider, acknowledged the magnitude of the plastic waste problem and expressed a commitment to finding solutions to reduce, reuse and recycle. This could have been a significant step forward in the fight against plastic waste, but unfortunately, it has fallen short.

¹² "World Bio Market Insights 60% of Fashion Companies Are Greenwashing and Changing Markets Wants to Do Something about It." *World Bio Market Insights*, 12 July 2021, worldbiomarketinsights.com/60-of-fashion-companies-are-greenwashing-and-changing-markets-wants-to-do-something-about-it/.

Greenpeace warned of "greenwashing baby steps" when the statement was first released, and this has proven to be accurate. Nestlé is far from reaching its goal and is even taking steps that harm the environment, such as burning plastic waste, which produces a significant amount of toxins and CO₂. In 2022, the company was one of the top five largest polluters in the world.

Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola has been exposed as the world's worst plastic polluter, producing over 120 billion plastic bottles each year, 99% of which are made from fossil fuels.¹³ These bottles take approximately 450 years to decompose. The company claims that 25% of its plastic packaging, mainly used in its bottles, comes from "marine plastic," which would have, otherwise, ended up in the ocean. However, non-governmental organizations and activist groups have criticized this move as too little too late, given that their status as a mass-polluter has not changed significantly. Furthermore, their production methods remain problematic.

Coca-Cola also owns "Innocent drinks", a company with a mission to make the world a better, healthier place. Innocent aims to be carbon neutral by 2025 and gives 10% of its profits to charity. However, the company's advertisement in the UK, which called for fixing up the planet by buying Innocent products, was widely criticized for being misleading, given Coca-Cola's status as the world's largest polluter. The advertisement was eventually withdrawn after public outrage.



Figure 3 Figure 4 Coca-Cola, one of the biggest polluters in the world, using greenwashing as a marketing tactic to promote their beverage

¹³ Mandard, Stéphane. "COP27 Sponsor Coca-Cola Is the World's Biggest Plastic Polluter." *Le Monde.fr*, Le Monde, 15 Nov. 2022, www.lemonde.fr/en/environment/article/2022/11/15/coca-cola-cop27-sponsor-and-world-champion-of-plastic-pollution_6004313_114.html.

Ryanair and Greenwashing in the Transportation Industry

Ryanair is a low-cost passenger airline company that operates scheduled flights across Europe and is known for offering flights at prices as low as 20 euros. In 2020, the company published an advertisement claiming that they produced the lowest carbon emissions among all commercial airlines. They used the slogan "Europe's Lowest Fares, Lowest Emissions Airline" and claimed that their youngest fleet, highest proportion of filled seats on flights, and newest, most fuel-efficient engines were responsible for their low carbon emissions."¹⁴

Nevertheless, this claim was not entirely truthful. In a 2018 EU report, Ryanair was named one of the top 10 polluters in Europe, which is a remarkable achievement given

The advertisement features a Ryanair aircraft flying over a green landscape. The text on the ad reads:

EUROPE'S LOWEST FARES, LOWEST EMISSIONS AIRLINE

Everybody knows that when you fly Ryanair you enjoy the lowest fares. But do you know you are travelling on the airline with Europe's lowest emissions as well?

While aviation is responsible for just 2% of carbon emissions, our industry is determined to play a leading role in reducing emissions. Aviation already pays significant environmental taxes – this year Ryanair will pay €630m in environmental taxes in Europe.

Ryanair has the lowest carbon emissions of any major airline – 66g Co2 for every passenger kilometre flown. This is because we have the youngest fleet of aircraft (avg. age 6 years), the highest load factors (97% of seats filled) and newest most fuel efficient engines.

Ryanair is committed to cutting our carbon emissions further which is why we are investing over \$20 billion in new aircraft that will cut our carbon emissions by 10% by 2030 and lower noise emissions by a further 40%.

Many of our customers are now choosing to offset the carbon cost of their flight each time they book with us. We support them making that choice and we thank them for contributing to our 4 great environmental partners.

Find out more at www.ryanair.com/environment

RYANAIR
MORE CHOICE. LOW FARES. GREAT CARE.

