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Book

A comprehensive guide to greenwashing phenomena, contexts, and trends : the mean, lean washing machine

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A Comprehensive Guide to Greenwashing
Phenomena, Contexts, and Trends

A Comprehensive Guide to Greenwashing Phenomena, Contexts, and Trends

The Mean, Lean Washing Machine

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Foreword

Jean-Patrick Villeneuve (USI Lugano)

WHAT ARE ORGANISATIONS DOING IN THE LAUNDRY
ROOM?

**From New Public Management to Democratic Governance: A Journey
Through Changing Environments and Expectations for Organisations
and Citizens**

'Who does What?' is a fundamental question when trying to understand
human affairs. While descriptive, it enlightens the more complex and tricky
'Who should be doing What?'. These questions have universal value that go
beyond merely domestic considerations. They are as valid in the laundry room
as they are in the political and corporate boardrooms of the nation.

They help in assigning responsibilities and obligations but also set expecta-
tions. Expectations that are set ever higher by citizens and consumers alike,
but expectations that now too often lead to disillusionment and deception.

Understanding the road from expectations to deceptions is a winding one,
and often, too often, seems to go through the laundry room. It is on this intrigu-
ing journey that this book aims to take us.

What the State does has greatly expanded over the centuries. Initially, its
perimeter was limited to the 'Sovereign functions of the State' elements his-
torically linked to the actions of the King, Army, Police, Justice, Money (print-
ing it and collecting taxes), and Diplomacy/Foreign Affairs. Many, if not most,
other social functions were to be provided either by non-state actors, be it the
church or other religious groups, or by diverse associations. Some functions,
deemed outside the realm of the public sector, were to be provided by the
economy writ large.

This state of affairs has greatly evolved over time and across politico-cul-
tural geographies. It can today be understood as something almost entirely
modulable (*à géométrie variable*) despite a number of tropisms anchored in
either historical, cultural, or economic considerations.

What is public and what is private is a matter of appreciation, as much political as cultural. Some functions are said to be clearly and exclusively to be done by the public sector, and others, it is as fervently argued, to be done exclusively by the private sector. These considerations and firmly held assumptions can then be reversed as one crosses borders—political, administrative, cultural, or even entirely imaginary ones. For example, most Western Europeans will define the management of prisons as something that must, necessarily, be wholly managed by the State. But in the United States, it is not rare to see private sector entities operate prisons. As the most central actor in society, and, it is to be remembered, the sole legitimate source of violence, what the State does and does not do has a great influence on all other actors and the system as a whole.

The emergence of New Public Management (NPM) in the 1980s, as well as the trends of greater privatisation of State functions under the likes of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, has had a significant influence. They have led private sector logic to be ever more present in the public sector (performance measurements, pay bonuses, client satisfaction focus, etc.). But—and we do not underline it enough—the opposite is also true, with the private sector taking on public sector-like functions but also assuming public sector-like expectations.

This reality has crystallised even further under the concept of Democratic Governance in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Concepts of openness, transparency, accountability, and participation have been positioned front and centre for any and all institutions. With this approach, it is the means that justify the ends. Organisational success and organisational legitimacy are now rooted in the very processes put in place. Organisational objectives are no longer a unique or even central metric. One needs to show what one does, and it needs to look good!

This system has led to an increasingly confused organisational and conceptual *macedoine*, where organisations have the option of picking and choosing what they like from the public or the private sector… as long as they can get away with it! This mixing of roles and responsibilities is, of course, not entirely politically or philosophically neutral.

For the State, behind the efficiency discourse of NPM, one finds the willingness to run the state more like a private business and to put it under similar obligations of results. One of the consequences has been the shrinking of the State, but also the introduction of a mercantile logic to its actions, whether these are logical, coherent, warranted, or not. Under Democratic Governance lies the idea that the individual has the interest, time, and energy to be part of the decision-making process, that they have the abilities and knowledge to contribute, and that this contribution will be positive. Thus, leaving the citizen to shoulder some of the tasks and responsibilities in the art of Statecraft.

For private enterprises, NPM has meant the opening of new sectors of activity, therefore lucrative opportunities, and in Democratic Governance, a good marketing tool to go beyond the simple flaunting of the quality of the results of their economic contribution and focus on their contribution to the greater social good, notably by advertising the human or ecological sustainability of their actions.

We, as both citizens and consumers, have also been complicit in these changes, seeing them, quite naively, as something that could only be positive. Absolute goods irrespective of the intent of the actors involved.

Organisations have the desire to win on both ends of the discussion: to appear virtuous, effective, open, transparent… but not necessarily to pay the price or to make the necessary efforts.

This has always been in the very nature of the political discourse, a tendency particularly exacerbated in these times of heightened electoral anticipation. For politicians, being in the light and being seen in the best possible light are two important and intemporal realities. It is almost a cliché to outline the fact that a politician often promises things he has no intention or no capability of doing. While some might simply lie, most leave themselves enough room to backtrack on their position, often simply by integrating caveats and equivocations into their statements. Being virtuous and popular is great, but if the price linked to achieving these things can be avoided, all the better. Corollary to that reality, public institutions, under the direct purview of said politicians, are increasingly operating under the same logic. In their case, by obligation rather than by choice. While private sector organisations operate under the imperative but not necessarily singular obligation of financial viability, it is interesting that the same dynamics seem at play on their end.

With the increasingly flexible answers to the 'Who does What' and the 'Who should be doing What' questions and the rise in importance of marketing and communication for organisations, expectations from citizens and consumers, as well as opportunities for public and private organisations, have exploded. The various organisational initiatives emerging from this new state of affairs have led to greater confusion and to two additional interrogations: 'Do they do what they say?' and 'Do they say what they actually do?'

These new questions lend themselves to several allegories. Allegories linking the act of cleaning, the physical removal of dirt, and restoration of a real or imagined *status quo ante* of cleanliness and orderliness to organisational actions are legion. We talk of laundering money, giving it the respectable and legal attributes of regular money; we talk of politicians washing their reputation and building back up a lost aura. Organisations also try to 'clean', as much as possible, their actions to make them look as good as possible.

The washing can be effective, providing a deep scrubbing of dirt and stains. Or it can be merely a light rinse, providing a temporary clean look and a better

smell, but one that is unlikely to sustain close examination. Either way, the last decades have seen an increasing number of organisations using the metaphorical common laundry room. Many organisations, it seems, do not do what they say they do, and often do not say what they actually do. Promises of a long and deep scrub are often nothing more than a quick addition of cheap perfume. However, it seems that people have wised up to those coming simply for a quick rinse and a dose of perfume. But allegories only take us so far in understanding what is going on.

This book takes us on the journey taken by organisations in reshaping the systemic 'Who does What' social question. More specifically, it provides a much-needed analysis of the too often murky, vague, imprecise, and unstructured debates surrounding the logic of this journey for private actors flaunting their newly extolled social roles and contributions. It provides the definitions, evaluations, and analytical grids to make sense of the dynamics. Such a solid contribution offering both breadth and depth is essential for all actors: for public organisations to ensure the regulation of markets; for citizens to better structure some of the nonsense they have been sensing; and for private enterprises to understand that we are on to them. In the near future, they will need to come clean, for real this time!

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
ADNOC	Abu Dhabi National Oil Company
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMA	American Marketing Association
AMR	Academy of Management Review
ASA	Advertising Standards Authority (U.K.)
B2B	Business-to-Business
B2C	Business-to-Consumer
BAT	British American Tobacco
BCE	Before Common Era
BSR	Business for Social Responsibility
CCO	Communicative Constitution of Organisation
CDER	Centre for Drug Evaluation and Research (U.S.)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFCs	Chlorofluorocarbons
CMA	Competitions and Markets Authority (U.K.)
COP	Conference of the Parties
CRM	Cause-Related Marketing
CSO	Chief Sustainability Officer
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSRD	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (EU)
DACA	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (U.S.)
DOJ	Department of Justice (U.S.)
EFRAG	European Financial Reporting Advisory Group
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency (U.S.)
ERCHO	Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organisation (U.S.)
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
ESG	Environmental, social, and corporate governance
ESRS	European Sustainability Reporting Standard
EU	European Union
FDA	Food and Drug Administration (U.S.)
FINTRAC	Financial Transaction and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada
FRC	Romande Consumer Federation (CH)

FTC	Federal Trade Commission (U.S.)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHGs	Greenhouse gases
GM	Genetically Modified
HLEG AI	High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence (EU)
ICCT	International Council on Clean Transportation
ICIJ	International Consortium of Investigative Journalists
IDI	Inclusive Development International
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
LPs	Limited Partnerships
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN)
SEC	Security and Exchange Commission (U.S.)
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (CH)
SD	Sustainable Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMILE	Scholar Maturity Index and Literature Evaluation
SSGA	State Street Global Advisors (U.S.)
TGA	Therapeutic Goods Administration (AU)
TNC	Transnational Corporation
UCPD	Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (EU)
U.K.	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGC	United Nations Global Compact
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
U.S.	United States
WEF	World Economic Forum

1.   Introduction to greenwashing

SOME NOTABLE CASES TO START WITH

One may recall the controversy from 2019 when McDonald's introduced paper straws, initially touted as an eco-friendly choice but later revealed to be non-recyclable. In June 2018, when McDonald's first announced the transition to paper straws, they presented it as a step in their broader commitment to environmental protection. Paul Pomroy, CEO of McDonald's U.K. and Ireland at the time, expressed pride in contributing to this environmental shift, stating, "The government's ambitious plans, along with strong customer feedback, have accelerated the reduction of plastic waste, and I'm pleased that we played a role in this societal change" (BBC News, 2018). Even then-Environment Secretary Michael Gove commended McDonald's for its significant contribution to environmental conservation through the introduction of paper straws (BBC News, 2018).

However, several months later, it was revealed that the newly introduced paper straws, promoted as an environmental choice, could not be recycled, unlike the plastic straws they replaced. The *Sun* newspaper disclosed an internal memo from McDonald's, stating that the paper straws were not recyclable and should be disposed of as general waste until further notice (Arnold, 2019). Afterwards, McDonald's acknowledged that the thickness of the paper straws posed challenges for recyclers. This incident is often reported as one of the most famous cases of greenwashing (Akepa, 2021).

In the summer of 2021, Adidas launched a green marketing campaign for its famous Stan Smith sneakers. The German sportswear giant marketed a new green version of the shoe, claiming it was made with 50% recycled materials. The advertisement depicted a Stan Smith shoe crushing an empty plastic bottle, with the backdrop featuring the slogan "Stan Smith forever – 100% iconic, 50% recycled." Adidas' green initiative to use only recycled polyester by 2024, marked by the sustainable redesign of its popular Stan Smith sneakers, was initially well received. However, following consumer complaints, the advertising faced scrutiny from the French Advertising Standards Authority – raising questions about the authenticity of the brand's green communication campaign. The advertising authority determined that Adidas' ad breached the

professional advertising regulatory rules, which mandate accuracy and non-deceptiveness in ads. The advertisement in question depicted the Stan Smith sneaker alongside claims of significant recycled content that lacked verifiable evidence. In addition, the advertisement's language was ambiguous, leaving it unclear whether the shoe was made of 50% recycled materials or if it was only recycled at the end of its life cycle. Additionally, using the "End plastic" logo was called into question: it misrepresented the shoe's production process, which still involved plastic – even if it is partially recycled (Bittau, 2021). This is another example of greenwashing.

A challenging week began on the afternoon of 15 December 2023 for Chiara Ferragni, Italy's most famous (and wealthiest) digital entrepreneur and influencer. On that day, the Italian Antitrust Authority announced fines against Ferragni and Balocco for their charitable initiative involving the "Pink Christmas" pandoro, produced by the company from Cuneo and branded by the influencer's label. This dessert, sold in 2021 and 2022 for over nine euros – originally, the same unbranded pandoro cost three – was marketed with the promise that the price premium would fund the paediatric oncology department at the Regina Margherita Hospital in Turin. However, this was in contrast to a fixed donation of 350,000 euros made solely by Balocco in May 2022, which was not linked to the pandoro sales proceeds. For promoting the product, Ferragni received a fee from the company of more than one million euros. As such, the scandal has been defined as a Charitywashing case, a form of greenwashing recently discussed in the field.

The cases above are well-known examples of greenwashing, a term that has become synonymous with deceitful environmental or social claims. Over recent decades, this practice has not only proliferated but also evolved into more sophisticated forms (Gatti et al., 2019). The surge in scandals related to greenwashing, the severe repercussions it imposes on organisations genuinely committed to protecting the environment, the prominence of the corporations implicated, and the profound impact of such deception on stakeholders' perceptions underscore the imperative for an in-depth comprehension of this complex issue. Practitioners, academics, and society at large must grasp the intricacies and hazards linked to greenwashing to effectively identify and counteract this ethically dubious practice.

In this introductory chapter, we delve into the origins of the term greenwashing, tracing its evolution and contextualising its current usage. We provide a holistic overview of the practice, examining it through the pragmatic lens of industry professionals as well as through a theoretical framework from both management and philosophy literature. By analysing the phenomenon through multiple perspectives, we aim to equip our readers with a nuanced understanding that transcends superficial knowledge and addresses the ethical dimensions of corporate environmental misrepresentation.

GREENWASHING: HOW IT ALL STARTED – NOT WASHING TOWELS IN THE HOTEL AND THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE "GREEN AND BUSINESS" DISCOURSE

"We'll destroy the environment, but make sure you reuse your towel," wrote the activist Jay Westerveld ironically in his now famous 1986 essay titled "It all comes out in the greenwash," where the term greenwashing was mentioned for the very first time (Johnson, 2022). At that time, the American environmentalist and field biologist was in Samoa studying tooth-billed pigeons when he stopped off at a resort to surf in Fiji. In his hotel room, he found a card with the following message:

> *Save Our Planet: every day, millions of gallons of water are used to wash towels that have only been used once. You make the choice: a towel on the rack means "I will use again". A towel on the floor means "Please replace". Thank you for helping us conserve the Earth's vital resources.*

The card was decorated with the three green arrows of the recycling symbol. Westerveld noted the irony of that message, considering the hotel was focused on a building expansion at the time, with little regard for the surrounding natural environment.

In an interview conducted by Motavalli in 2011 for the *Daily Finance*, Westerveld explained that the word *green* was taken by the Green Party in Germany, which used the term in the context of its work preserving old buildings (instead of building new ones) and stopping forest destruction. "Then, the word *greenwashing* just came to me," said Westerveld. "It seemed really logical, pretty simple, kind of like whitewashing."

At the end of the 1990s, the term greenwashing gained popularity among activist groups and environmentalists thanks to Greer and Bruno's book, *Greenwash: The Reality Behind Corporate Environmentalism* (Greer & Bruno, 1996). The book provided an overview of the damaging effects of transnational corporations' (TNCs) actual behaviour, claiming that TNCs are the primary creators of dirty, unsustainable technologies.

Before the 2000s, however, greenwashing references and, more generally, the debate around the impact of business on our natural environment remained a concern primarily for environmental activists and NGOs on the left. While civil society was trying to boost the issue and create awareness, business companies were silent about the topic for a long time.

The phenomenon of globalisation, the consequent movement of businesses towards TNCs, and the fact that companies have been accused of being key causes of environmental and social disasters have revived questions about

the role of corporations in society. In this context, civil society and national legislatures created new expectations regarding corporate behaviour, altering how the economic, environmental, and social impacts were expected to be balanced in corporate decision-making (Dahlsrud, 2008).

After the 2000s, a paradigm shift in the capitalist conception of corporate responsibility has pushed companies to consider and communicate their environmental impact. The green terminology became translated into business language. Terms like *Triple bottom line*, *Eco-efficiency*, *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR),* and *Sustainability* became diffused into virtually every major corporation in the Western world (Bergquist, 2017).

What happened in between? How does the business world, which for years tried to avoid the social and environmental discourse – even asserting that social and environmental concerns were beyond its scope of responsibility ("the social responsibility of business is to increase its profit" (Mulligan, 1986)) – now position itself as a driver of change? Why do almost all companies in Western countries today wish to appear "green" and communicate their environmental commitments? A possible answer explaining why the green debate has been introduced into the business discourse can be related to the advent of so-called *eco-capitalism* or *business environmentalism* (Strasser, 2011).

New trends in consumption and investment behaviour have certainly favoured the transition towards eco-capitalism. Socially and environmentally responsible investing has grown enormously in the last two decades. Since 1995, when the U.S. SIF Foundation began tracking and measuring sustainable investing assets in the U.S., the field has evolved into a multi-trillion-dollar industry with more than $8.4 trillion invested in 2022 in socially responsible firms (SIF Foundation, 2022). More and more private investors believe that their investments may contribute to advancements in social, environmental, and governance practices, and they integrate environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) criteria in their investment decisions (Pizzetti et al., 2021). Sustainable and ethical consumption has also grown enormously in the last decades. Research suggests that consumers today are willing to pay a premium price for products perceived as green and sustainable, and they are ready to boycott polluting and unethical companies to support socially responsible ones.

Civil society, policymakers, and mass media have played a decisive role in putting environmental and social issues on the public agenda. In their book about sustainability marketing, Belz and Peattie (2012) emphasise the role of mass media in bringing environmental and social issues to the public's attention. They discuss how numerous environmental and social problems are often perceived as distant from people's direct experiences and daily lives. Problems such as global warming, water scarcity in remote regions, soil pollution, child labour, and unacceptable working conditions in developing countries are

challenging for individuals to relate to in their everyday lives. Consequently, mass media play a key role in bringing environmental and social concerns to the forefront of public attention. Through the dissemination of scientific discoveries and news reporting, media and social media contribute to shaping public awareness. However, as public attention is a limited resource, environmental and social issues must compete with other topics to capture a share of it. According to the issue–attention cycle, public focus on a particular issue tends to be fleeting, with attention shifting over time. Despite this dynamic, environmental concerns have consistently maintained a prominent position on the public agenda since the 1970s. One explanation for this enduring attention is the emergence of a seemingly endless array of new environmental problems, ranging from localised toxic contamination to global threats like climate change, deforestation, or plastic pollution in the ocean. Additionally, environmental organisations have successfully presented environmental problems in compelling and dramatic ways. Activist groups like Greenpeace employ symbolic visuals and catchy communication campaigns that resonate in the media. For instance, the highly publicised conflict surrounding the proposed sinking of the oil facility Brent Spar in 1995 evoked a sense of intense drama. The public perceived the debate between Greenpeace and the oil giant Shell as a battle between good and evil, akin to the classic David versus Goliath narrative. This perception often transcends scientific evidence and factual arguments but is used by media to capture attention.

