

Seeing greenwashing companies' true colors

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Research in the *International Journal of Environment and Sustainable Development* shows that there is a gap between the environmental messages given to consumers in verbal or visual form and the perception of and trust in those messages and whether consumers recognize some of them as nothing more than greenwashing.

Greenwashing is a neologism that refers to the scurrilous actions of some companies or organizations using misleading marketing tactics to create a false impression that their products or services are environmentally friendly or sustainable when they are not. The term "greenwashing" is a play on the term "whitewashing," which refers to the practice of covering up or hiding negative information. Greenwashing is used to conceal unsustainable or environmentally harmful practices. If consumers recognize greenwashing, then the company's fake appeal to environmentally conscious consumers in order to gain a competitive advantage in the market will be stymied.

Kenny Basso, Jandir Pauli, Priscila Cerutti, Marcia Perin, Vitor Francisco Dalla Corte, and Leila Dal Moro in the Faculdade Meridional, IMED, Brazil carried out a single-factor experiment. In this experiment, participants were shown either text or image-based materials. The researchers found that those individuals exposed to the text format materials engaged with it far less than those exposed to an image. Indeed, those people presented with images were more likely to be suspicious of greenwashing than the text-only group because they were more likely to engage with the material.

The findings of this study highlight the need for consumers to be wary of greenwashing tactics used by companies. The use of images is more engaging and so makes it harder for greenwashing claims by unethical companies to be accepted by consumers.

As [climate change](#) and [environmental problems](#) continue to be pressing [global issues](#), it is crucial that companies and consumers work together towards more [sustainable practices](#). This study sheds light on the need for more transparent communication from companies, and the importance of [consumers](#) educating themselves and taking a proactive role in buying from companies that do not greenwash their products and services.

More information: Leila Dal Moro et al, Greenwash, show your true colours: how verbal and visual messages influence consumers' perception, *International Journal of Environment and Sustainable Development* (2022). [DOI: 10.1504/IJESD.2022.10044789](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJESD.2022.10044789)

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