Partners: firstclimate, RENATURE, native woodland, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group.

that it was competing against actual coal plants. Furthermore, the company published this misleading advertisement despite having taken no steps to reduce its carbon footprint and with its carbon emissions having increased by 5.9% the previous year.

The advertisement caused public outrage and was banned by the UK's Advertising Standards Authority only a few days after its release. This example of greenwashing was a deceptive attempt by Ryanair to mislead the public and present a false image of its commitment to environmental sustainability.

Figure 5 Ryanair advert claiming «lowest fares, lowest emissions airline»

¹⁴ "Ryanair Accused of Greenwash over Carbon Emissions Claim." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 5 Feb. 2020, www.theguardian.com/business/2020/feb/05/ryanair-accused-of-greenwash-over-carbon-emissions-claim.

The Impact of “Climate Guilt”

The phenomenon of "climate guilt" refers to a sense of responsibility and remorse experienced by individuals who believe they are not taking adequate measures to mitigate the effects of climate change. This feeling has been fueled, in part, by the actions of corporations who have failed to take responsibility for their impact on the environment and instead shift the focus onto the actions of individuals.¹⁵

This perspective on the climate crisis is flawed as it fails to acknowledge the crucial role that corporations play in mitigating the effects of climate change. While individual efforts are commendable, they are not enough to effect real change without the cooperation of corporations. Consumers have the power to counteract misleading greenwashing tactics by being aware of these strategies and making informed choices.¹⁶

Furthermore, climate guilt can also lead consumers to be more susceptible to false claims made by companies seeking to capitalize on this guilt. For example, a person feeling climate guilt may choose to purchase "organic" produce without considering the potential for it to have a larger carbon footprint due to transportation from a distant location. This highlights the importance of being mindful and making informed choices to avoid perpetuating unsustainable practices.

Environmental Consequences

Greenwashing, as a concept, may not directly impact the environment but companies that practice greenwashing are able to cause significant harm to the environment. The fashion industry is a prime example where such practices can be seen. These companies can pollute the air and water of the location where their factories are located, but still claim that the garments produced there are manufactured using environmentally friendly methods.

Similarly, the food industry can use plastic packaging that takes decades, if not centuries, to decompose, and still claim to be "plastic-free" or "carbon-neutral." Local businesses can offer paper straws and sell reusable bottles, presenting a false image of sustainability, while not actually recycling waste or using recyclable containers for deliveries and throwing away usable food. The decomposition of food waste in landfills

¹⁵ Heyl, Julia Childs. "What to Do If You Feel Guilt about Climate Change." *Verywell Mind*, Verywell Mind, 12 June 2022, www.verywellmind.com/what-to-do-if-you-feel-guilt-about-climate-change-5295979.

¹⁶ Joungn. "How Can We Stop Feeling 'Climate Guilt'? Hank Green Explains." *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, 27 Aug. 2019, www.pbs.org/wnet/peril-and-promise/video/climate-guilt-hank-green/.

produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas that is more toxic for the environment than carbon dioxide.¹⁷

Furthermore, large retail stores, regardless of their industry, often sell products that are not manufactured locally. The transportation of these products results in the emission of carbon dioxide, which absorbs radiation and prevents heat from leaving the atmosphere, contributing to climate change and increasing the overall temperature of the planet.¹⁸

In the absence of suspicion, investigation by local governments, third-party research institutes, or commissions, companies can continue to pollute the environment while claiming to be eco-friendly. The situation is not fictional but is a common occurrence in various industries, making it crucial for individuals to educate themselves on this topic and demand corporate social accountability for the environment.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Ghana

Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) are currently being negatively impacted by Multinational corporations burning plastic and using resources while claiming to be sustainable and Ghana is no exception. Ghana is mostly being polluted by the textile industry, meaning that garment “giants” such as Zara and H&M are abandoning unwanted or unsellable clothes within Ghanaian territory and filling up landfills with no regard for local people or wildlife. In Ghana, clothes from Europe, the UK and North America arrive and are sold on street markets. If a piece is unsellable because of a malfunction, it is thrown out and ends up on a landfill such as the one in the picture below. These clothes are left to fill up as synthetic textiles such as polyester take hundreds of years to decompose. To make more space in the landfills, clothes are often burned, creating even more CO₂ emissions and further harming the environment.¹⁹

¹⁷ “Fight Climate Change by Preventing Food Waste.” *WWF*, World Wildlife Fund, www.worldwildlife.org/stories/fight-climate-change-by-preventing-food-waste.