The transition towards eco-capitalism, pushed by global dynamics and the new stakeholders' expectations just described, has favoured the establishment of several principles to balance economic success with environmental and social responsibility. Although these concepts are not novel in economics, they have achieved considerable success and widespread adoption due to the emergence of the new era of eco-capitalism. Among them, some of the most significant are:

• Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): since the mid-1920s, scholars and researchers have discussed the notion of CSR, which deals with the relationship between business and society. In the marketing and corporate communication fields, interest in CSR grew significantly after the 1970s, and, since the beginning of the 2000s, it has become a priority in marketing research (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Signs of the current flourishing of CSR in marketing and corporate communication studies include, for example, the presence of tracks dedicated to CSR in almost all the leading marketing and corporate communication conferences, the establishment of dedicated journals explicitly focused on CSR, and the diffusion of CSR courses at the university level. At the practitioner level, growing

stakeholder pressure to hold companies accountable for their social and environmental issues has been accompanied by the proliferation of CSR reports and CSR ratings and rankings (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

- Sustainable Development (SD): The integration of a sustainable development perspective into strategic management requires companies to approach the business in line with the so-called three Ps of sustainability – People, Planet, and Profit. According to this perspective, businesses should actively incorporate sustainable development goals (SDGs) into their strategies and operations, ensuring the long-term viability of their practices while minimising environmental and social harm and promoting social betterment.
- The Triple Bottom Line approach: according to this approach, companies should adopt a holistic perspective, considering and measuring not only financial gains but also social and environmental impacts. In line with the sustainable development principle, the Triple Bottom Line theory expands the scope of traditional business by simultaneously considering the impact on social well-being, the natural environment, and a fair economy.
- Resource efficiency and circular economy: These concepts describe firms prioritising resource efficiency, promoting waste reduction and recycling, and adopting circular economy principles to minimise resource consumption and waste.

In the era of eco-capitalism, social pressure to become environmentally and socially responsible is transforming business strategies and activities to an unprecedented level. Sarkar and Kotler suggest that CSR and marketing are entering a new era, that of "Brand Activism," that is "the corporate effort to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to make improvements in society" (Sarkar & Kotler, 2020). Corporate activism takes various forms, spanning from the art of crafting persuasive letters to newspapers or politicians, engaging in political campaigns, exercising economic power through boycotts, gathering in powerful rallies, marching through the streets, asserting one's voice through strikes, or making a public statement.

Some examples may clarify how companies engage today in political discussion, taking a stand on socially related subjects. A few years ago, Microsoft opposed President Trump's decision to terminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme, deeming it fundamentally contradictory to its core values and detrimental to its capacity to attract skilled individuals. Microsoft's executives not only affixed their signatures to an open letter in solidarity with DACA but also engaged directly with Congress to advocate for its preservation. Additionally, the company pledged to finance the

legal defence of their employees who fall under the category of "Dreamers," demonstrating their ongoing support (Smith & Korshun, 2018).

Ryanair, the airline headquartered in Dublin, has adopted a particular approach to navigating the complex political landscape of Brexit. CEO Michael O'Leary committed against the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. By expressing his concerns during an airline executives' conference, O'Leary emphasised that the aviation industry would be the first to experience negative consequences, suggesting that triggering a crisis might compel British citizens to reconsider their stance on Brexit. He even contemplated the possibility of grounding Ryanair planes to protest Brexit. It is important to note that O'Leary's opposition did not stem from ideological or moral grounds but rather from the anticipated increase in travel costs within Europe, which would potentially reduce Ryanair's profitability and limit its customers' ability to travel affordably beyond the borders of the United Kingdom (Smith & Korshun, 2018).

In this interconnected context, consumers, especially Millennials, are willing to pay a higher price for social or environmental activist brands, as their emotional connection with such brands goes beyond price logic (Shivakanth Shetty et al., 2019). Therefore, brands, especially those targeting Millennials, cannot afford to be indifferent to social and environmental issues but must take a stance. In this context, greenwashing has reached its moment, not just as a strategy to obtain corporate legitimacy (without paying the costs of being truly green), but also as a prominent topic in media debates and mainstream narratives.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS AND ANTECEDENTS: LANGUAGE, THE TOWER OF BABEL, SOPHISTIC RHETORIC, AND THE ART OF PERSUASION

As we have seen, the first mention of greenwashing goes back to the early 1980s and corporate communication on the (re-)use of towels in the hospitality industry. In the following chapter, however, we argue that the antecedents of today's greenwashing go back to the very beginning of human civilisation, language, and the use and misuse of information.

Following cognitive psychology, the human brain is a dual-process machine, best known through the works of Daniel Kahneman and the distinction between fast and slow thinking (Kahneman, 2013). In ethical contexts, the work of Joshua Greene, building on the dual-process concept, is well known for distinguishing between a "moral tribe" thinking (Greene, 2015) and the rational-deliberative mode, resonating with Kahneman's slow thinking. In evolutionary terms, the more tribal, fast-thinking mode is called archaic thinking and dates back to the inception of *Homo sapiens*. The second thinking mode, however, is

much younger and must be seen as an add-on to the first mode, dating back to some 5,000 years ago. This corresponds roughly with the transition from oral language to scripture around 6,000 years ago and thus with the formalisation, systematisation, and reproducibility of human language. Different ancient narratives and scriptures like the Bible, the Mahabharata or Homer's *Iliad* are full of stories of deception, alliances, fraud, lies, or manipulation. What has not been discussed in the dichotomy of fast and slow thinking is the criminal and instrumental power of slow thinking in a non-credible and strategic way. One may add here that deception and camouflage are natural in the sense that animals and plants also evolved to apply strategies of embellishment, exaggeration, misleading signals, or mimicry. Therefore, the point of this chapter is to shed light on the historical prevalence of misleading behaviour to obtain some instrumental gain, be it financial, evolutionary, prey, or symbolic.

In other words, language has also been used since its inception to mislead. Following the storytelling myths of the Bible, Adam and Eve were convinced by a serpent to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, though they had been told not to. In the Abrahamitic mythology, this led to the fall of man, implying the knowledge of good and evil. The second relevant, powerful myth to understanding the underpinnings of greenwashing is the so-called Tower of Babel: a story to explain the many different human languages and the consequences of what happens when communication is confusing and confused. The link to greenwashing here may be seen in the lack of consistent and credible communication. While the example of the Tower of Babel illustrates the hubris of ambition, greenwashing is much more down to earth as it only misleads about green engagement and the inconsistency between words and deeds. In both cases, however, the victims, so to speak, are those who communicate consistently and credibly but are confronted with mistrust by the misleading communication of the greenwashers and language confusers.

The leitmotif is, therefore, to be seen in the instrumental use of misleading communication, and it is philosophy and academia, as such, that have been a response to the persuasive and manipulative tricks and techniques of the Sophists in ancient Athens. This is to be seen as the birth of philosophy and the sciences. The founding figure of Socrates, whose dialogues were later written down by Plato, leading to the birth of philosophy, is a literary construct of a member of the educated citizens of Athens. Plato's dialogues were based on dialogue and reasoning, contesting given assumptions and, in a way, democratised reason and knowledge. Socrates, however, was not operating in an intellectual vacuum but developed his dialogical teaching method and ideas against the prevalence and dominance of the Sophists, namely elite teachers of the aristocracy, teaching skills in persuasion and rhetoric against high fees affordable only to the noble people and thus serving the status quo. Socrates literally stood up against the Sophists, walking the streets and talking to everybody,

using dialogue and reasoning as methods to teach and train to arrive at a conclusion. What was groundbreaking back then, from today's perspective, offers parallels with ethical theories, particularly those of the open society, including Karl Popper and his critical rationalism or Habermas and his discourse ethics, with both stressing the importance of democratic governance against any concentration of power by absolutism, oligarchism, totalitarianism, or fascism. The link to greenwashing here is the use of sophisticated PR and marketing language to create a green impression, while the underlying actions do not justify the green messages – or divert or omit non-green or unsustainable elements on the product, service, process, or communication level. The common denominator, however, is to be seen in the instrumental nature of mandating and paying for a specific type of communication that follows a specific instrumental purpose of the mandate-giver. In other words, the kind of advantage-taking communication we find in the practice of greenwashing today is not new at all but is as old as human communication. But, on top, it can also be said that the resistance to instrumental-persuasive communication that is misleading is equally old and established – as human communication, when it works consistently and consensually, is a smooth operating system allowing us to reduce transaction costs and collaborate and inform efficiently.

As such, persuasion may have different directions, leading to different ethical assessments. In organisational communication, for example, research has highlighted the Latin roots of persuasion and the change of meaning it may take when occurring in different grammatical contexts: "Persuadere" can be used as a transitive or an intransitive verb – that is, with and without an object. The transitive form of the verb implies a relationship and an interaction among people. The intransitive, on the other hand, focuses on only the act of the subject. The fact that it can be used in Latin in both ways has an effect when translated into another language. In both English and German, for example, "persuadere" with an object means to convince, whereas "persuadere" in the intransitive use without an object means to persuade in the sense of talking someone into something or "to bring someone round" (Shanahan et al., 2018).

Therefore, green persuasion would mean using proof to substantiate verbal claims with facts and deeds. Unfounded claims as they are put forward in greenwashing, however, would fall into the category of persuasion that is instrumental and misleading. This understanding resonates also with the criteria for greenwashing from various organisations, published at the end of this chapter.

ON SURFACE AND SUBSTANCE IN GREENWASHING: A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION ON THE THRESHOLD BETWEEN MAKEUP AND PLASTIC SURGERY

As greenwashing is a rather fuzzy and fluid concept depending not only on the quality of the misleading communication but also on the eye of the beholder, the question of what qualifies as greenwashing and what does not has attracted attention and has led to definitions, theories, and criteria. Naturally, a clear consensus has yet to be reached, as greenwashing (and all the other washings described here) is a moving target. The eye of the beholder is also not a stable concept, as normative considerations of what is misleading to a degree that is not illegal but still concerning are subject to changing bottom lines, each different in different cultural contexts and within societies also not unified. Therefore, in this book, we report the status quo of definitions, theories, and concepts (Chapter 2: Academic Accounts of Greenwashing), as well as different sets of criteria (at the end of this chapter and in Chapter 2). However, in the first comprehensive book on greenwashing and other *washings, we do believe that there is more to say beyond the obvious review of the state of the art. Therefore, this chapter intends to reflect more philosophically and beyond the mere scope of greenwashing on surface and substance, which, in more ontological and epistemological perspectives, is what greenwashing is all about, as the allegoric use of "washing", as derived from whitewashing, already suggests.

When we find that greenwashing is a phenomenon in the eye of the beholder and that the term greenwashing is a co-recreation of (a) a misleading green message and (b) the accusation of misleading communication (Seele & Gatti, 2017), we are already in the midst of the argument that the term greenwashing is about the relationship between surface and substance. The underlying question is: what do we see when we say greenwashing? Moreover, is seeing all that matters when discussing (misleading) communication? Allegoric paraphrases of greenwashing like "window dressing", "impression management", "lipstick on the gorilla", "painting the *Titanic*'s deckchairs a lighter shade of green", or "little green lies" illustrate the concept vividly.

The common denominator of the aforementioned allegoric descriptions is the moral grey zone. Greenwashing is a phenomenon distinct from upfront fraud. It is not a lie, but a "little lie", which technically is still a lie but more likely a lie one gets away with. This is the moral grey zone of greenwashing and why the phenomenon is such a fuzzy and fluid concept. In other words, it would be more precise not to speak of a phenomenon in the eye of the beholder but of a phenomenon in the moral eye of the beholder. That is also why greenwashing invites ethical reflection, as moral perceptions are involved in all

their subjectivity, individuality, and cultural variance. Surface perception is, therefore, the primary criterion, and much of the empirical research we find on greenwashing is testing exactly this: perception measurement of mostly consumers and other stakeholders.

In this more foundational philosophical inquiry, however, the focus on surface perception would only be simplistic and insufficient to understand the phenomenon of greenwashing at large. The fundamental question is, therefore, what is underneath the surface? If we stick to the original allegorical root of whitewashing a wall, the paint is on the surface, and the wall, built of bricks, cement, and maybe plaster, is what is underneath the wall. By painting the wall, the wall receives a surface appearance and surface protection. What is visible to the human eye, however, is only the surface. Deconstructing or x-raying the wall may reveal what the wall is made of. In philosophical terms, this is what we propose to call the substance of the wall. However, not all phenomena are as simple as walls in buildings. The engineering solution of surface paint allows for a much different figuration and presentation than, for example, skin and body or sustainability and companies. In the case of human skin, the skin is in direct connection through the organism's metabolism with the substance. Nutrition, for example, affects both the substance (here, the human body) and the human skin, one of many organs of that organism. Also, unlike the wall of a building, the human body could not exist without the largest human organ, the skin. It gives the substance its form, and without the outer form, the substance could not exist. Unlike the wall, the skin and the body, including muscles, bones, and organs, are symbiotic. The skin also is an essential threshold between the inside and the outside. Through transpiration or hair formation, for example, the skin accommodates the human organism to a suitable temperature. In other words, the surface is the *medium* of communication acting as a threshold between the inside (here, substance) and the outside (here, the environment including impulses and observers).

Equipped with these two analogies on surface and surface perception – with a simple example like the paint on the wall and a holistic example like human skin – we may now position greenwashing within this allegoric play of words. A company is not as static as the wall that gets whitewashed every now and then; as a legal entity, a company – being a contract between other persons (natural and/or legal) – is not as alive as a human being (here understood as a natural person). A company, therefore, appears in between the two. It has the instrumental side of a visible surface that is designed to be perceived in a specific instrumental way. There are experts like corporate communicators, PR, and marketing specialists organising a specific surface perception, particularly for business-to-consumer companies. The brand of the company and/or its products and services also communicate the "personality" of the legal entity. In strategic communication, this is aligned with the most important

stakeholders: consumers; shareholders; and non-governmental organisations. The skin, as an essential organ of the human body, also allows for borrowing analogies: as the skin is the threshold between inside and outside, combining the paradoxical function of dividing while connecting, the (green) value-laden communication of a corporation also signals the substance of a company (i.e., whether it is green or not) and the surface (i.e., the green image it projects). When this communication is inconsistent – and thus misleading – this may cause accusations of greenwashing by different stakeholders (most importantly consumers, NGOs, and shareholders) as greenwashing does have an impact on financial performance and investment decisions (Gatti et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023).

However, the human skin also has a different function that is crucial for the analogy with greenwashing: surface perception and the strategic embellishment of surface perception, also to enforce or camouflage some of the metabolic features of the skin, giving hints on age, nutrition, health, or mating behaviour through smell and transpiration as functions of the skin. This enhancement and impression management of surface perception is possible through makeup, an entire beauty industry worth billions specialised in the hope of changing surface perception to a more favourable outcome. But it does not stop here: plastic surgery, unlike makeup, is not applied on the surface; it is a new and altered surface. Plastic surgery, unlike makeup, cannot be removed by a cleanser, it is part of the fabric; it is the new fabric of the surface.

Therefore, we need to expand the focus from surface and substance to the "and" of "surface and substance", as the two are not separate entities like whitewash applied to the plaster of a wall but like the skin – and in analogy, the perception of a company engaging in (green) marketing and corporate communication forms a third category between inside and outside. In other words, expanding the reflection leads us to an ontological argument. Theoretically, this may be best framed by the founder of philosophy, Aristotle himself, and his distinction (applied to the formal system of logic) between the included and the excluded middle, leading to the law of non-contradiction in traditional logic. This principle has been described in scholastic terms as "tertium non datur" (Latin for "there is no third") as an expression of this law, which posits that there is no middle category between the two categories, here inside and outside. The analogy above on whitewashing a wall and human skin when considering the surface indicates how the Aristotelian law may be applied here in the analogy to greenwashing based on the reflection on surface and substance: greenwashing, just as human skin, is to be understood as a "third" in between the two categories. The natural human skin, in this regard, acts as a third that separates while simultaneously uniting the two categories: a key feature of thresholds. The same holds for greenwashing, as we may say. The communication and marketing, and here more specifically, the misleading green

communication leading to a greenwashing accusation, may be seen as a third category between the inside (substance) and the outside, viz., its perception (surface). However, the two are not to be isolated; and in the case of greenwashing, the contradiction between misleading green communication and the non-green-sustainable substance (core business of the company) is the contradiction that constitutes the greenwashing – as a third category in the middle, as a third category in its own right ("*tertium datur*"). Like in plastic surgery, the greenwashing accusation becomes part of the surface perception and thus of the perception of the whole, as the substance cannot be perceived (unless data from the inside is published or leaked, which usually is not the case as business secrecy is a guaranteed part of the legal entity).

In sum, the reflection and the allegory presented here suggest the following takeaways to gain a more complex understanding of greenwashing:

- Surface embellishment is a principle known in nature (mimicry, camouflage). Therefore, to mislead as such does not necessarily have to be understood as morally dubious but as a survival strategy. Humans use techniques of embellishment and camouflage as well to present themselves more favourably. This may be on the surface (makeup) or an altered surface (plastic surgery).
- The perception of the surface and the underlying assumptions of the (invisible) substance underneath may be understood as a category of its own, a "third" between inside (substance, core business) and outside (perception, marketing, and corporate communication).
- Greenwashing as a threshold (the "and" as a third of substance and surface) is characterised by separating while uniting. In this sense, greenwashing is a phenomenon in the eye of the beholder, but it is not to be separated by the truth proposition between surface and substance.
- Misleading, nevertheless, remains a manipulation where the truthfulness is changed to a more favourable perception, which, however, is not true.
- Truth is an important feature for functional communication that is ethical in the discourse ethics sense, but also efficient as a means of conveying relevant information.
- A certain level of untruthfulness and misleadingness may be understood as part of the game, even creating emotions and drama. However, too much of it may lead to confusion and collapse, as the myth of the Tower of Babel illustrates.

