

# The phenomenon of greenwashing in the fashion industry: a conceptual framework

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## Abstract

Fashion industry on the environment has a staggering impact size: it is estimated that the sector is responsible for approximately 9% of greenhouse gas emissions, over 92 million tons of waste produced per year and a consumption of water of 79 trillion litres (Niinimäki K., et al., 2020).

These numbers are alarming and underpin the need for fundamental changes in the fashion business model, production, supply chain and consumer behaviour.

The concern about the sustainability issue is growing among the consumers. To address this new need from consumers and to contribute to the sustainability cause, companies in the fashion industry are implementing actions to limit their impact on the environment and are adopting good practices along the entire supply chain, from the raw materials used, to the production processes, to the organisational models (De Ponte C., et al., 2023).

In some cases, the main driver to claim the commitment in the environmental cause is reputation-oriented, and if the commitment to environmental initiatives is not transparent or proportionate with the claim published, then greenwashing occurs (Wren B., 2022).

Greenwashing has usually been defined as a gap between symbolic and substantive actions, also deflecting attention to minor issues (Siano A., et al, 2017). Delmas M. et al. (2011) state that poor environmental performance and positive communication of one's environmental performance are two characteristic behaviours that greenwashing companies engage in.

They also identify three main levels of drivers for greenwashing: external, such as limitations in regulation and stakeholders' pressure; organizational, such as firms' organisational characteristics and inertia; and individual, such narrow decision framing and optimistic bias.

Dobos E., et al. (2022) use in their work a combination of indicators from the literature to describe the main aspects that indicates greenwashing in a firm: hidden trade-off, no proof of the claim, vagueness, worshipping misleading labels, irrelevant claims, describing only the green part of an environmentally unfriendly product, unauthorized use of stamps, unsustainable core business, exaggerate achievements, influencing policymakers against environmentally friendly laws, proclaiming commitments already required by law, fuzzy reporting.

From this starting point, our work aims to investigate the theme of greenwashing on three levels. First, from a scientific literature point of view, by conducting a systematic literature review based on the steps proposed by the Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews - SPAR-4-SLR (Paul J., 2021). This step will allow to understand the greenwashing main characteristics and to individuate the most important firms analysed under this phenomenon.

As for the second phase of the process, based on aforementioned information, we adopt a web scraping tool to investigate major firms' websites encountered during the Literature Review, to analyse the information on their websites, adapting the frameworks individuate in the literature.

Finally, we analyse the Region Marche context, in Italy, applying the framework to the websites of the firms in this region.

As a result, we aim to propose a literature review for academics and policymakers who work on this topic, setting a framework to analyse firms under the lens of greenwashing. The paper will also collect and define the strategies against the greenwashing phenomenon and proposal for improvement, to support firms in their path towards sustainability, avoiding greenwashing.

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