¹⁸ “What Are Carbon Emissions (and Why Do They Matter)?: Viessmann UK.” *What Are Carbon Emissions (and Why Do They Matter)? | Viessmann UK*, www.viessmann.co.uk/en/heating-advice/boilers/what-are-carbon-emissions-and-why-do-they-matter.html.

¹⁹ Besser, Linton. “‘Dead White Man’s Clothes’: The Dirty Secret behind the World’s Fashion Addiction.” *ABC News*, ABC News, 21 Oct. 2021, www.abc.net.au/news/2021-08-12/fast-fashion-turning-parts-ghana-into-toxic-landfill/100358702.



Figure 6 Landfill in Ghana

Germany

Germany has passed numerous laws against greenwashing and false marketing as a whole. In fact, Germany has some of the strictest and most highly regulated legislative framework when it comes to misleading or false marketing. More specifically, German legislators have made greenwashing an offense under criminal law, not by case law. Moreover, the general population is keenly aware of the rapidly spreading impact of climate change and are, therefore, more likely to look down upon any corporation that attempts to hide practices that contribute to this phenomenon.²⁰ Additionally, the German government is able to impose fines to companies that greenwash in order to prevent them from taking such actions ever again. German courts are able to sentence the person responsible for the false advertising to up to three years in prison.

United States of America

Like many Western countries, the USA has passed laws and implemented rules and regulations against greenwashing. Like Germany, for example, the US has prohibited greenwashing to a large extent using laws; however, they lack the strict implementation of such laws that Germany is famous for.

European Union (EU)

The European Commission has implemented an initiative on substantiating “green claims” within EU borders. Some of the rules and regulations of this initiative include: “the revision of EU consumer law to empower consumers for active participation in the green transition”, “a sustainable product policy initiative” and “the farm to fork strategy”. These strategies are all part of the European Green Deal which states that

²⁰ “Sustainability Claims and Greenwashing in Germany: CMS Green Globe.” *Sustainability Claims and Greenwashing in Germany* | CMS Green Globe, cms.law/en/int/publication/cms-green-globe/germany.

“Companies making ‘green claims’ should substantiate these against a standard methodology to assess their impact on the environment.” While there is still much to be done about the actual implementation of such initiative, the EU has forged a clear path that will hopefully work out in the environment’s favor.

Greenpeace

Non-Governmental Organization Greenpeace was founded in 1971 and its main goal is protecting and advocating for the environment and any vulnerable groups that are affected by climate change. Since greenwashing was established as a term, Greenpeace has been helping expose corporations and individuals that are taking advantage of the environment while claiming to use eco-friendly measures to produce their goods. However, what makes Greenpeace highly significant in this issue is its status as general consultant for the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Such close bonds with one of the most considerable organs of the UN assists Greenpeace in enacting meaningful change and altering individual perception on greenwashing altogether.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| DATE | DESCRIPTION OF EVENT |
|----------------|---|
| 22 April, 1970 | The First Earth Day is celebrated. |
| 1971 | Greenpeace is founded. |
| 2017 | The Zara “Join Life” collection is launched. |
| 2019 | The H&M “Conscious” collection is launched. |
| 3 March 2022 | The European Commission publishes the draft directive on the adaptation of the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive. |
| 27 April 2022 | Antonio Guterres claims that “We cannot afford Greenwashing”. |
| 22 July 2022 | H&M lawsuit is filed. |