SETS OF GREENWASHING CRITERIA FOR PRACTITIONERS AND RESEARCHERS: AND THE NEW CHAPTER OF GREENWASHING ASSESSMENT BY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Given the roots of greenwashing in the hospitality industry and the manifold definitions and scholarly papers over the last decades, there are still many divergent and incompatible ways of identifying what is greenwashing and what is not. The danger and risk, however, are twofold: first, a greenwashing accusation is unfounded or even weaponised against a competitor; second, companies engaging in green activities and CSR are confused about what counts as credible green engagement and communication and what runs the risk of being accused of greenwashing. This confusion and terminological inconsistency have even led to some organisations not communicating their green engagement at all, thus participating in a trend recently known as "greenhushing" (see the section on greenhushing in Chapter 4).

In this ever-changing discourse on greenwashing and what it is and what it is not, clarity is highly needed, and this means, from a practitioner's perspective, having criteria that define what qualifies as greenwashing and what does not. In recent years, different sets of criteria have emerged to provide guidance. An overview of criteria and definitions may be found in de Freitas Netto et al. (2020) or Gatti et al. (2019). Nevertheless, in the following, we present a selection of the most prevalent criteria going back to the four original Greenpeace criteria of greenwashing, the seven sins of greenwashing from the consultancy TerraChoice in 2007, and more recently, the ten criteria from the Norwegian organisation Skrift in 2020.

The environmental NGO Greenpeace was among the first to issue a set of four greenwashing criteria around 2005. These were listed on their website, along with the names of companies falling into one of the four criteria. However, the webpage has been down for many years now. Rumours among its members have it that the legal complaints of companies being listed on the website made it impossible to keep up the criteria and the list of companies in breach of them. Therefore, the four criteria cannot be quoted anymore from their original source. Nonetheless, they have been archived and published by greenwashing scholars, such as Zanasi (Zanasi et al., 2017) and Seele (Seele, 2022). Despite the issues related to their publication, the four original Greenpeace greenwashing criteria still provide a good orientation for practitioners on what to understand as greenwashing.

1. *Dirty business*: consists of touting an environmental programme or product while the corporation's product or core business is inherently polluting

or unsustainable. An example would be a company that brags about its boutique green R&D projects – while most of its spending and investment are used to reinforce old, unsustainable, polluting practices.

2. *Ad bluster*: entails either using targeted advertising and public relations campaigns to exaggerate an environmental achievement to divert attention away from environmental problems or spending more money on advertising an environmental achievement than actually doing it. An example would be a company that promotes a million-dollar ad campaign about a clean-up that costs them much less.

3. *Political spin*: involves advertising or speaking about "corporate green" commitments while lobbying against pending or current environmental laws and regulations. An example is when companies use advertising or public statements to emphasise corporate environmental responsibility in the midst of legislative pressure or legal action.

4. *It's the law, stupid!*: consists of advertising or branding a product with environmental achievements that are already required or mandated by existing laws. For example, if an industry or company has been forced to change a product, clean up its pollution, or protect an endangered species, but then uses PR campaigns to make such actions look proactive or voluntary.

Because of their clarity, Greenpeace's criteria for greenwashing are still being taught and used in greenwashing research, as we will later discuss in Chapter 2. However, given their bluntness, some organisations felt accused of misleading green communication, though exaggeration and embellishment are part of strategic marketing communication and public relations. Hence, a few years later, in 2007, the environmental consultancy TerraChoice (later acquired by UL) put forward seven criteria called the sins of greenwashing (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). Unlike the more general Greenpeace criteria, TerraChoice's are exclusively on a product level and conceived to help consumers and companies avoid the pitfalls of misleading green claims accused of greenwashing. One of the peculiarities of the TerraChoice (now UL) criteria is that they are published, but, according to the page of UL, they may not be quoted or highlighted – a statement that contradicts the fundamentals of publication (and could count as something like *publication-washing*, that is, publishing content that the publisher prohibits from being quoted). As the freedom of research in open societies is guaranteed by the Swiss constitution (and many other constitutions), the criteria are referenced here as they are referenced in many scholarly contributions on greenwashing (for a systematic review, see de Freitas Netto et al., 2020), although they do not offer much more than what the Greenpeace criteria offer in a more concise way. Basically, the criteria

exemplify what kind of misleading communications may cause greenwashing, framed in a moralistic-normative way labelled as "sins", giving the phenomenon a non-scientific moral attitude that, by its nature of coming about, has one purpose: selling attention and mandates for the company. The criteria are: (1) Sin of the hidden trade-off (narrow set of attributes); (2) Sin of no proof; (3) Sin of vagueness; (4) Sin of worshipping false labels; (5) Sin of irrelevance; (6) Sin of the lesser of two evils; and (7) Sin of fibbing. Conceptually, as highlighted in Chapter 2, the criteria are well described in the scholarly literature when it comes to communication standards of corporate sustainability and corporate social responsibility and, more specifically, CSR reporting following the guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). Here, the concept of "materiality" of green or CSR communication provides a background for engaging in committed, authentic, and credible communication (Wagner & Seele, 2017; Whitehead, 2017).

In 2020, in an effort to call for action against greenwashing, the Norwegian "business climate leader" organisation Skift published ten additional criteria on a webpage available in English and Norwegian (Skift, 2020). These have been signed by over 200 business corporations and may be understood as self-regulation of companies for engaging in corporate communication that does not fall into greenwashing. Their definition is broad in scope and puts emphasis on backing up all claims being made concerning CSR issues: "greenwashing is a form of misleading marketing or communication, where a product, service or company is presented as 'better' in respect to climate change, the environment or human rights issues, without proper documentation to back this claim" (Skift, 2020). The ten Skift criteria, here listed with their explanations, are recommended to practitioners and researchers as they provide helpful guidance on how not to run into greenwashing accusations and how to engage in and benefit from the positive effects of green communication highlighting green commitment.

1. *Be honest and accountable*. Be careful when using words like green, sustainable, recyclable, eco-, and fair without both explaining and documenting what your company has done or will do to ensure these statements can be verified. Avoid using pictures of pristine nature, green leaves, windmills, or happy workers to come off as more sustainable. Do not use results from reports without context to better suit your marketing.
2. *Make sure that your company's sustainability efforts are not limited to your communications and marketing departments*. Companies that continue with business as usual but employ a marketing strategy focusing on sustainability will end up as greenwashers in almost every case. Aim for a holistic approach to sustainability. Be careful when using words

like green, sustainable, recyclable, eco-, and fair without both explaining and documenting what your company has done or will do to ensure these statements can be verified.

3. *Avoid talking about the importance of sustainability, nature, the climate, and ethical trade if your company has not made serious efforts on these issues yourselves.* It is nice to raise the Pride flag, mark International Women's Day, wear a sustainability goals pin, or share #blacklivesmatter, but it will appear hollow if this is the extent of your commitment to sustainability.

4. *Do not under-communicate your company's own emissions and negative impacts on the climate, nature, and human lives.* It is better to admit to being part of the problem and focus on what can be done to improve. A good plan and clear goals will be appreciated by the public. Most people cheer for those who do their best.

5. *Be careful using a large share of the marketing budget on small measures that do not affect your company's footprint significantly.* If marketing is focused on the five percent of your range labelled as "sustainable," but the remaining 95 percent is causing harm to the climate, environment, and people producing them, you should have concrete plans for changing that ratio drastically.

6. *Avoid buying a clean conscience through climate quotas or by letting others clean up ocean plastic.* Businesses taking sustainability efforts seriously start by working on their own footprint.

7. *Use established labelling, or work towards the establishment of good labelling mechanisms in your industry if it is lacking today.* Established labelling makes it easier for both people and businesses to make informed choices. Labelling that might wrongly give the impression of a third-party certification is not advised.

8. *Be careful using terms such as "better for the climate, nature, and the environment."* Almost all production of goods and services affects the biosphere negatively in some way or another. If there is no concrete documentation of how a product could be deemed "better," it should not be marketed as such.

9. *"Cherry Picking" from the UN sustainable development goals can lead you astray.* The most important sustainability goals are those that have the closest link to the company's core activities. If the production line emits large amounts of CO_2 or causes violations of human rights in another country, you should avoid marketing the work on equality in your home country.

10. *Donations and sponsorships are great, but they are not proof that you are working on sustainability issues.* Again, focus on the company's core activities rather than listing donations to a respected organisation as the

company's effort for change. Products and services provided must change according to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the goals listed in the Paris Agreement (Skift, 2020).

Since then, Skift has developed an AI-based tool to help consumers, companies, and governments avoid or identify greenwashing. The AI-based tool allows a user to feed a text into the tool to get an impression of whether the ten (or some) criteria are met. Skift's webpage promotes this tool, stating:

> Check whether your text has a high risk of greenwashing with our analysis tool (prototype). We check the text against criteria 1, 4, 8 and 10 in the Guide Against Greenwashing, and also provide you with tips to improve your text. (Skift, 2020,)

We fed the following test text, which obviously contains greenwashing, to the AI-based tool:

> Our lemonade is all natural and sustainable. No pesticides and herbicides are intoxicating the environment as our ingredients are only water, sugar, and artificial flavours.

The machine rightly identified a greenwashing risk – although it did not catch the trick of the text "selling" artificial flavours as natural, implying that artificial flavours do not need nutrition and treatment like real fruits. The AI got the hint with artificial flavours but does not comment on the weasel word "natural", which literally may mean anything and is not a protected qualification.
  Here is the reply from the AI:

Analysis

Risk of greenwashing: Moderate.

The text has a moderate risk of greenwashing. While it mentions that "the lemonade is 'all-natural' and sustainable", it lacks specific details and documentation to support these claims. The use of the term "artificial flavours" contradicts the claim of being natural. Additionally, there is no mention of any efforts to reduce environmental impact or promote sustainability beyond the absence of pesticides and herbicides.

Suggested Improvements

Provide specific details: It is important to provide specific details and evidence to support claims of being natural and sustainable. This could include information about sourcing ingredients, production processes, and any certifications or standards followed.

Avoid contradictory statements: The mention of "artificial flavours" contradicts the claim of being all natural. It is important to ensure consistency in messaging to avoid confusion and scepticism.

Highlight sustainability efforts: To improve transparency, it would be beneficial to mention any additional sustainability efforts beyond the absence of pesticides and herbicides. These could include initiatives to reduce water usage, packaging waste, or carbon emissions.

Consider certifications: Obtaining certifications from recognised organisations can help validate claims of being natural and sustainable. This could include certifications for organic ingredients or sustainable production practices.

Provide information on ingredient origins: Including information about where the ingredients are sourced from can help demonstrate a commitment to sustainability and support for local or ethical suppliers (Skift, 2020, tested on Jan. 13th, 2024).

Overall, the AI tool is a helpful assessment tool for a first impression and orientation. It remains, however, to be seen if the changing semantics of what stakeholders understand to be misleading green communication will lead to an objective assessment, given that human discourse and semantics as such are fluid concepts. Therefore, what holds true for other AI applications is also advisable for the Greenwashing AI assessment tool: to maintain an (expert) "human-in-the-loop" instead of a totally automated assessment.

More on the latest trends in identifying greenwashing and the trend to regulate it is discussed in the last part of the book in the outlook chapter (Chapter 4).

2. Academic accounts of greenwashing

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1, greenwashing was introduced and analysed through the lens of ethics and philosophy. In the following chapter, the phenomenon is discussed from a different viewpoint. Marketing and management literature will provide the framework to understand the managerial implications of greenwashing and the business dynamics associated with it.

GREENWASHING AS A DEFLECTED FORM OF SUSTAINABILITY MARKETING

The Roots of Sustainability Marketing

From a corporate strategy viewpoint, greenwashing could be understood as a deviated form of sustainability marketing. Therefore, to understand greenwashing, we need first to define what sustainability marketing is. Sustainability marketing derives from the notions of environmental or green marketing, societal marketing, and social marketing. We, therefore, propose a short description of each phenomenon to arrive at an understanding of what sustainability marketing is.

Environmental marketing became popular in the 1970s when it was introduced to identify the marketing of products designed with respect for the environment and targeted the so-called green consumers, that is, consumers concerned with incorporating ecological considerations into their purchasing decisions. The initially small segment of green consumers, mainly belonging to groups of activists and environmentalists of the 1970s, has gradually grown and developed. Increasingly, green credentials have established themselves as appreciated features in various product categories, making "the green" a differentiating factor for building competitive advantage. Since the 2000s, green communication and marketing have become so popular in the U.S. that marketing scholars and consultants have begun to study their evolution, further segmenting green consumers based on their values, purchasing behaviours, and level of activism.

As discussed in the literature (Belz & Peattie, 2012; Kotler, 1972), societal marketing proposes that the intersection of three perspectives – organisational goals, consumer goals, and societal goals – may lead to marketing opportunities for businesses. Based on two dimensions, immediate consumer satisfaction and long-run social benefits, social marketing categorises products into four groups: deficient products (low long-run social benefit and low consumer immediate satisfaction); pleasing products (no long-run social benefit and high consumer immediate satisfaction); salutary products (high long-run social benefit and low consumer immediate satisfaction); and the so-called desirable products (high long-run social benefit and high consumer immediate satisfaction). Deficient products fail to meet customer satisfaction and do not contribute to the long-term interests of society (e.g., unsafe cars). Pleasing products provide high levels of immediate satisfaction but may challenge long-term social welfare (e.g., polluting sports cars). Salutary products may have limited appeal, but they offer long-term benefits to society (e.g., car sharing). Desirable products provide both immediate customer satisfaction and long-term social benefits (e.g., hybrid or electric cars).

According to societal marketing, companies should eliminate deficient products, incorporate pleasing credentials into salutary products, and integrate salutary features into pleasing products. The objective of such an approach is to transform purchasing and consumption habits by making only desirable products available to the market. Corporate investments should, therefore, be concentrated on making every firm's product desirable.

Scholars have harshly criticised societal marketing because of the impossibility of translating its main idea into practice (Crane & Desmond, 2002). Who should and can decide what is in the public's best interest? What about personal freedom in consumption choices (provided they are legal) and the consumers' attitudes towards pleasing products? These unsolved challenges explain why societal marketing has remained underdeveloped in the literature, leaving the ground for new forms of responsible marketing.

Societal marketing must be distinct from social marketing, which deals with applying marketing practices and tools to address social change issues. Social marketing programmes are typically developed and implemented by individual public service organisations or NGOs to influence the behaviour of individuals or communities to enhance their well-being or that of society. However, there is a growing trend towards forms of collaboration between the profit and non-profit sectors as they are both increasingly concerned with changing unsustainable consumer habits.

Social marketing encompasses social communication campaigns designed to raise awareness among people. By adopting a full marketing logic based on developing and implementing the marketing mix, social marketing is considered a more comprehensive and effective approach to motivating and sustaining

pro-social behavioural changes. Initially, social marketing was mainly associated with public health campaigns aimed at reducing harmful behaviours such as smoking, alcoholism, drug abuse, or overeating. However, its applications have expanded over the years to include environmental campaigns promoting wilderness protection, conservation of natural resources, clean air, and energy efficiency, as well as other social campaigns addressing topics such as human rights, corruption, gender, and racial equality (Belz & Peattie, 2012).

According to marketing literature (Belz & Peattie, 2012), sustainability marketing constitutes a logical evolution from the previously described approaches (green marketing, societal marketing, and social marketing). It extends and further elaborates the relationship between marketing and ecological and social issues. Sustainability marketing implies a new conception of marketing that can be adopted by any firm in every industry. It encompasses the social and environmental logic typical of social, societal, and green marketing, often relegated to certain product categories and specific firms targeting niche segments of conscious consumers. Doing sustainability marketing today means considering the three principles of Sustainable Development (SD) promoted by the United Nations (People, Planet, Profit) in the various marketing decisions, whether related to production, distribution, communication, or pricing.

Based on these clarifications, sustainability-marketing management refers to "planning, organising, implementing, and controlling marketing resources and programmes to satisfy consumers' wants and needs, while considering social and environmental criteria and meeting corporate objectives" (Belz & Peattie, 2012). In simple terms, sustainability marketing may be described as building and maintaining long-term sustainable relations with customers, the social context, and the natural environment (Belz & Peattie, 2012).

Therefore, sustainability marketing implies that every marketing decision is evaluated in terms of its social, environmental, and economic impacts. According to sustainability marketing, marketing actions and programmes aimed at respecting the environment and supporting the social betterment of the community are no longer seen, as in the past, as being in opposition to making a profit, but they are perceived as opportunities for growth and as potential sources of competitive advantage.

Consider, for example, Too Good To Go, a company designed to address food waste. The company, which presents itself as a social impact business, has developed a food app that connects customers and local restaurants by offering the purchase of unsold food products (such as bread, cakes, sandwiches, or whole meals) at discounted prices at the end of the day. This initiative allows many small and medium-sized businesses to reduce the costs associated with the disposal of unsold foods while offering a benefit to consumers and reducing food waste.

Sustainability marketing is not limited to companies with a clear social or environmental focus, but it is becoming an essential perspective for every company in almost every market environment (at least in Western countries). Small businesses, as well as multinational corporations, are called upon to adopt this approach, which is aligned with the current orientation of marketing.

In 2013, the American Marketing Association (AMA) revised the definition of marketing to express the societal marketing orientation established after 2000. According to this view, marketing should focus on offerings that have value for customers and simultaneously enhance society's well-being. The AMA 2013 definition of marketing (approved in 2017) claims that "marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (*What Is Marketing? – The Definition of Marketing* – AMA, 2023).

From Sustainability Marketing to Greenwashing

Nowadays, companies engage in sustainability marketing in a variety of ways.

First and foremost, they do it *directly* by integrating sustainable development principles into their business strategies and activities. An increasing number of companies are proactively committed today to adopting sustainable practices across various aspects of their business. They are implementing energy-efficient technologies, reducing carbon emissions, implementing waste management systems, and optimising resource consumption. The circular economy is becoming an option for several small, medium, and large firms. In addition to environmental considerations, companies are increasingly incorporating social responsibility initiatives into their business activities. They actively promote diversity and inclusion, engage in philanthropy, support local communities, and ensure fair labour conditions throughout their supply chain.

At the highest level of direct engagement with sustainability marketing, companies integrate sustainability into their corporate culture, making it a core value embraced by employees at all levels. These companies often provide training programmes designed to promote and integrate ethics into corporate culture. They recognise the role of the Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO), establish internal sustainability committees, and encourage employee involvement in corporate sustainability initiatives.

Today, businesses may also engage in sustainability marketing *indirectly* – by financing other organisations. They can do so regularly, through an established and continuous relationship with a non-governmental organisation (NGO), or occasionally, in relation to specific campaigns. This is the case of Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) initiatives, where a firm works together with an NGO or a charity to sustain a social or environmental project. Usually,

the financial contribution is linked to the sale of a specific product within a particular timeframe, but the donation could also become stable and regular. An example is the collaboration between UNICEF and Pampers. Starting from 2006, through its "1 Pack = 1 Vaccine" campaign, Pampers has been actively involved in supporting the Neonatal Tetanus Elimination Programme of UNICEF.

CRM has often been criticised because of the instrumental approach behind it. In several cases, CRM is just seen by companies as a tactical tool to improve reputation and make money, as some controversial cases illustrate. In 1983, for example, American Express engaged in a CRM programme to assist in the restoration of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. American Express generated $1.7 million for the cause while spending $6 million on advertising its "good" commitment (Berglind & Nakata, 2005).

A different way to engage in sustainability marketing is through *collaborations*. A business company may collaborate with an NGO to provide a positive social and environmental impact. Collaboration goes beyond mere funding. It implies sharing different resources at various levels, whether tangible, intangible, or involving employee interactions. Consider, for instance, the collaboration between Coca-Cola and WWF. In 2007, the two organisations launched a partnership to secure freshwater resources that extended across over 50 countries. Over the years, the partnership expanded the focus beyond water provision to address the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions throughout Coca-Cola's supply chain. Another example of a company well known for its collaborative approach to addressing social and environmental challenges is Nestlé. The Swiss company is actively engaged in establishing long-term relationships and collaborations with various stakeholders, including industry associations, NGOs, civil society organisations, academia, and governments. The company believes that partnership with others is required today to deliver a greater positive impact. Based on the well-known Creating Shared Value approach (Porter & Kramer, 2011), the company engages in a multi-stakeholder dialogue to generate a positive impact for the business, its shareholders, society, and the planet.

From a moral (normative) perspective, it is not easy to judge the ethical approach of multinational corporations like Nestlé (or to guess the underlying goals behind their actions). On one side, they are the primary promoters and supporters of sustainability marketing and have fostered its dissemination and development within marketing practice. On the other side, however, they are often regarded as examples of unethical businesses, often cited as negative examples in business ethics courses. For years, Nestlé has been accused of various scandals and controversies. For example, in the 1970s, the company was accused of sending saleswomen dressed as nurses to convince mothers in developing countries that their milk formula was better than their own breast

milk (the Baby Formula Scandals). In 2021, Nestlé was sued for allowing forced labour on their cocoa plantations. A class action lawsuit is currently pending.

By looking at the issue from a broader perspective, one can see a hidden contradiction between the flourishing momentum of the managerial application of sustainability marketing (instrumental and win–win logic) and the environmental damage caused by the production system perpetuated by big corporations – often characterised by amazing CSR profiles and sustainability-related projects. It seems that, while promoting themselves as green and sustainable, corporations operate just as they are used to doing: privileging profits and sitting out the urgent challenges posed by the environment.

The consideration above allows us to understand that companies may also engage in a distorted or deflected form of sustainability marketing, named greenwashing.

Before presenting a comprehensive analysis of definitions and typologies of greenwashing phenomena as discussed in management and marketing literature, as well as theories and findings of current research, the next subchapter will provide an overview of publications in the field. The longitudinal analysis of greenwashing-related studies reveals how the topic is gaining momentum not only in management practice but also in management research.

A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS OF GREENWASHING RESEARCH

Academic literature about greenwashing is expanding, with more than 3,393 articles mentioning "greenwashing" or "greenwash"[1] retrieved from the ABI/Inform ProQuest database. The analysis of the years of publication reveals a general and continuous increase in the number of publications addressing greenwashing. Before 2005, there were only a few articles on the topic per year. However, since 2008, the number of publications has consistently grown (Gatti et al., 2019). In a study about greenwashing trends in academic literature, Montgomery et al. (2023) revealed that journal articles about greenwashing in the ABI/Inform ProQuest database moved from about 50 papers in 2005 to 100 in 2011 and to more than 500 in 2021, reaching a new record of publications. It is interesting to note that Montgomery et al. (2023) entitled their literature review about greenwashing research "No end in sight? A greenwash review and research agenda". The trend in management and business research is unquestionable, and it suggests that we are currently experiencing a proactive phase of greenwashing research, supporting the claim that the proliferation of greenwashing practices in business has been accompanied by the expansion of the relative literature.

Among the academic journals publishing articles on greenwashing, the *Journal of Business Ethics* emerges as the leading publication journal, followed by the *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability* journal and *Organization & Environment*.[2] The fact that *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability* is one of the leading publications in the sector reveals how greenwashing and CSR issues, in general, are entering a new phase where corporate implementation of CSR and sustainability is no longer merely a merely management concern, but it also deals with the institutional and political environments. Indeed, even though the majority of studies still belong to the fields of marketing, corporate communication, and management, there is an increasing number of publications focused on accounting, law, and legislation.

Publications about empirical studies increased consistently after 2003, reaching more than 70% of the entire publication production in 2019 (Gatti et al., 2019). Empirical research in the field encompasses a range of research methods, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Among the different research techniques employed by scholars studying greenwashing, case study, survey research, and experimental research methods are the most commonly employed (Gatti et al., 2019).

While academic articles about greenwashing are becoming more numerous, to our knowledge, only a few business-related books have discussed the overarching phenomenon so far. Some of the existing books (Miller, 201; Pearse, 2012) discuss greenwashing cases and related scandals with the main objective of making the public aware of the practice. Other books have analysed the phenomenon from an academic viewpoint; for example, Van der Ven (2019) proposes a novel theory to study eco-labelling credibility, while Bowen (2014) applies a theoretical model to understand symbolic corporate environmentalism. Her discussion leads to the new concept of the "social energy penalty", which identifies the social cost associated with corporate actions aimed at limiting the conversation on environmental problems and solutions. Finally, Vollero's book (2022) analyses academic business-research literature about greenwashing, providing an interesting picture of previous research on the topic.

GREENWASHING DEFINITIONS FROM ACADEMIC LITERATURE

Table 2.1 summarises the main definitions of greenwashing discussed in the literature. The table has been developed starting from the supplementary materials of Pizzetti et al. (2021). The original table has been revised to update the classification with additional definitions. Therefore, the resulting table (Table 2.1) combines Pizzetti et al. (2021)'s review of greenwashing definitions with an analysis of greenwashing literature performed by the authors.

Table 2.1   *Overview of greenwashing definitions*

Greenwashing-definition clusters	Main definitions and related references
Disinformation	"Disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image" (definition taken from the 10th edition of the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* and reported by: Furlow, 2010; Gillespie, 2008; Mitchell & Ramey, 2011; Ramus & Montiel, 2005; ; Vos, 2009; Wang & Sarkis, 2017) "The act of disseminating disinformation to consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service" (Baum, 2012)
False or misleading claims	"Making false or misleading claims about purportedly environmentally friendly aspects of products or services" (Lane, 2013) "The act of misleading consumers about the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service" (Chen & Chang, 2013; ; Parguel et al., 2011) "False advertising" (Mills, 2009)
Not credible communication: • not substantiated by a credible certification • not supported by evidence	"A claim about the environmental or social benefits of the product that is unsubstantiated" (Bazillier & Vauday, 2009) "Making claims that are neither substantiated by a credible third-party certification nor by evidence" (Alves, 2009)
Selective disclosure of positive information	"The selective disclosure of positive information about a company's environmental or social performance, without full disclosure of negative information on these dimensions, so as to create an overly positive corporate image" (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006, 2011) "Communication that misleads people regarding environmental performance/benefits by not disclosing negative information and disseminating positive information about an organisation, service, or product" (Tateishi, 2017) "[A] symbolic strategy whereby firms seek to gain or maintain legitimacy by disproportionately revealing beneficial or relatively benign performance indicators to obscure their less impressive overall performance" (Marquis et al., 2016) "[T]he practice of promoting environmentally friendly programs to deflect attention from an organisation's environmentally unfriendly or less savoury activities" (WebsterDictionary, 2024)

Greenwashing-definition clusters	Main definitions and related references
Discrepancy between words and deeds: • Symbolic conformity • Decoupling from standards	"Greenwashing combines poor environmental performance and positive communication about the environmental performance" (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Guo et al., 2017) **Symbolic conformity:** "Not walking the talk", "Symbolic information emanating from an organisation without substantive actions" (Walker & Wan, 2012). They also define greenwashing as a gap between "symbolic" and "substantive" corporate actions. "A specific subset of symbolic corporate environmentalism in which the changes are both merely symbolic and deliberately so" (Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014) **Decoupling from standards:** "Organisations follow formal policies, plans, and programs to demonstrate to the public that they are compliant, and decoupling their actual operations from formal structures in an attempt to buffer internal conflicts from an uncertain situation" (Guo et al., 2017) "A decoupling strategy when it is based on policy claims, codes of conduct (Christmann & Taylor, 2006), social accreditations or green labels (Walker & Wan, 2012) designed to signal conformity thought certifications, rather than actually conforming" (Roulet & Touboul, 2015) "A deliberate disconnect between organisational structures that enhance legitimacy and organisational practices that are believed within the organisation to be technically efficient" (Jamali et al., 2010)
Accusation-based	"Greenwashing is a co-creation of an external accusation toward an organisation with regard to presenting a misleading green message" (Seele & Gatti. 2017)
Deceptive manipulation	"It consists in deceptive conduct, in which sustainability communication engenders a deliberate manipulation of business practices aimed at making tangible statements regarding corporate sustainability" (Siano et al., 2017)

Source: Authors' elaboration from the supplementary materials of Pizzetti et al. (2021).

To classify greenwashing definitions, Pizzetti et al. (2021) have developed a summary table reporting the main definitions discussed in the literature. We further elaborated the table for a comprehensive and updated synthesis (Table 2.1). Given the complexity of greenwashing phenomena and the overlap in definitions, the different definition clusters are not mutually exclusive. In

the following paragraphs, the different definitions presented in Table 2.1 are reported and discussed.

Greenwashing definitions are linked to several attributions or misleading practices. One of the most widely accepted definitions of greenwashing considers it as "Disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image" (definition taken from the 10th edition of the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*).

Even though there is agreement in the literature about the association between greenwashing and disinformation in general, when moving towards more specific explanations of greenwashing, scholars disagree on the scope of the practice as well as on the degree of falsehood implied in the message. While most definitions consider greenwashing to be exclusively related to environmental issues (more than 60% of existing definitions), some academics argue that greenwashing also deals with social concerns (Gatti et al., 2019). The current widely shared academic interpretation of the debate, which we also support, is that greenwashing can be seen as an umbrella concept incorporating similar washing phenomena with different scopes. The same term, greenwashing, is then used also in a narrow sense to indicate washing practices related to environmental issues. This interpretation explains why so many different washing-related terms have recently been recently developed. The proliferation of the washing terminology is, therefore, an answer to the need to distinguish among phenomena that share certain processes and traits but differ in terms of scope and topic.

As previously mentioned, another distinction discussed by academics in the field regards the level of falsehood implied in greenwashing communication. Some scholars perceive greenwashing as false advertising or misleading/false claims (Lane, 2010, 2012; Mills, 2009). Others argue that greenwashing also includes claims that lack substantiation from credible third-party certifications or evidence (Bazillier & Vauday, 2009). In this case, the corporate message could be true, but without certification from an external organisation, the communication could be classified as greenwashing.

Other researchers suggest that greenwashing is not typically false communication, but rather, it involves the selective disclosure of positive information about a company's environmental or social initiatives while concealing or downplaying any negative aspects. According to this view, greenwashing corresponds to obscuring potentially harmful information by an organisation (Mitchell & Ramey, 2011). This perspective presents greenwashing as a sophisticated tactic employed by companies to obscure potentially detrimental information from public scrutiny. By selectively disclosing positive information, firms may create a favourable image of their environmental and social

performance while avoiding mentioning unfavourable practices or impacts. Through selective disclosure, organisations aim to manipulate public perception, maintain a positive reputation, and potentially attract conscious consumers and investors. Under this view, poor environmental performance alone does not constitute greenwashing per se. A polluting company may choose not to promote any positive actions or initiatives, thus avoiding claims that could be scrutinised. Alternatively, a firm may possess a relatively positive track record in terms of environmental and social responsibility, but it fails to address certain negative impacts publicly. Therefore, by intentionally diverting attention away from problematic practices, companies commit greenwashing, regardless of their actual engagement in sustainability.

This final consideration highlights an important aspect of the greenwashing phenomenon: to be considered greenwashing, the practice must be deliberate (Mitchell & Ramey, 2010). Therefore, "genuine" greenwashing is always intentional.

Very close to the selective perspective, the discrepancy approach looks at greenwashing as "the intersection of two behaviours: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance" (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Definitions based on this perspective focus on the discrepancy between corporate words and deeds. In simple terms, using the well-known expression coined by Walker and Wan, engaging in greenwashing means "not walking the talk" (Walker & Wan, 2012).

Within the framework of the discrepancy perspective, greenwashing has also been discussed as a strategy for decoupling from standards. As Roulet and Touboul suggest, greenwashing can take the form of "a decoupling strategy when it is based on policy claims, codes of conduct, social accreditations, or green labels designed to signal conformity through certifications, rather than actually conforming" (Roulet & Touboul, 2015). According to this view, greenwashing is related to the concept of decoupling implementation from certification. The term indicates the practice of showing standards without continuously complying with the requirements prescribed by the certification (Aravind & Christmann, 2011).

Another subcategory of the discrepancy group of definitions focuses on the gap between "symbolic" and "substantive" corporate actions. Discussed under the framework of ceremonial conformity and symbolic conformity literature, these definitions approach greenwashing as "symbolic corporate environmentalism in which the changes are both merely symbolic and deliberately so" (Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014). Note that even the symbolic conformity approach to greenwashing emphasises the deliberate nature of greenwashing.

Therefore, as previously mentioned, "genuine" greenwashing always implies an intentionally misleading message. However, according to Seele and Gatti (2017), the misleading intent of the corporate communication practice or the deliberative fabrication of false messages is not enough to claim the presence of greenwashing. Greenwashing only exists in the face of an accusation of misrepresentation. The accusation-based definition of greenwashing defines greenwashing as "a co-creation of an external accusation toward an organisation with regard to presenting a misleading green message" (Seele & Gatti, 2017). The accusation process is therefore a central aspect of greenwashing. In line with literature on corporate social irresponsibility, which claims that corporate behaviour is socially irresponsible only when observers perceive it as such (Lange & Washburn, 2012), this view applies the formula of *no accusation, no greenwashing* to underline the ontological nature of greenwashing as a phenomenon in the eye of the beholder. Indeed, regardless of the degree of deceit in the message, greenwashing is only deemed to exist when media, NGOs, or other stakeholders attribute blame to a message or a company.

By combining the discrepancy factor with the accusation element, Seele and Gatti (2017) developed the distortion-based greenwashing matrix. The matrix allows a deeper and more nuanced understanding of occurrences related to greenwashing. We report and discuss below the four cases of greenwashing presented in the matrix:

1. *Genuine greenwashing*: a company deliberately disseminates false or deceptive CSR claims, resulting in accusations of greenwashing, which subsequently impair its legitimacy and lead to reputation damage. An illustrative case of genuine greenwashing is the Nike incident concerning sweatshop labour in Vietnamese factories in the 1990s. During a 1997 Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) meeting, a Nike representative showcased a video portraying happy workers in a Vietnamese factory. Two days later, while the conference was still ongoing, *The New York Times* published a front-page article highlighting the poor working conditions in Vietnamese Nike plants, where employees were exposed to carcinogens at 177 times the safe levels and received a level of payment significantly below the local minimum wage (Beder, 2002).

2. *False greenwashing*: in this case, an organisation is accused of greenwashing even though its CSR communication is accurate and consistent with the organisation's behaviour. Despite the absence of false or misleading information, the company still faces negative consequences, such as a loss of legitimacy and reputation damage. An example is the criticism faced by Chiquita in the mass media of Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden. The company has been accused of using announcements regarding the reduction of pesticide use on its plantations as mere empty rhetoric (Brunton et al., 2017). Furthermore, Chiquita has been alleged to offer bananas that are less environmentally friendly compared to

organic bananas and less ethically produced than fair trade bananas. However, Scherer et al. (2013) argue that the criticism directed towards Chiquita is based on unrealistic expectations, such as the belief that a large organisation can completely eliminate pesticide use within weeks.

False greenwashing elicits the same adverse impact on legitimacy as genuine greenwashing due to the widespread public support usually garnered for criticism of organisations, regardless of the accusation's validity (Scherer et al., 2013). Consequently, even if these claims lack substantiated data or proof, they effectively undermine and diminish the credibility and legitimacy of companies. Just as organisations seek to convince consumers of their social and environmental value, NGOs may persuade the public of an organisation's responsibility in environmental or social disasters, even when such responsibility is not proven. The activist group The Yes Men presents an ironic example of false greenwashing. The group creates counterfeit corporate websites resembling those they intend to satirise, leading to numerous interviews, conferences, and invitations to TV talk shows in which group members masquerade as corporate representatives. One of their most notable cases involves their campaign against Dow Chemical. In December 2004, a Yes Men member appeared on BBC World as Jude Finisterra, a Dow Chemical spokesperson and claimed that Dow Chemical planned to liquidate Union Carbide, the company responsible for the Bhopal disaster in 1984. The spokesperson further alleged that the resulting $12 billion would be allocated towards medical care, site clean-up, and research on hazardous corporate products. After two hours, Dow Chemical issued a press release refuting the statements, inadvertently generating even greater media coverage of the fabricated news. Consequently, Dow Chemical's share price plummeted by 4.24% in just 23 minutes in Frankfurt, resulting in a $2 billion reduction in corporate market value. The craziest thing about this story is that Dow Chemical only acquired Union Carbide in 2001, 17 years after the Bophal tragedy. The Dow Chemical incident exemplifies the role of accusation and its consequences in greenwashing (*Home | The Yes Men*, n.d.).