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

H&M Lawsuit

In 2022, a class-action lawsuit was filed in New York against H&M’s misleading environmental claims. The lawsuit was filed by plaintiff Chelsea Commodore, a NY marketing student. The lawsuit was filed on the basis of Commodore and many others purchasing products from H&M that were marketed as environmentally conscious, when in reality they were not. In essence, the entire lawsuit was filed under the premise of misleading marketing. This is extremely important to this issue as it constitutes a real-world example of everyday people taking matters into their own hands and demanding accountability for companies’ non-eco-friendly actions (social accountability). This lawsuit, while at the time of writing this study guide is still

ongoing, has brought attention to the issue of greenwashing and has called out one of the largest contributors. Hopefully, this lawsuit will pave the way for more such actions from environmentally aware citizens to hold such companies accountable and demand for reform in their production and transportation process.

COP27

COP27 is the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In 2022, it happened in Egypt and took place from November 6th to November 20th. During the conference representatives of the UN member-states were able to debate and negotiate about policies regarding lowering the global temperature and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Greenwashing was amongst the many topics discussed during the conference. Even Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary General made a statement regarding greenwashing, namely that world leaders should have “Zero tolerance for greenwashing.” Overall the conference was deemed an underwhelming by many, as only some decisions were reached about what actions should be taken to combat climate change and the rising temperatures of the earth. However, one of the conference’s greatest achievements was the establishment of the concept of “loss and damage” which is “the negative impacts of climate change that occur despite, or in the absence of, mitigation and adaptation.”²¹ This is an important step towards measuring the impact an action has or does not have on the environment. Therefore, more efforts can be made in bettering the environment.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Developing Sustainable Supply Chains

Developing sustainable supply chains is a complex process that requires a multi-faceted approach to be achieved. There are several key steps that need to be taken to develop aforementioned supply chains. Some of these can include conducting a sustainability assessment. This involves evaluating the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the supply chain and identifying areas for improvement. Moreover, companies can develop a sustainability strategy, based on the assessment. The sustainability strategy should outline specific goals and targets for improving the environmental, social, and economic performance of the supply chain. More importantly, developing sustainable supply chains must include implementing sustainable sourcing practices; essentially, procuring raw materials and products from suppliers that have been independently verified to meet certain environmental and social standards. Improving transparency and traceability, implementing systems for

²¹ “Loss and Damage: A Moral Imperative to Act.” *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/en/climatechange/adelle-thomas-loss-and-damage.

tracking the flow of materials and products through the supply chain, in order to identify and address any potential sustainability issues should also be kept in mind when developing sustainable supply chains. Furthermore, encouraging collaboration and partnerships, working with suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders is of value in this context. Continuously monitoring and reporting, may also involve regularly monitoring the performance of the supply chain and reporting on progress towards sustainability goals and targets. Lastly, investing in new technologies and innovations can include investing in renewable energy, circular economy practices and more efficient logistics, to reduce the environmental impact of the supply chain. Ultimately, developing sustainable supply chains is a continuous process that requires the full engagement and commitment of all the actors involved, from suppliers, manufacturers, retailers to consumers. Consumer behaviour and choices can also play a vital role in driving sustainability in the supply chain.

Universal Consumer Protection Laws

Laws drafted with targeting greenwashing in mind can protect consumers from such practices in several ways. By prohibiting false or misleading claims, companies will have to discontinue such claims about the environmental benefits of their products. Providing penalties for any violation of these rules can also prove beneficial. Moreover, establishing guidelines for environmental marketing such as the "Green Guides" in the United States, will provide guidance to companies on how to make truthful and non-deceptive environmental claims. Additionally, providing penalties for non-compliance such as fines for companies that violate consumer protection laws, would include making false or misleading claims about the environmental benefits of their products. Establishing certification and avoiding labelling schemes with laws that are intended to help consumers identify products that have been independently verified to meet certain environmental standards. A very important aspect in providing solutions for this issue would be establishing a regulatory body such as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States, or the European Union Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) in the EU, whose role is to enforce consumer protection laws and take action against companies that violate them. As mentioned in the section about sustainable supply chains, encouraging transparency and traceability would also be beneficial in this context. Laws can encourage companies to be more transparent and traceable in their supply chains, which would help to identify and address any potential sustainability issues. Finally, encouraging collaboration and partnerships between companies, suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders to develop sustainable supply chain practices and share best practices. It is important to note that laws and regulations must be continuously updated to keep up with the current market and technology advancements, and with the changing expectations of consumers. This will help to ensure that consumers are protected from greenwashing practices and that companies are held accountable for their environmental claims.