3. *Potential greenwashing*: in this scenario, a firm disseminates misleading CSR communication without facing any accusations of greenwashing. In such cases, greenwashing is only potential, as the absence of an accusation hinders its visibility. From a longitudinal perspective, at the beginning, greenwashing is always potential until someone makes a formal allegation.

4. *No greenwashing*: in this case, companies engage in transparent and consistent CSR communication, and no accusation occurs. An example of authentic CSR communication is found in a company's annual report that accurately describes the company's environmental and social activities without misrepresenting reality.

An alternative perspective to greenwashing conceptualisation has been discussed in the literature by Siano et al. (2017). Instead of defining greenwashing as misleading communication, the authors describe the phenomenon as a form of deceptive manipulation. The definition draws from the Communicative Constitution of Organisation (CCO) perspective. Aligned with the post-modern tradition in organisational communication research, the CCO perspective views organisations as dynamic communication processes that can transform organisational reality rather than merely represent it. Unsustainable corporate practices may, therefore, be influenced and pushed by the challenges of fulfilling communication promises, as in the case of the Volkswagen (VW) emission scandal.

The VW scandal originated from the findings of an investigation conducted by the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT), an independent non-profit organisation that offers technical analysis to environmental regulators. In 2014, the ICCT conducted tests on three European VW diesel cars, revealing significant disparities between laboratory tests and real-world driving conditions regarding pollutant assessments. The ICCT shared these findings with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which started an investigation in May 2014. On 18 September 2015, the EPA discovered the presence of a device that allowed VW cars to detect when they were being tested and emit significantly lower CO_2 levels than during normal driving. As a result of the scandal, VW suspended sales in the U.S. of its Audi models and the four-cylinder diesel engine VW. The impact of Dieselgate on financial markets was huge, as VW's stock crashed by 22% on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange in a single day (Siano et al., 2017).

Following the CCO framework, Siano et al. (2017) suggest that the willingness to conform to environmental standards, incentivised by internal and external communications about sustainability-related expectations, influences some organisational members to act unethically to create the reality communicated in corporate texts. In this case, CSR communication is not initially misleading but promotes fraudulent practices and unethical behaviours. This particular form of greenwashing is defined as "deceptive conduct, in which sustainability communication engenders a deliberate manipulation of business practices aimed at making tangible statements regarding corporate sustainability" (Siano et al., 2017).

In the literature, greenwashing definitions have been classified according to different criteria. Scholars in the field have distinguished those definitions that focus on the attributes of the objects from those that focus on the processes behind the objects. The object-attribute view emphasises the inconsistency between an object's (product's) attributes and the corporate messages about its environmental traits. In this case, the product is described as greener or more

environmentally friendly than it actually is. Instead of looking at green product credentials, the process-attribute view considers the communication process behind greenwashing. According to this perspective, greenwashing deals with the act of misleading. Definitions belonging to this category compare corporate efforts in promoting environmental and social initiatives or products' green characteristics with the actual efforts made to improve the product's environmental impact or corporate environmental performance.

Therefore, according to the literature, greenwashing definitions may focus on the environmental practices of a company (*firm level*) or on the environmental benefits of a product or service (*product-service level*). Product- and firm-level greenwashing can be further classified into two categories: *claim greenwashing* and *executional greenwashing*, resulting in four different types of greenwashing (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). An analysis of the different forms of greenwashing will be provided in the next subchapter.

GREENWASHING: TYPOLOGIES FROM ACADEMIC LITERATURE

In 2020, de Freitas Netto et al. (2020) systematically reviewed concepts and forms of greenwashing reported in academic literature. Their study resulted in a comprehensive categorisation of greenwashing phenomena. The following subchapter presents and discusses the different typologies resulting from the de Freitas Netto et al. (2020) analysis. Afterwards, based on the recent developments in greenwashing research, new typologies and categorisations are integrated and reported.

As previously mentioned, greenwashing cases can be distinguished into four categories: product-level claim greenwashing; product-level executional greenwashing; firm-level claim greenwashing; and firm-level executional greenwashing.

The predominant focus of existing research has been on claim greenwashing, which refers to misleading environmental claims created through textual arguments and related to the ecological benefits of a product or service (product-level greenwashing) or to corporate environmental practices (firm-level greenwashing).

Carlson et al. (1993) discuss two categorisations of green claims: *claim type* and *claim deceptiveness*. Claim type encompasses five typological categories: (1) *image orientation*, which enhances a firm's eco-friendly image through associations with well-known environmental causes or activities; (2) *environmental fact*, which involves independent statements by firms about the environment and its condition; (3) *product orientation*, which focuses on the ecological characteristics of a product; (4) *process orientation*, based on claims about the ecological high performance of a production process or

disposal method; and (5) *combination*, claims that fall into two or more of the aforementioned categories.

These types of green claims can further be classified according to the claim deceptiveness categorisation. Claim deceptiveness comprises four typological categories. The first category, called *false/outright lie*, indicates fabricated or inaccurate claims. Then, there is the *vague/ambiguous* category, which relates to claims that lack clarity, are overly broad or ambiguous, or lack a clear definition. *Omission* comprises claims that lack information to evaluate the claim's validity. The last category *combination* is used for claims exhibiting two or more of these categories.

In relation to the claim of greenwashing, Parguel et al. (2015) analyse advertising evoking nature and offer a different classification. They report three forms of greenwashed advertising, indicated as (1) *lying*, (2) *lying by omission*, and (3) *lying through lack of clarity*. Lying by omission indicates claims omitting crucial information necessary to assess the sincerity of the claim, while lying through lack of clarity consists of claims employing vague or ambiguous terms.

In a study about fuzzy reporting and greenwashing practices in corporate sustainability disclosure, Contreras-Pacheco and Claasen (2017) report some other forms of greenwashing, all related to claim firm-level greenwashing. These additional types of greenwashing were originally developed by Greenpeace. Afterwards, they were reported in *The Greenpeace Book of Greenwashing* (Bruno, 1992) and further elaborated by Berrone (2016). The final Contreras-Pacheco and Claasen's (2017) categorisation comprehends five new types of greenwashing, named: *dirty business*, *political spin*, *ad bluster*, *fuzzy reporting*, and *it is the law, stupid!*

While the description of the typologies reported below is presented according to the aforementioned literature, the examples discussed were elaborated by the authors. As for the other greenwashing categorisations employed in the literature, the different types of greenwashing are not mutually exclusive. They can also relate to the different sins previously discussed.

The dirty business type of greenwashing involves companies operating in an intrinsically unsustainable industry but promoting corporate sustainable practices that do not represent their overall business or the industry. The Shell promotional campaign "*Don't throw anything away. There is no away*" is an example. Shell employed the slogan in a 2007 advertising campaign. The words were accompanied by an image of an industrial landscape with multiple refineries and chimneys expelling colourful flowers into a clear blue sky. The *Guardian* published an article titled "*No bouquets for Shell press ad*" harshly criticising the company for this deceptive advertising. In addition, Friends of the Earth, an environmental activist group, accused Shell of inconsistency between its communication and the company's actual environmental

performance. According to the group, while promoting some sustainable corporate practices, the company was misleading the public about the general impact of its business on the environment, creating false perceptions about the negative effects of its operations. The campaign was finally banned by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in the U.K., and the company publicly declared its decision not to employ the campaign in the future.

Political spin refers to obtaining benefits from governments by influencing regulations in the field of sustainability. CSR is used in this case as an excuse to picture lobbying for sustainability as a moral act. Frequently, these spins are rationalised based on the companies' status as significant contributors to taxes or employers in the country. Therefore, political spin involves the adoption of political CSR to work against social betterment. In an independent report about British American Tobacco (BAT) in Africa (Rimmer, 2005), BAT has been blamed for having supported HIV prevention programmes with the ultimate objective of achieving sufficient political power to "relegate" tobacco as a health issue and to reduce bans on tobacco advertising and smoking in public areas.

Another type of firm-level greenwashing discussed by Contreras-Pacheco and Claasen (2017) is the ad bluster case. Ad bluster is about exaggeration and puffing in relation to sustainability matters. In marketing and corporate communication, the advertising technique of puffing involves the utilisation of exaggerated adjectives, which can potentially lead to misleading impressions. It is worth noting that this advertising practice is not forbidden if the exaggeration employed is clearly discernible and lacks the intent or ability to deceive consumers. However, when the exaggeration does not correspond to reality, and the discrepancy creates false impressions in the target group, the exaggeration is considered misleading and, in many countries, potentially prosecuted by the law.

Fuzzy reporting is about using sustainability reports to distort reality by presenting a favourable image regarding corporate CSR that does not correspond to the actual corporate CSR profile. The fact that sustainability reporting is based on a unidirectional type of communication allows companies to manipulate the medium through impression management.

In a study about impression management tactics in sustainability reporting, Sandberg and Holmlund (2015) identified some tactics companies use to shape stakeholders' impressions in sustainability reporting. Based on the evidence that companies do use these tactics to alter the stakeholders' perceptions of corporate CSR engagement, we suggest a correlation between greenwashing and some of the impression management tactics elaborated by Sandberg and Holmlund (2015).

Among these tactics, some are associated with how firms showcase their actions. The *tactic of praise*, for example, involves a company presenting its

actions in an excessively favourable light, deliberately shaping the perception others hold of it by emphasising its accomplishments. One method employed by companies to implement the praise tactic involves projecting an image of nobility and high moral standards. An illustration of this can be found in a statement reported in the 2010 Shell Sustainability Report, where the company reported its efforts to reach a legal settlement with the families of Ken Saro-Wiwa, an Ogoni activist, and eight others who were executed in 1995 by the military government. At the time of the events, the company was accused of having been complicit in the men's deaths. In its sustainability report, the company presented the decision to agree to a settlement and provide compensation to the families as an act of goodwill, not because of its involvement in the case (Shell, 2010).

When a company has neglected sustainable practices, it may employ the impression management *tactic of defence* (Sandberg & Holmlund, 2015), which again we relate to greenwashing. This tactic involves attempting to rationalise why sustainable actions were not taken or why they failed, thereby seeking to portray its inaction or failure as inevitable – and so acceptable. The objective of employing this tactic is to provide justifications for unsustainable behaviours to preserve the firm's impression of a responsible and sustainable organisation.

Sandberg and Holmlund (2015) also identified tactics related to the writing style that companies use to shape impressions. We suggest that companies may use all these tactics, alone or in combination, to practise greenwashing. The *subjective style tactic* involves the presentation of narratives (e.g., a corporate action or project, an event, an output, a story) only from the company's own point of view. A company may use this tactic to present information biased by its own opinions and/or to favour arguments that support one side of the narrative. By using the *positive style tactic*, a company may exaggerate the positive aspects of its sustainability and downplay or neglect the negative ones. Providing vague and ambiguous information without clarity or specific details means adopting a *vague style tactic*. In addition, a company may use the *emotional style tactic* in sustainability reporting or in corporate sustainability communication to evoke emotions in the reader and portray the firm as a feeling entity. It is worth noting that many of these tactics of impression management in sustainability reporting may be associated with more than one sin of greenwashing or with one of the greenwashing types previously discussed. This is a sign of the interdisciplinary nature of greenwashing, which touches on subjects related to marketing, philosophy, ethics, management, communication, and law.

It is the law, stupid! is the last type of firm-level greenwashing described by Contreras-Pacheco and Claasen (2017). It involves corporate statements about sustainability achievements, which, in reality, are mandatory by law.

Very similar to TerraChoice's sin of irrelevance (product level), this type of greenwashing is applied at the firm level. In this case, therefore, the irrelevant information is not related to a specific product but regards corporate operations and activities. Claiming with emphasis that a factory's emissions are below a specific level when the level corresponds to the upper limit set by law is an example.

As previously mentioned, in addition to claim-level greenwashing, Parguel et al. (2015) identified a new typology of greenwashing, named executional greenwashing. This particular type of greenwashing does not relate to corporate claims or written statements. On the contrary, it is based on using nature-inspired elements in pictures or sounds, such as backgrounds depicting natural landscapes. Using green and blue colours, sounds from nature, or images of animals (especially endangered animal species) are examples of executional greenwashing. These nature-evoking elements may lead to false perceptions regarding an organisation's environmental commitment. Indeed, these elements subtly evoke ecological inferences by activating implicit mental associations with nature. In 2009, McDonald's underwent a logo transformation in Europe. Starting from Germany, the company replaced the red background of its logo with a green background, aiming to convey its commitment to environmental sustainability, a choice harshly criticised by NGOs and environmentalist groups. The McDonald's logo change in Europe is often criticised as a form of eco-embellishment greenwashing, that is, executional greenwashing.

Another aspect that has been considered in greenwashing literature to categorise greenwashing phenomena is the *locus* of greenwashing. Indeed, greenwashing frequently occurs within the supply chain, where a company that claims to be responsible works in partnerships with suppliers that engage in environmental pollution or worker exploitation. A notable example is the Apple–Foxconn scandal, which emerged following a series of suicides among Foxconn employees, one of Apple's suppliers. In 2010, there were 18 suicide attempts resulting in 14 deaths, with the working conditions at Foxconn's factories being cited as the primary cause. Although the scandal concerned working conditions at Foxconn, Apple faced accusations and repercussions, leading the then-CEO Steve Jobs to introduce Apple's "Supplier Progress Report" to repair and safeguard the company's reputation. This scandal highlights the importance of effective supply-chain management in achieving true sustainability: mere talk by firms must be supported by actions at every level of the value chain. By looking at greenwashing from a supply-chain perspective, Pizzetti et al. (2021) identified a new categorisation of greenwashing phenomena based on the locus of greenwashing. Based on the premise that greenwashing involves a mismatch between communication and actions, the authors suggested three distinct forms of greenwashing that vary based on where the disparity lies between words and deeds. This continuum ranges from the

supplier level to the company level. At the company level, there is *direct greenwashing*, wherein the inconsistency between a company's sustainability claims and its actual behaviour originates internally. This occurs when a company itself engages in deceptive practices that contradict its proclaimed commitment to sustainability. Conversely, at the opposite end of the continuum, there is *indirect greenwashing*, characterised by a disparity that is entirely external to the company. Here, the supplier is responsible for both sustainability communication and misconduct, as their actions contradict their own sustainability assertions. In this case, the company neither claims sustainability nor engages in inappropriate behaviour. Consequently, the greenwashing can be solely attributed to the supplier, despite potential negative consequences faced by the company. An example of indirect greenwashing can occur in the retail industry, where a retailer procures goods from a supplier claiming adherence to certified CSR standards like environmental management or fair labour practices, which later are uncovered to be outdated, thus making evident that the supplier has misrepresented its certifications. In addition to these two types of greenwashing, there is a third form of greenwashing positioned midway along the continuum. This type, named *vicarious greenwashing*, arises when a company that proclaimed its commitment to sustainability is accused of greenwashing due to its associations with a supplier that fails to meet sustainability standards. In this scenario, the company itself does not engage in misconduct but fails to effectively monitor or sanction the supplier, whose actions violate the company's CSR statements.

Therefore, to sum up, the analysis of the locus of greenwashing within the supply chain allows the identification of three categories of greenwashing: direct greenwashing at the company level; indirect greenwashing at the supplier level; and vicarious greenwashing situated between the two. The classification captures the importance of *where* the discrepancy between the walk and the talk occurs in greenwashing cases.

There is another type of greenwashing that must be added to the different categories discussed in the chapter and is drastically different from all the cases reported above. After analysing the Volkswagen 2014–2015 scandal, Siano et al. (2017) expanded the taxonomy of greenwashing by identifying a new type of greenwashing, namely *deceptive manipulation*. As claimed in the previous section of the chapter, dedicated to greenwashing definitions, greenwashing as a deceptive manipulation consists of "deceptive conducts, in which sustainability communication engenders a deliberative manipulation of business practices aimed at making tangible statements regarding corporate sustainability" (Siano et al., 2017). This particular form of greenwashing is related to the corporate commitment towards unsustainable corporate practices pushed by the challenges of fulfilling communication promises. While the other forms of greenwashing deal with misleading communication about

corporate practices, here, in line with the communication constitutes organisation (CCO) perspective, it is the communication that shapes corporate behaviours. According to this view, texts and speech have a performative power. Therefore, pressure towards conforming with corporate statements may result in deceptive manipulation greenwashing.

THEORIES AND FINDINGS IN BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT STUDIES

Why do Companies Engage in Greenwashing?

In the previous sections of this chapter, we discussed how companies engage in sustainability marketing today (different levels of corporate sustainability-marketing commitment: direct, indirect, collaboration) and how firms engage in greenwashing (greenwashing typologies). In the following section, we will focus on *why* firms engage in green communication and why sometimes this engagement becomes greenwashing.

The main reason why companies engage in green marketing and communication is to achieve corporate legitimacy. Corporate legitimacy is related to several business advantages, such as increased access to resources, stronger relationships with business partners, and a more capable workforce. Management research suggests that, ultimately, by attaining legitimacy, a firm may improve its financial performance (Deephouse, 1999). In the current context of eco-capitalism, CSR and green marketing initiatives are new sources of legitimacy. Attaining legitimacy through environmental messages is crucial for companies to maintain or re-establish public trust, particularly in light of recent conflicts between business organisations and environmental activist groups, which have resulted in increased scepticism among the public. Additionally, green marketing enhances corporate reputation and leads to higher consumer purchase intentions and willingness to pay.