Net-Zero Pledges

Net zero pledges can help fight greenwashing by providing a clear and measurable goal for companies to work towards and by providing a framework for them to transparently report their progress toward achieving that goal. When attempting to set a net-zero pledge, companies should be setting clear and measurable goals – by committing to net zero emissions, companies are setting a clear and measurable goal for reducing their environmental impact. This ensures that companies are held accountable for their environmental claims, and that consumers can easily evaluate the progress that companies are making towards achieving those goals. Then, being required to report on their progress towards achieving those goals will help increase transparency and traceability of their environmental performance. This allows consumers and other stakeholders to evaluate a company's progress and hold them accountable for their actions. By encouraging innovation and investment, companies are further incentivized to invest in new technologies and innovations that can help them achieve their goals. This can lead to the development of new sustainable products and practices, which can benefit both consumers and the environment. Additionally, net zero pledges can raise awareness about the importance of addressing climate change, and can encourage consumers to consider the environmental impact of their purchasing decisions, especially when these pledges come from multi-national corporations whose influence extends multiple countries. Through promoting a “race to the top”, net zero pledges can set a standard for companies to meet and companies are further incentivized to outperform their competitors in terms of environmental performance. However, it is important to note that net zero pledges should be accompanied by verifiable and transparent reporting, and that companies should be held accountable for their actions, otherwise, they could be seen as greenwashing. Independent organizations and certifications can play a role in monitoring and verifying companies' net zero pledges and progress. This has been supported by the UN as a UN panel has stated that: “A net zero pledge should be made publicly by the leadership of the organization and include targets for 2025, 2030 and 2035... It should demonstrate that it will help achieve a 50% cut in global emissions by 2030 and will sustain net zero after 2050.”²²

Sustainable Fashion

Sustainable fashion can be defined as clothes, accessories, shoes, etc., that come from raw materials, manufacturing, and transport that have been extracted in the most environmentally friendly and sustainable manner possible. In order to promote sustainable fashion, there must be development of sustainable textile production methods, this includes using sustainable materials, such as organic cotton, linen, and hemp, and implementing sustainable production processes, such as low-impact dyeing

²² “5 Ways to Tackle Greenwashing, According to UN Experts.” World Economic Forum, www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/11/greenwashing-stop-report-un-experts/.

methods. Implementing circular economic practices may also assist the situation. This includes designing products that can be easily repaired, recycled, or repurposed, and implementing systems for collecting and processing used clothing and textiles. The most important step toward achieving truly sustainable fashion is encouraging consumer education and awareness, including educating consumers about the environmental and social impacts of fashion, and encouraging them to make more sustainable purchasing decisions. It is crucial to remember that developing sustainable fashion is a never-ending process that calls for the participation and dedication of all participants in the sector, from suppliers and manufacturers to retailers and consumers. By being educated and adopting sustainable purchasing decisions, consumers contribute significantly to the sustainability of the fashion industry.

Phasing out Fossil Fuels and Promoting Renewable Energy

Even though the solutions discussed thus far in the study guide mainly correlate to the market aspect of this issue, resolving the environmental consequences of the subject is also considered to be part of the Environmental Committee’s responsibilities. Therefore, they may also be mentioned. Another solution for this issue may be for companies that greenwash to actually implement what they are claiming they are already doing. This would mean that mass-polluter companies that have been suspected of greenwashing, to completely stop using fossil fuels such as coal, crude oil and natural gas to power their factories and produce their products. Rather, these companies would begin using renewable power sources such as solar, wind and hydropower energy. Considering that most of the companies that are mentioned have multi-million currency budgets, such a “drastic” measure would not be completely impossible. However, most companies lack incentive to do so, something which can easily be permanent with the rest of the solutions above.

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