Given the positive correlation between green marketing and corporate legitimacy, it is important to understand why firms engage in greenwashing with the risk of being accused of unethical conduct (and therefore reducing their attained legitimacy). To understand the reasons behind greenwashing, following Seele and Gatti (2017), we will briefly discuss the process of greenwashing from the perspective of corporate legitimacy literature and signalling theory.

Corporate legitimacy theory distinguishes three types of corporate legitimacy: cognitive legitimacy; pragmatic legitimacy; and moral legitimacy. Contrary to moral and cognitive legitimacy, pragmatic legitimacy arises from the self-interest calculations of key stakeholders based on their perception of corporate actions and communication. Pragmatic legitimacy may be strategically managed by the instrumental manipulation of symbols to gain

social support. Through symbolic communication, companies may strategically influence stakeholders' perceptions and attain corporate pragmatic legitimacy. Therefore, according to legitimacy and green marketing research, green and social communication serve as a means to obtain pragmatic legitimacy, regardless of their level of deception. Indeed, without an accusation of greenwashing, even intentionally misleading green messages may effectively influence stakeholders' perceptions, leading to a high level of corporate legitimacy. Only when an accusation of greenwashing occurs is the strategic effect of misleading green communication questioned, causing a reduction of legitimacy. Therefore, undiscovered greenwashing, categorised in literature as potential greenwashing (Seele & Gatti, 2017), may be seen as a means to attain legitimacy.

As signalling theory suggests, false or misleading green claims are effective strategies in altering stakeholders' perceptions for two primary reasons, which must occur simultaneously to make greenwashing a "successful" tactic. The first factor is related to the benefits organisations attain, regardless of the authenticity of their environmental and social performance, when they signal their commitment to green issues. Because in free markets, every company has the possibility to signal or not its CSR commitment (through voluntary communication) and given that signalling green-related messages is shown to be correlated with an increase in corporate legitimacy, even organisations with poor environmental performance perceive a high incentive (the expected legitimacy gains) in signalling their false or misleading messages.

The other reason motivating companies to strategically use greenwashing is the fact that stakeholders are often unable to differentiate between genuine and purely symbolic environmental commitment based on a firm's engagement in green communication and advertising. This is explained by the information asymmetry that exists between the sender (the company) and the receiver (stakeholders), as detailed in communication theories. The complexity and evolving nature of the scientific knowledge underlying many environmental claims make it challenging for the general public to interpret corporate communication accurately. Consequently, due to the information asymmetry between companies and their stakeholders, misleading green communication can be used as a means to signal corporate environmental behaviour, leading to corporate legitimacy attainment.

Therefore, the existence of an information asymmetry between companies communicating their sustainability performance and the public receiving the messages makes greenwashing mistakenly interpreted as a signal of genuine sustainability commitment. A comparison may clarify the process. Let's imagine wanting to know how a colleague engages in recycling. Most likely, one would rely on the colleague's account (which serves as a signal) to interpret her choices and level of commitment. Unless one can enter the colleague's home

and personally verify her behaviour, one will evaluate her commitment based on her communication, whether it is authentic, partial, or false. In the business context, in most cases, a company's stakeholders cannot verify and judge whether the sustainable behaviours celebrated by a company correspond to the company's actual commitment or whether these are deceptive symbols to create positive impressions. Given the impossibility of evaluation, even companies that prioritise profit over environmental and social considerations have an advantage in presenting themselves as green and sustainable, relying on greenwashing tactics.

Seele and Gatti's (2017) analysis of the greenwashing process under the framework of signalling and legitimacy theories helps understand the main reason behind corporate engagement in greenwashing. In addition to this general explanation, other scholars have developed a more comprehensive analysis of specific drivers of greenwashing. Yang et al. (2020), for example, identify three distinct causes of greenwashing: market opportunities; competitive pressure; and governmental policies.

In recent times, environment-related regulations have been established in some countries. However, the enforcement of these regulations is not always effective, and restrictions vary across countries and industries. In addition, in emerging markets, regulations on green communication are often limited. The current structure of governmental policies is, therefore, a driver – or at least a fertile ground – for greenwashing, especially within those firms with a primary focus on profit maximisation.

Current market opportunities may also stimulate a company to greenwash. As global warming concerns continue to escalate, customers have shown increased environmental consciousness. Even if genuine corporate green initiatives are a means to attract eco-conscious consumers, greenwashing may also attract new segments. This explains why greenwashing has become a common practice for companies seeking to capitalise on market opportunities.

Finally, according to Yang et al. (2020), a company may engage in greenwashing due to competitive pressure. Pushed by the fear of being left behind, a firm may decide to over-communicate its environmental credentials.

In their well-known article "The drivers of greenwashing", Delmas and Burbano (2011) have studied several factors that may influence individuals' and firms' intention to greenwash. The two scholars distinguished three different categories of greenwashing drivers: organisational; external; and individual. Their contribution allows for a more nuanced understanding of greenwashing antecedents.

Individual drivers are related to individual cognitive tendencies characterising managers and decision-makers responsible for green communication. Research suggests that narrow decision framing, hyperbolic intertemporal discounting, and optimistic bias lead to greater involvement in greenwashing.

Narrow decision framing refers to the inclination to make decisions in isolation, that is, without considering the broader context. Decision-makers might focus on promoting the environmental friendliness of a product or the firm itself without adequately considering the future requirements for implementing green initiatives. A decision-maker may also decide to prioritise short-term gains from greenwashing without weighing the potential long-term negative effects on corporate image or reputation in case of a greenwashing accusation. This relates to another cognitive tendency that could lead to greenwashing, namely hyperbolic intertemporal discounting. This tendency often results in dynamic inconsistency or preference reversals. For instance, hyperbolic consumers may display a discrepancy between their long-term objective of "saving money" and their preference for instant gratification coming from shopping. This leads to them failing their desired long-term target because of compulsive shopping linked to instant gratification. Consequently, when consumers realise the inconsistency between their immediate behaviours and long-term targets, they tend to reverse preferences and abandon the objective of "saving money". In the context of greenwashing, a manager might opt to actively promote the company's environmental sustainability with the intention of bearing the costs of implementing green practices in the future. When that future becomes the present, faced with the impossibility of complying with the declared environmental targets, the manager perceives inconsistency and resorts to greenwashing.

Another cognitive individual driver of greenwashing identified by Delmas and Burbano (2011) is optimistic bias, which involves individuals *over*estimating the probability of positive outcomes and *under*estimating the likelihood of negative events. This bias arises because individuals tend to anchor their forecasts for future outcomes on optimistic plans rather than relying on past results as a more realistic basis. In relation to greenwashing, decision-makers might overestimate the positive outcomes of their deceptive environmental claims, such as increasing market share or attracting green consumers and socially responsible investors. At the same time, they may underestimate the potential negative consequences of greenwashing, such as consumer lawsuits, NGO scrutiny and criticism, or negative media coverage.

External drivers of greenwashing include both market and non-market external drivers. One of the most important non-market external drivers is the regulatory context of green marketing and greenwashing, as already mentioned in relation to the governmental policies described by Yang et al. (2020). The lack of legislation, variation in regulations across countries, and the limited punitive consequences of greenwashing create an uncertain regulatory landscape for multinational corporations. The debate around the role of legislation in fighting greenwashing is heating up. In July 2023, in Switzerland, several political and civil society actors raised the issue. On the

political front, lawmakers are urging the Federal Council to establish a legal framework, which currently does not exist. At the same time, consumer protection organisations and groups, such as the "Konsumentenschutz" and the Romande Consumer Federation (FRC), have filed a complaint with the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) against several Swiss companies for greenwashing. The consumer protection organisations believe that these companies' claims about their CO_2 reductions are not credible. They have also filed a complaint with the Swiss Commission for Loyalty for deceptive advertising. According to exponents of the FRC, Switzerland currently lacks any legal framework for green advertising and communication. They believe guidelines need to be quickly established to prevent abuses by companies. According to Swiss lawmakers, without regulations, consumers may lose trust in environmentally friendly products, hindering the ecological transition. Regardless of the debate about the role of law and legislation, which will be further elaborated in Chapter 4, several scholars suggest that the current regulatory context of greenwashing is a critical, direct driver of greenwashing that allows companies to engage in deceptive practices without significant repercussions (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

According to Delmas and Burbano (2011), besides non-market external factors, understanding the reasons behind greenwashing also requires consideration of market external drivers, such as consumer demand, investor demand, and competitive pressure. In many industries, firms experience both consumer and investor pressure to present themselves as environmentally friendly, creating incentives for them to promote positive messages about environmental performance. When consumers' and investors' pressure for environmentally friendly practices is high, unsustainable companies are more likely to engage in greenwashing. The competitive landscape also plays a pivotal role in shaping a firm's decision to communicate about its green performance. When companies perceive other companies within their industry as successful, they tend to emulate their practices. Research has shown that this tendency also applies to the adoption of environmentally friendly practices. When successful firms actively engage in green marketing, other companies in the same market may feel compelled to commit for fear of falling behind their competitors. For instance, after realising that its competitors had a stronger commitment to mitigate global warming, UBS decided to adopt a more progressive and active climate change policy.

As the competitive landscape may positively affect the adoption of green practices within an industry, at the same time, the increasing centrality of corporate green communication among successful companies may also reinforce the trend among non-sustainable firms. Those firms may feel pressure to engage in greenwashing to avoid losing their position in the market.

Firm responses to external drivers are influenced and mediated by various organisational-level factors, such as firm characteristics, incentive structures, ethical climate, effectiveness of intra-firm communication, and organisational inertia. Firm characteristics influence the strategic choices related to green marketing and greenwashing, as well as the degree to which a company perceives external pressure to greenwash. They include variables such as company size, industry, internal capabilities and resources, and life-cycle stage. For example, B2C firms tend to experience higher levels of consumer pressure to portray themselves as environmentally friendly than B2B companies. Even the costs associated with greenwashing (the likelihood and consequences of an external greenwashing accusation) may be higher for large firms with well-established brands. Indeed, they attract more activist and media scrutiny due to their higher visibility, making them more vulnerable to public attention.

In addition to firm characteristics, research suggests that the incentive structure of a company plays a crucial role in determining its ethical behaviour, therefore affecting the intention to greenwash. Incentives tied to achieving arbitrary marketing goals related to promoting the firm's environmental image can increase the likelihood of greenwashing. These incentives might push managers to take shortcuts in verifying the truthfulness of their communication messages or to exaggerate green communication.

Given that greenwashing is considered an ethically dubious behaviour, it is more diffuse among firms with egoistic ethical climates, that is, when the corporate culture and norms promote the satisfaction of self-interest objectives. Indeed, research indicates that unethical behaviour tends to happen more often in organisations where an egoistic climate prevails (Delmas and Burbano, 2011).

Organisational inertia, which refers to the strong persistence of existing structures and procedures within a company, may also act as a barrier to the implementation of green initiatives. Therefore, organisational inertia might account for the inconsistency between a manager's expression of environmentally friendly intentions and the actual implementation of those intentions, even when the manager's intent is genuine. The process of transforming the company's structure and operations to embrace the declared sustainability may be slowed down or stopped by organisational inertia.

Another organisational-level driver of greenwashing is the effectiveness of intra-firm communication. The occurrence of unintentional greenwashing can sometimes be attributed to sub-optimal intra-firm communication. This implies that firms with inadequate communication between their marketing and production departments are more likely to greenwash, assuming all other factors remain constant. Miscommunication or a lack of information exchange between these departments might lead to an exaggeration of a product's environmental attributes, resulting in unintentional greenwashing.

Research suggests that, in addition to the aforementioned organisational-level factors, the firm's motivating principle behind CSR and sustainability may affect corporate CSR management (Gatti & Seele, 2015), and, therefore, the tendency to greenwash. Maignan and Ralston (2002) identify three main principles that drive corporate commitment to CSR: performance-driven; stakeholder-driven; and value-driven. The value-driven principle is based on the positive duty approach, reflecting a genuine and proactive commitment to CSR and sustainability. According to Maignan and Ralston (2002), when this principle is prevalent, CSR is based on "values considered by the organisational members as central, enduring, and distinctive to the firm". Companies embracing the value-driven principle are expected to be less correlated with greenwashing practices, because their engagement in CSR and green communication is guided by a genuine and proactive intent towards sustainability.

The performance-driven principle, also named instrumental motive, adopts a utilitarian perspective, viewing green marketing as a means to achieve economic objectives, such as increasing profit and sales volume. Also, in this case, the commitment to CSR and sustainability is proactive, but the goal is not linked to a genuine intent to improve the planet's well-being. The stakeholder-driven principle, on the contrary, is based on a reactive approach to CSR. Companies following the stakeholder-driven principle look at CSR as a response to external pressure and scrutiny from stakeholders. This principle is rooted in the negative duty perspective, suggesting that businesses engage in CSR due to social pressure from their external environment.

Contrary to the value-driven principle, the performance-driven and stakeholder-driven motivating principles may encourage companies to engage in greenwashing when the perceived economic benefits are higher than those of genuine green marketing or when stakeholders' pressure to appear green increases.

The Main Consequences of Greenwashing

Having listed all the potential causes of greenwashing as reported in the literature, in the following section, we will present the main consequences of greenwashing. Indeed, once detected, greenwashing may cause extremely negative effects for the business, questioning its legitimacy and reputation.

First and foremost, given that greenwashing is a phenomenon in the eye of the beholder (Seele & Gatti, 2017), only when detected through a third-party accusation does it negatively affect the business. The first noticeable effect of receiving a third-party accusation of engaging in greenwashing is the immediate cancellation of market benefits in terms of sales and reputation. The accusation removes the information asymmetry between the company and its public, making the signal (false/misleading green communication) ineffective in influencing the public perception of the firm's green value.

An interesting insight into greenwashing's negative effects comes from a study conducted by Gatti et al. (2021), where the authors compared the consequences of greenwashing with the consequences of corporate environmental misbehaviour not related to deceptive communication. That is, when a company involved in an environmental scandal or characterised by low environmental performance does not engage in communicating its green values and the green credentials of its products. In line with previous literature, Gatti et al. (2021)'s research suggests that poor environmental performance and misbehaviour negatively affect stakeholders' attitudes and intentions. Interestingly, greenwashing was found to be an amplifier of such negative effects, leading to a further significant decline in stakeholders' intentions to purchase or invest in the firm. In general, stakeholders are more inclined to avoid companies engaged in greenwashing practices than firms involved in misbehaviour, even when the environmental misconduct is the same. According to the authors, it is the lie that counts. An environmental misbehaviour that lacks any connection to corporate environmental communication does not necessarily indicate a breach of contract with stakeholders, as there are no specific green commitments to fulfil. On the contrary, green communication creates higher expectations among stakeholders regarding a company's present and future behaviours and commitments. Consequently, when a company engages in greenwashing, it is perceived as blameworthy, and the environmental damage is perceived as intentional and, thus, more serious – even when the misconduct is exactly the same. Therefore, in cases of greenwashing, stakeholders believe there is a greater violation of trust; they perceive the company as dishonest, especially in comparison with a firm that does not claim to be environmentally committed, and thus, they form negative impressions about the company itself, leading to a reduction in corporate legitimacy and reputation.

Other negative consequences of greenwashing have been reported and discussed in the literature. In the next paragraphs, we summarise them to offer a comprehensive picture of the risks associated with greenwashing.

According to Walker and Wan (2012), greenwashing ultimately impacts a firm's financial performance. To demonstrate this on a macro level, the two scholars conducted a study on Canadian high-polluting firms. They found a negative correlation between greenwashing and a company's financial performance (Walker & Wan, 2012). Du (2015) also investigated the negative effects of greenwashing on a corporate macro level, finding a negative association between greenwashing and the cumulative abnormal returns of companies in the Chinese stock market. In relation to the firm's financial performance, Wu and Shen (2013) observed a positive correlation between CSR and financial performance in banks across 22 different countries. However, this positive relationship was absent for banks that engage in greenwashing practices. The financial impacts of greenwashing also seem to be affected by the life-cycle stage of a company. There is evidence suggesting that, in the European Union,

young start-ups do not experience any financial consequences from engaging in greenwashing. However, companies established for at least eight years face a negative profit impact from greenwashing (Montgomery et al., 2023).

On a micro level, greenwashing may lead to a loss of trust among employees, causing discomfort within the working environment and reducing employees' commitment to work (Walker & Wan, 2012). Research also suggests that greenwashing negatively affects investors' attitudes and intentions to invest (Gatti et al., 2021; Pizzetti et al., 2021). In addition, greenwashing affects consumers' perceptions and behavioural intentions. Consumers' reactions to greenwashing are probably the most prominent topic addressed in the literature. Indeed, most of the research studying the consequences of greenwashing focuses on consumers' reactions to it. For example, Chen and Chang (2013) conducted a survey among electronics consumers in Taiwan and discovered that greenwashing increases consumers' confusion and risk perception; this, in turn, reduces consumers' trust in the environmental claims related to a product. Similarly, Chang (2011) found that consumers may question the credibility of green claims and develop more negative evaluations if they perceive that a company is committed to persuading its public about the green credentials of its products to improve the corporate image. In another study about consumers' perceptions of CSR and greenwashing, it has been demonstrated that the perception of the company's intrinsic motivation behind CSR communication acts as a mediator between CSR communication and brand evaluations and purchase decisions (Parguel et al., 2011). Other studies suggest that products portrayed as environmentally friendly without adequate substantiation lead to reduced perceptions of product quality, causing what is referred to as a "greenwashing discount", which negatively impacts purchase intentions (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015).

While eco-conscious consumers are willing to support companies that demonstrate genuine environmental efforts, they are also ready to boycott greenwashing firms and engage in negative word-of-mouth (WOM) (Parguel et al., 2011). The problem today is that it is extremely difficult to distinguish fair communication about a firm's commitment to green issues from greenwashing. This factor, together with the increased proliferation and sophistication of greenwashing practices and the growing coverage of greenwashing-related scandals by media and activist groups, has led to a growing sense of consumer scepticism and mistrust. In addition, the greenwashing behaviour of a single brand can have a detrimental impact on consumers' purchase intentions for green products of other brands within the same industry (Wang et al., 2020). Consequently, communicating with and persuading an organisation's stakeholders regarding its CSR credentials has become even more challenging. Therefore, honest companies experience adverse consequences of greenwashing – not only those that engage in it.

Because greenwashing may assume different forms (e.g., false communication, selection of positive information, vague or ambiguous communication), it is important to understand the effects of the different practices. Considering that greenwashing involves deceptive communication (Bazillier & Vauday, 2014), how companies execute this deception can influence its effects. In communication psychology, deceptive communication can be classified as either active or passive. Active deception involves fabricating false information to misrepresent reality, while passive deception strategically and intentionally withholds certain information without altering reality. In the context of greenwashing literature, academics have identified both active and passive deceptions as forms of greenwashing. Active greenwashing occurs when companies make false claims about the environmental attributes of their products or about the environmental performance of the firm itself. Passive greenwashing involves selectively disclosing positive information about a company while intentionally withholding negative environmental aspects. Gatti et al. (2021) proved that active greenwashing has a more negative impact on the intention to invest than passive greenwashing. This is explained by the higher moral accountability associated with active greenwashing.

In addition to active and passive greenwashing, the different forms of greenwashing may be distinguished between those related to communication and those linked to action. As previously discussed, greenwashing may assume the form of deceptive manipulation, defined by Siano et al. (2017) as "a deliberate manipulation of business practices aimed at making tangible statements regarding corporate sustainability", therefore, associated with action-level greenwashing. Stakeholders perceive action-level greenwashing as particularly serious. Indeed, several experiments studying action-level greenwashing show that when greenwashing is performed through actions, investors' intention to invest drastically decreases (Gatti et al., 2021).

To measure stakeholders' reactions to different forms of greenwashing in a supply-chain context, Pizzetti et al. (2021) tested how the locus of greenwashing differently affects blame attribution and intention to invest. As previously mentioned, the authors distinguish three different types of greenwashing based on the locus of the discrepancy between corporate environmental communication and behaviour: direct; indirect; and vicarious greenwashing. Their findings highlight that an inconsistency rooted within the internal operations of a company (direct greenwashing) always leads to higher negative effects on blame attribution and intention to invest. This means that as the level of internality, controllability, and intentionality of a discrepancy increases, the extent of blame assigned to a company also escalates, leading to a decrease in the inclination to invest. However, even if indirect and vicarious greenwashing are related to lower negative effects in terms of stakeholders' reactions, when a company asserts control over its supply chain, it creates expectations regarding its management of suppliers and their level of sustainability. If information and facts contradict these expectations, as in the case of a CSR scandal, the negative impact of greenwashing increases. It is imperative, therefore, to exercise

strict control to manage suppliers and supply-chain protocols or, alternatively, to communicate the actual control over suppliers transparently. This recommendation is particularly relevant considering that, in certain contexts, sourcing materials from suppliers sustainably can present challenges. Companies should, therefore, disclose their actual involvement in supply-chain management, acknowledging areas of strength and areas needing improvement. A pioneering example of such transparency is Patagonia, which has been at the forefront of sharing comprehensive information about its supply chain with stakeholders. This approach has also been adopted by Ferrero, an Italian company. On its CSR platforms, Ferrero shares detailed information about sustainability certifications at the supplier level and traceability of its raw material plantations, together with indexes and procedures that need to be improved.

Pizzetti et al.'s (2021) research extends the scope of greenwashing research to a supply-chain context. This is particularly important because greenwashing scandals often occur at the supply-chain level. For example, this happens when a company portrays itself as socially and environmentally responsible but partners with a supplier engaged in environmental pollution or operating sweatshops. Supply-chain management is widely acknowledged as a pivotal factor in influencing corporate environmental behaviours. In fact, a substantial body of literature has recognised sustainable supply-chain management as a critical element in attaining genuine sustainability. Despite this importance and the fact that several greenwashing scandals occur at the level of suppliers, the dynamics and implications of greenwashing at the supply-chain level remain underexplored in the literature.

When considering stakeholders' responses to greenwashing, it is crucial to remember that not only do different types of greenwashing affect stakeholders differently, but the stakeholders' individual characteristics also play a role in shaping their reactions. Research indicates that stakeholders' attentiveness and cognition are pivotal factors in determining how they respond to green communication and greenwashing. Stakeholders' attentiveness determines whether a particular issue is perceived as salient to a given stakeholder. Other aspects of cognition are equally significant in defining salience. For example, an employee with a background in environmental science will react much more negatively to her own company's greenwashing than an employee without such a background (Montgomery et al., 2023). Stakeholders' partisan political leanings also mediate their responses to corporate claims concerning environmental issues. For example, the importance assigned by stakeholders to climate change issues may vary according to their political beliefs, shaping different reactions to corporate communication about the topic. Moreover, there is substantial variation in the level of trust stakeholders place in corporations. Therefore, some people may unquestioningly accept corporate claims, some may outright reject them, and others will carefully evaluate them based

on all available evidence (Montgomery et al., 2023). Considering these individual characteristics is essential in understanding how stakeholders perceive and react to greenwashing.

When considering the effects and consequences of greenwashing, it is important to remember that each greenwashing instance is unique, characterised by a specific combination of deception type and level, resulting in distinct reactions from stakeholders. In addition, it is important to note that greenwashing also has a negative impact on society, as shown by the deadweight loss in welfare economics (Yang et al., 2020). According to Yang et al. (2020), if greenwashing is not addressed promptly, its long-term consequences can be severe, resulting in reduced investments in the production of green products for the market. This, in turn, incentivises firms to engage in unsustainable but more profitable behaviours. Consequently, the negative externalities of greenwashing may negatively affect social welfare and our planet.

Future Research Avenues

Regarding future research avenues and outlooks, scholars are expected to broaden the scope of their research beyond consumers and B2C markets. They should extend their focus to the B2B context, which has received limited attention in previous studies. This is crucial considering the numerous instances of greenwashing scandals involving companies' suppliers and supply-chain issues. In this context, it is essential to comprehend how greenwashing impacts collaborations and dynamics between B2B companies.

Future investigations should also prioritise exploring strategies to effectively counter greenwashing practices. There is an urgent need to identify practical solutions that could serve as disincentives for greenwashing. The objective of this research avenue is to gain insights into how to combat greenwashing and enlighten consumers about deceptive messages (Montgomery et al., 2023).

Considering the increasing sophistication of greenwashing practices, future research should also explore novel tools, techniques, and the involvement of new actors in the creation of greenwashing content. For instance, it would be interesting to investigate the role of consultancy firms specialised in developing corporate communication materials, as they may either promote or discourage greenwashing.

Finally, given the evolving nature of greenwashing-related phenomena, there is a high demand for mapping and analysing all the forms that greenwashing may assume, such as bluewashing, pinkwashing, machinewashing, or wokewashing. An attempt to provide a comprehensive list of greenwashing phenomena is offered in the next chapter of this book, where all types of *washings will be presented.

CONTRIBUTION OF MONOGRAPHS ABOUT GREENWASHING

While academic articles about greenwashing are becoming more numerous, to our knowledge, only a few books have discussed the phenomenon so far. Some of the existing books (Miller, 2018; Pearse, 2012) discuss greenwashing cases and related scandals with the main objective of making the public aware of the practice. In *Greenwashing Sport* (Miller, 2018), Miller discusses the contradiction of professional sports advertising their environmental efforts while contributing to our global environmental crisis. The author examines and evaluates the environmental policies, sustainability-related rhetoric, and the green communication of motor racing, football associations, and the Olympics, claiming that their actions and statements can be seen as a form of greenwashing. Additionally, he discusses the alignment of sports with gas and petroleum industries through sponsorship deals, which gives visibility and a positive image to environmentally polluting corporations. Using a similar critical tone, Pearse's book (2012) *Greenwash: Big Brands and Carbon Scams* aims to be a wake-up call. Through a critical examination of the green initiatives of famous brands and celebrities, the author questions the authenticity of the climate-friendly revolution promoted everywhere.

Other books have analysed the phenomenon from an academic viewpoint. For example, Van der Ven (2019) proposes a novel theory to study eco-labelling credibility. In *Beyond Greenwash*, the author addresses the following question: in the context of transnational eco-labelling, how can consumers distinguish between greenwashing and genuine attempts to address environmental challenges? To answer this question, the author employs an innovative proxy measure to assess the credibility of eco-labels based on adherence to established best practices.

In *After Greenwashing: Symbolic Corporate Environmentalism and Society*, Bowen (2014) applies a theoretical model to understand symbolic corporate environmentalism. Her discussion leads to the new concept of the "social energy penalty", which identifies the social cost associated with corporate actions to limit the conversation on environmental problems and solutions.

Finally, Vollero (2022) analyses academic business-research literature about greenwashing, providing an interesting picture of previous research on the topic. The book also presents a few case studies that illustrate how to avoid the greenwashing trap.

NOTES

1. Data retrieved from ABI/Inform database. English scholarly articles. 08-03-2023.
2. Data retrieved from ABI/Inform database. English scholarly articles. 08-06-2023.

3.   All sorts of *washings: a comprehensive overview

INTRODUCTION

This chapter embarks on a thorough exploration of *washing phenomena, presenting the first comprehensive overview of its kind. A meticulous review of diverse sources, including academic, practitioner, and media articles, as well as blogs, forums, and personal websites, has yielded the identification of 39 distinct types of *washing.

Seeking to establish uniformity in terminology across different writing variations, we have chosen to represent each *washing as one word, devoid of spaces or hyphens. However, exceptions arise when the term 'washing' is preceded by an acronym, as seen in the case of CSR-washing or COP-washing.

The structure of each subchapter adheres to the following systematic format. Initially, an assessment of the *washing scholar maturity is provided. To simplify this evaluation process, we developed a straightforward, user-friendly Scholar Maturity Index and Literature Evaluation, SMILES. A smiley face (☺) denotes a well-explored concept within the academic literature, a neutral face (☺) indicates a scarcity of scientific articles, necessitating further research, while a frowning face (☹) highlights either a paucity or complete absence of scholarly work on the phenomenon under examination. It is essential to note that the presence of a frowning face does not imply an absolute absence of references for the *washing in question. Rather, it signals a limited number of academic sources, with potential references coming from personal websites, forums, or other non-peer-reviewed platforms. This caution underscores the potential for bias, expression of personal opinions, or unverified content lacking rigorous peer review. Proceeding with clarity, each subchapter then provides a definition or a list of definitions, particularly for those *washings with multiple meanings. Subsequently, a case study or emblematic events illustrating the engagement of the specific type of *washing are presented. These pave the way for an in-depth analysis that highlights the unique characteristics of the *washing under scrutiny.

1.   AI-WASHING

SMILE: (☺)

Definition

AI-washing is defined as the accusation of the practice of misleadingly claiming, through unfounded and hollow assertions, to be using or being powered by AI technology – while lacking or not fulfilling the necessary requirements to be defined as AI-powered – to, among others, promote a positive image, increase financial returns, and secure funding.

AI-washing Cases

Engineer.ai is a tech company founded in 2012 that claimed to have developed a platform based on an "AI-powered software assembly line that breaks projects into small building blocks of re-usable features that are customised by elastic human capacity from around the world" (Azevedo, 2018), which permitted non-tech-geeks to create almost an entire mobile app with minimal effort and within an hour (Woollacott, 2023). This alleged innovation facilitated the accrual of approximately $30 million in investments by the end of 2018 (Azevedo, 2018). However, following a report in the *Wall Street Journal* by Purnell and Olson (2019), it was later revealed that the assertion was overstated since behind the alleged AI, there were Indian software engineers. Although Engineer.ai had started to "work on AI-based automation", they were still "at least a year away from being used as the foundation for the advertised service" (Smolaks, 2019). The report also underlined how the tech company lacked machine learning and data science experts, which questioned how the company could have implemented the advertised feature, and a Google Cache of the tech company's webpage dated 2019 highlighted the company's reliance on 75,000 external contractors (Smolaks, 2019).

The above-mentioned example represents a case study of the growing practice of AI-washing – which is now worrying the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) authorities (Vanderford, 2023). Analogous to the concept of greenwashing in the context of sustainable products, companies have started to capitalise on hype for AI technology and consumers' willingness to buy or invest in AI-powered technologies by misleadingly claiming to key stakeholders, through unfounded assertions, their utilisation or reliance on AI technology (Dey, 2023; Vanderford, 2023) – despite lacking or not fulfilling the necessary requirements to be defined as AI-powered (Prisznyák, 2023).

Such a practice is carried out primarily to increase short-term sales, differentiate oneself from competitors (Dey, 2023), and secure funding – as evidenced by a study by MMC Ventures indicating that start-ups that mention AI in their descriptions raise 15% more funding than those who do not (Ram, 2019). In addition, engaging in AI-washing can be done out of ignorance of the meaning of AI or, more strategically, to stall and buy time for implementing the necessary changes in one's technology (Rosencrance, 2022).

Like in greenwashing, the fallout from AI-washed claims can be severe and long-lasting. Exposed deceptive practices can significantly damage a company's reputation, resulting in diminished sales and a dearth of investments (Dey, 2023). Moreover, these adverse outcomes could ripple across the entire sector, creating a crisis of confidence in AI technology and trivialising its meaning (Rosencrance, 2022).

2. ARTWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

Artwashing was coined to define the process of gentrification initiated by the establishment of artists or art galleries in a neighbourhood. Over time, its scope expanded to encompass the strategic use of art and philanthropic donations to art institutions to enhance one's image. Subsequently, an additional understanding of artwashing was introduced to define the accusations made against magnates who sponsor cultural organisations but whose wealth was allegedly ill-gotten. Let us present them in order.

Main Definition

Artwashing consists of an accusation of a deliberate predatory strategy by which developers use art galleries and artists as instruments to increase the value of an urban area.

Secondary Definitions

- Artwashing defines the attempts by corporations, states, or any other entity to clean up their negative public image by increasing their reputation through targeted sponsorships to cultural institutions.
- Artwashing comprises accusations made against magnates who provide generous donations to artistic or cultural institutions but whose wealth was accumulated through dubious or unethical activities.

Artwashing and Gentrification

In 2017, the reading of Chris Kraus' *After Kathy Acker at CUNY was inter-
rupted by two protestors who took the stage. They accused the author of sup-
porting the gentrification of Boyle Heights by hosting a reading of his book in
the neighbourhood at the 365 Mission gallery. The protestors pointed out how
the many art galleries in the neighbourhood were leading to the "displacement
and ultimate cultural erasure" of the locals (primarily Hispanic working class
(Billard, 2017)); this because of the rising prices and the artists' and galleries'
"blatant disregard for the rich history of the community they are overtaking"
(Billard, 2017). Their contention, nonetheless, was not against culture or art
per se but on the "broader effort by planners and politicians and developers
who want to artwash gentrification" (Billard, 2017).

   The accusation of artwashing consists of the deliberate predatory strategy
by which developers introduce art galleries or rent spaces to artists in a low-
income neighbourhood – thus increasing interest in the area (Francis, 2017);
their arrival "forces out local shops and services and drives up property prices"
(Dalley, 2018), and, once prices have risen, they market the neighbourhood to a
more affluent and "smarter demographic" (Dalley, 2018) – leaving (first) resi-
dents and (then) artists to move to a cheaper area. As such, art and artists are
"treated by developers as a form of regenerative detergent" (Francis, 2017). It
is important to state that such a process is not confined to Boyle Heights but
has been deployed in other places, such as New York City's Chinatown. In
this case, between 2014 and 2017, "more than 60 galleries [were] established"
(Billard, 2017) in the neighbourhood. Their arrival was met by a rent rise,
which drove low-income residents and business owners out of their neighbour-
hood since they could not keep up with the mounting costs (Chinatown Art
Brigade, 2016).

Artwashing as an Image Lip Service

The use of the word "artwashing" remained confined to the realm of gentrifica-
tion struggles until 2020, when activists induced museums into refusing fossil
fuels money – thus bringing "a shift in the artwashing narrative" (Commetric,
2022). The newer understanding of artwashing defines the attempts by corpo-
rations, states, or any other entity to clean up their negative public image by
increasing their reputation through targeted sponsorships to cultural institu-
tions (Commetric, 2022; Francis, 2017).

   Illustrative instances of this practice include Qatar's substantial donations to
the British Library amid the imprisonment of a poet for his writings (Dalley,
2018); Saudi Arabia's claims of cultural freedoms while harshly punishing
artists (Dalley, 2018); the imprisonment of photographer Shahidul Alam in

Bangladesh amid the promotion of Dhaka's cultural initiatives to the world's press (Dalley, 2018); BP sponsoring the Tate galleries in London (Francis, 2017); Volkswagen's support of the MoMA while "equipping 11 million cars with illegal software to cheat emissions testing, and then lying to investigators about the scheme" (Commetric, 2022); or BlackRock's sponsorship of the MoMA while having connections "to private prisons and the economic crisis in Puerto Rico" (Commetric, 2022). The big pharma sector is not excluded from the list of alleged artwashers, with the Sacklers recently having their name removed from galleries and museums all over the world for their links with the OxyContin producer Purdue Pharma, which "was accused of being a key contributor to the devastating opioid crisis sweeping the U.S." (Commetric, 2022).

This image lip service is, nevertheless, increasingly denounced by NGOs, scientists, and civil society with targeted campaigns, many of which have led to positive results such as the boycott of "London's Science Museum's new exhibition on the climate crisis because of its sponsorship by Shell" (Commetric, 2022). Other examples include the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre, National Galleries Scotland, the Southbank Centre, and the BFI, which ceased all sponsorship ties with oil giants Shell and BP as their "oil money now looks almost as rancid as cash from arms and tobacco companies" (Commetric, 2022).

Artwashing and Ill-gotten Wealth

Finally, closely related to the previous understanding, artwashing is also used to refer to the accusation made against magnates who provide generous donations to artistic or cultural institutions but whose wealth was accumulated through dubious or unethical activities. Examples of this use of such understanding of artwashing are the accusations made against MoMA's "trustees Laurence Fink and Steven Tananbaum due to their companies' respective investments in private prisons and Puerto Rican debt" (McGivern, 2019).

3.   BEEWASHING (ALSO KNOWN AS OR SIMILAR TO: HIVEWASHING)

SMILE: (☺)

Definition

Beewashing describes the accusation of communicative efforts, even when good-intentions inspired, aimed at ameliorating one's (corporate) image by promoting projects that allegedly help pollinators (and consequently the environment) but that, de facto, do nothing – or even worsen – their conditions and do not tackle the systemic nature of the threat that they face.

Beewashing Cases

In an article in *The New York Times* in August 2023, journalist David Segal and photographer Ciril Jazbec explored the growing practice by B&Bs, hotels, restaurants, and offices of having beehives on their rooftops. For an annual fee, a beekeeper installs and cares for the hive while the "customers get the honey and the pleasure of doing something that benefits bees and nourishes the environment" (Segal & Jazbec, 2023). However, despite the good intentions, such a growing trend is producing the opposite effect to the extent that conservationists and researchers believe that this "craze for honey bees now presents a genuine ecological challenge" (Segal & Jazbec, 2023) that has generated a new type of *washing: "beewashing" (MacIvor & Packer, 2015), also known as "hivewashing" (Segal & Jazbec, 2023).

Ever since the human-caused decrease of insect pollinators has become a mainstream issue (Hall & Martins, 2020) and their paramount role recognised by most (Wilson et al., 2017), private individuals, celebrities "like Beyoncé and Queen Camilla" (Segal & Jazbec, 2023) and companies have started to support projects that allegedly aim at increasing the number of pollinators. Most of these projects focus only on the honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) – which has become the poster child for the pollinators' decline – that does not need help, and not on the more than 20,000 species of feral bees worldwide that are fundamental providers of ecosystem services (Matias et al., 2017) and are in dire conditions, but whose existence goes unnoticed by most (Hall & Martins, 2020) – since they do not produce honey and they live "in ground nests and cavities like hollow tree trunks" (Segal & Jazbec, 2023). This misconception about who needs to be protected (wild bees and other pollinators) and who does

not (honey bees) is having detrimental effects on the former (Royal Botanical Garden Kew, 2020). The Royal Botanical Garden Kew has underlined how the "unsustainable proliferation in urban beekeeping" (Royal Botanical Garden Kew, 2020) and beehives around the world – more than one hundred million worldwide, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (DeStatis, 2023) – is depleting forages (for both honeybees and wild ones), promoting the out-competition of wild bees, and facilitating the spillover of diseases to wild species (Daszak et al., 2000). As such, the misplacing of conservation efforts "actively harm[s] populations meant to be conserved, waste[s] limited resources (e.g. time, energy, money), misinform[s] the public and/or de-legitimize[s] scientific evidence" (Colla, 2022).

Because of these nefarious effects, in 2015, MacIvor and Packer coined the term "beewashing" to describe the communicative efforts aimed at ameliorating one's corporate image by promoting "feel-good" (Colla, 2022) projects that allegedly help pollinators (and consequently the environment) but that, *de facto*, do nothing – or even worsen – their conditions and do not tackle the systemicity of the issue (MacIvor & Packer, 2015). Examples of initiatives that amount to beewashing have been listed by Colla (2022) and range from "the widespread promotion and sale of bee hotels" (Colla, 2022), which have not been backed by science (MacIvor & Packer, 2015), to "the well-known multi-million dollar crowd-sourcing campaigns for the 'Flow hive'" (Colla, 2022), or those rooftop hives initiatives documented by Segal and Jazbec (2023) that are becoming popular in cities (Casanelles-Abella & Moretti, 2022) and with businesses (Egerer & Kowarik, 2020). Finally, beewashing can also encompass positive actions, such as planting flowers for pollinators, which distract political attention and divert resources from tackling the core issue (Ford et al., 2021).

4.   BIODIVERSITYWASHING

SMILE: (☹)

Despite the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment's dire snapshot of the health of ecosystems, where 15 out of 24 ecosystem services were declared to be in decline (Agardy et al., 2005); even though the more recent Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services assesses that 14 out of 18 categories of Nature's services have been declining since the 1970s (IPBES, 2019); and regardless of the call to rethink the economics of biodiversity (Dasgupta, 2021), the biodiversity crisis continues to be overlooked both at international conferences and remains much less covered by the media. Nevertheless, the recent scandals about carbon offsetting and the heightened awareness of greenwashing might be changing the attention given to biodiversity. Some, in fact,

have started calling attention to the fact that businesses are recalibrating their engagement from environmental and climate-related projects to biodiversity ones. Although such an interest might be welcomed, with it may also come the first misleading claims about alleged engagement for biodiversity protection and conservation, a phenomenon termed "biodiversitywashing".

Definition

Biodiversitywashing is defined as the accusation of misalignment between biodiversity talk and walk, where deceptive practices, which range from token and superficial commitments to unsubstantiated claims, are strategically utilised to enhance one's corporate image by capitalising on the heightened public awareness of the biodiversity crisis.

The Recent Interest in Biodiversity and Doubts about Substantial Actions

In 2022, two Conferences of the Parties (COP) were held, each addressing distinct environmental crises. The first, hosted in Sharm El-Sheikh by Egypt, centred around the climate crisis and garnered widespread attention with over 90 heads of state in attendance. The second, held in Canada, focused on the less-publicised biodiversity crisis, with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as the sole head of state participant (Dolsak & Prakash, 2023).

Although both conferences address the overuse of common resources and face the prisoners' dilemma when it comes to decision-making (if one unilaterally decides to kerb one's CO_2 emissions or not to cut down a forest to protect biodiversity – thus incurring increased costs – one might not be sure that others will do the same, therefore, nullifying one's efforts), there is a stark difference in the public's interest in the two. Legagneux et al. (2018) underscore how, between 1991 and 2016, in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K., there was a profound media coverage discrepancy between climate and biodiversity issues: climate change-related issues were covered 3.3 times more than biodiversity ones (a number that reached a factor of eight in 2016).

Despite this gap, investors are starting to consider biodiversity in their investment choices, with some reports identifying that for 41% of them, "biodiversity is at the centre of, or a significant factor in, their investment policy today" (Robeco, 2022). This growing attention to the biodiversity crisis is a trend that brands have started noticing and to which they have responded by increasing their commitments in the area.

This shift of corporate interest from advertising climate-friendly actions to biodiversity protection and conservation projects might be caused, among other factors, by the heightened public and institutional awareness of greenwashing.

In addition, however, Ormesher (2023b) identifies the recent carbon credits scandals as another possible reason for such a redirection of interests. Given the widespread backlash that followed the carbon credits scandal (where the carbon credits emitted by one of the leading certifiers were discovered to be worthless (Greenfield, 2023a)), many companies have started parting ways with offsetting schemes and recalibrating their message, highlighting how "they're giving back to nature" (Ormesher, 2023b). For example, in 2022, Patagonia gained media attention for its founder's pledge to donate all profits not reinvested in the company towards "protecting nature and biodiversity" (Ormesher, 2023b). Allbirds claimed to have launched the first carbon-zero shoe in the world that does not achieve net-zero through offsetting but through regenerative farming (Ormesher, 2023a), and LVMH articulated its "concrete action plans on achieving circularity, transparency and traceability, and climate and biodiversity because all our products are dependent on the environment" with its environment development director stating that "preserving biodiversity is a responsibility not just for us but for society" (Ormesher, 2023b).

While the involvement of private enterprises in biodiversity conservation is commendable and desirable, cautionary voices have emerged (Eyre, n.d.), warning against the potential emergence of biodiversitywashing, a phenomenon akin to the carbonwashing [internal reference] of the carbon debate and greenwashing [internal reference] for the climate and more general environmental debate. Biodiversitywashing encompasses misleading practices that capitalise on the growing public concerns over biodiversity loss to improve the corporate image. These range from token commitments to protecting and restoring biodiversity (such as highlighting "minor concessions" to biodiversity, e.g., "green bridges or tunnels over and under new roads, or proposals for offsetting the loss of one area of forest by promising to protect another" (EcoNexus, 2018)) that are not matched by any substantive actions taken in this regard, to the promotion of biodiversity-orientated products that cannot be properly assessed because of the absence of precise metrics (Robeco, 2022). Therefore, biodiversitywashing expresses the misalignment between the (biodiversity) talking and the (biodiversity) walking.

In conclusion, it is imperative to note that some have started to question whether, akin to the claims raised against carbon credits, the use of biodiversity credits (namely, a compensatory conservation instrument similar to carbon offsets where residual biodiversity damages are balanced out with biodiversity benefits elsewhere) could become a form of biodiversitywashing (Conti & Seele, 2023, 2024) – which, when supported by governments, could reach an institutional level (Cox, 2021). This is because, with biodiversity offsets, biodiversity benefits are uncertain while biodiversity damages are; as such, users of this tool may (also unintentionally and in *bona fide*) mislead external

stakeholders about their lack of impacts, or positive ones, on biodiversity (Cox, 2023).

5.   BLOCKCHAINWASHING

SMILE: (☹)

Blockchainwashing and cryptowashing are intricately connected, given that blockchain technology serves as a fundamental element in numerous crypto-currencies to guarantee security (Friedhelm & Weintraud, 2021). While block-chain is the underlying technology for cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, scholarly literature on the former type of washing is scant.

Definition

Blockchainwashing consists of piggybacking on the blockchain popularity by misleadingly using the blockchain label to promote a product better or claim-ing to run one's product on a blockchain basis without having all the features to be defined as blockchain-based.

From its Origins to the First Misuses

In 2008, Satoshi Nakamoto introduced the groundbreaking technology of blockchain (Nakamoto, 2008). It consists of "dividing a distributed ledger into blocks of transactions that can be chained together" (Roy, 2023); such a pro-cess "ensure[s] security and a convergence of views in a world where everyone writes transactions in a decentralised way, in an open world, where there is no one to say 'this is the right version of the ledger'" (Roy, 2023). These features led to the widespread adoption of blockchain-based systems across various sectors (Friedhelm & Weintraud, 2021). Applications range from orange juice producers using blockchain to trace their supply chain for enhanced transpar-ency in product origins (BBC, 2019) to Catholic Church groups utilising it for registering sacred sacraments (Carbó, 2021; Cryptonaute, 2018).

However, this surge in popularity has prompted some to opportunistically piggyback on it to better their image or increase sales. This involves misusing the blockchain label, either by superficially attaching it to an existing product, solution, or service (Moore, 2016) or by failing to meet the necessary criteria to be genuinely labelled as a blockchain-based product or service. This decep-tive practice, characterised by a mismatch between claims and actual features, is referred to as blockchainwashing.

6.   BLUEWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

Bluewashing is a term used to describe a deceptive practice where corporations try to mislead consumers into believing they are socially responsible by using the United Nations' reputation. There are five meanings associated with bluewashing. The first and main one involves exploiting the reputation of the United Nations, the second involves using the UN's initiatives in ways that are not directly related to their original purpose, and the last involves rebranding events that are socially ambiguous as sustainable, non-consumeristic, and planet-friendly. Let us present them in order.

Main Definition

Bluewashing is the accusation of a symbolic, self-serving, monodirectional, communicative façade not backed by any substantiated or verifiable humanitarian action – or any other deed in the field of social issues – that aims to intentionally mislead consumers or other stakeholders into believing that a corporation is socially responsible by piggybacking on the United Nations' reputation (and their blue logo).

Secondary Definitions

- Bluewashing consists of the political strategy of retrospectively legitimising a country's illegal deeds by introducing the United Nations as a sponsor.
- Bluewashing consists of establishing a colour palette to identify environmentally friendly car engine technologies and misleadingly transposing them to normal gasoline and diesel vehicles to better market them.
- Bluewashing consists of vague and/or unsubstantiated statements about data security and privacy.
- Bluewashing is a communicative façade where socially ambiguous practices are symbolically and misleadingly rebranded more positively following the social protection aspects advocated by the United Nations Global Compact – without any institutional partnership with the said international organisation.

Bluewashing and the United Nations Global Compact

In July 2000, the former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan was photographed shaking hands with Nike's CEO Philip Knight. The handshake marked Nike's commitment to join and uphold the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), a set of ten principles – introduced a year earlier at the World Economic Forum (WEF) – to protect human rights, implement decent labour conditions, increase environmental responsibility, reduce environmental impact, and combat corruption.

The photo symbolises the cooperative efforts aimed at finding common ground between the UN and giant transnational corporations (Bruno & Karliner, 2000) – for upholding the global values that underpinned the ethical and governance debates in the 1990s (Wilkinson, 2005). However, such a worthy objective took an adverse turn and created the practice of bluewashing, which hijacked greenwashing on a global scale (Greer & Bruno, 1996) – hence the colour reference both to the new scale (namely, the blue planet) and to the colour which defines the UN's corporate identity and characterises the peacekeeping troops' helmets (Seele, 2007). Such a misleading twist has been enabled by three elements:

(i)   the "norm-based sociological emphasis" (Berliner & Prakash, 2014);
(ii)   the lack of verifiable obligations and enforcement (Voegtlin & Pless, 2014) that "do not impose concrete outcome standards on its participants" (Berliner & Prakash, 2014) – note that all "proposals to regulate or even monitor the practices of large corporations were mostly removed from […] documents" (Greer & Bruno, 1996);
(iii) the voluntariness of the subscription.

These features made it possible to perform a mere "ceremonial commitment" (Lim & Tsutsui, 2012) to better its public perception, that is, to *bluewash* its image with the perceived positive brand of the UN represented by the blue flags in front of the UN headquarters.

Bluewashing is a symbolic, "self-serving" (Ruiz-Blanco et al., 2022), mono-directional (Bruno & Karliner, 2000), communicative façade not backed by any substantiated or verifiable humanitarian action – or any other deed in the field of social issues (Chen & Chang, 2013) – that aims to intentionally (Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014; Nyilasy et al., 2014) mislead consumers into believing that a corporation is socially responsible by piggybacking on the United Nations' reputation. Fundamentally, bluewashing is a CSR "lip service" (Sailer et al., 2022) that, if discovered, backfires in the form of general scepticism

towards the company's social responsibility and engagement (McClimon, 2022).

Two main reasons can be conceived to explain the choice to implement the bluewashing strategy. The first consists of Nike's attempted damage control by hiding or shifting the attention away from their documented poor performance regarding human rights and labour standards (ABC News, 2008; Connor, 2002, 2000; Kish, 2016; Teather, 2005). In fact, numerous reports described how Nike had been producing its garments in countries where authoritarian governments impeded all civil society organisations and unions, and where workers were harassed or even threatened from unionising (Connor, 2000): all conditions in diametrical opposition to the UNGC ten principles. In this regard, some scholars (Berliner & Prakash, 2015) have even underlined that not only Nike but many members of the United Nations Global Compact have "poorer performance than non-members in crucial and cost-intensive dimensions, while merely making low-cost efforts to improve in rather superficial dimensions" (Sailer et al., 2022). The second objective is communicative and aimed at gaining an economic advantage against competitors that, *ceteris paribus*, did not have such a partnership. In fact, the subscription to the Global Compact ameliorates the company's public perception in terms of "values, social programmes, and governance practices" (McClimon, 2022), that, when not upheld by any concrete actions or reforms, turns into free-riding on the United Nations' reputation.

Bluewashing and its Secondary Meanings

Since the new millennium, the concept of bluewashing has spilt over to different fields. A new application of the notion is using bluewashing to pejoratively indicate the political strategy of retrospectively legitimising a country's illegal deeds by introducing the UN as a sponsor. This is the strategy that many states have employed to legitimise their armies' involvement in the Iraq war (Monbiot, 2003). As such, the notion is detached from the ten principles of the UNGC but still retains the link to the United Nations and the reference to its colour.

Other examples, instead, have completely detached themselves from the original understanding of bluewashing and now stand to describe something else altogether.

The first of the new applications concerns the automobile industry: carmakers are adopting the use of the colour blue to suggest an environmentally friendly type of technology, such as electric, hybrid, fuel-efficient, using alternative fuels, or compliant with Euro 6 standards (Vicente, 2013) – often then transposed to better market normal gasoline and diesel vehicles with catchy names such as BlueTec (Mercedes-Benz) and Bluemotion (VW, Audi) (Seele,

2007). Such a colour palette aims to distance the carmaker from the controversial green tree-huggers to embrace an eco-friendly technology that does not reduce the pleasure of driving or performance (Seele, 2007).

The second innovative understanding is the transposition of bluewashing into the field of digital ethics and security, where it is used to describe the industry's "vague or unsubstantiated claims about their data privacy and security" (McClimon, 2022).

The third new understanding retains the social protection aspect advocated by the United Nations Global Compact but lacks the institutional partnership with the international organisation. Examples of such use are the communicative efforts of certain companies to symbolically rebrand socially ambiguous events in a more sustainable, non-consumeristic, and planet-friendly manner, like advertising sales as "Social Friday" to distance oneself from the scandalous Black Friday (Sailer et al., 2022).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is an open debate in the literature about whether bluewashing is a standalone concept or whether it falls under the bigger umbrella term of greenwashing (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020; Seele & Gatti, 2017). Such confusion is increased by the lack of "standardised terminology and fuzzy boundaries" (Sailer et al., 2022); some scholars, in fact, reference the phenomenon by different names: "social-washing" (Rizzi et al., 2020), "corporate hypocrisy" (Wagner et al., 2009), or "CSR-washing" (Pope & Wæraas, 2016).

7.   BROWNWASHING (ALSO KNOWN AS OR SIMILAR TO: BLACKWASHING, COLOURWASHING)

SMILE: (☺)

Brownwashing can have three major meanings. The first concerns race and the actions of certain companies to capitalise on this debate (Birkner, 2020). The second deals with the representation of race in the film industry (Blank, 2017; Case, 2022). The third directly relates to greenwashing and is primarily discussed in the academic literature. Let us present them in order.

Main Definition

Brownwashing is an accusation of the marketing practice of capitalising on the public outcry against systemic racism, mainly directed at people of colour (hence, the use of the colour brown) to increase the brand image – while providing no concrete solutions, or just performative ones, to tackle the problem: talking without walking.

Secondary Definitions

- Brownwashing identifies the practice of film producers casting actors of colour in historically white roles to increase diversity and represent today's multiculturalism.
- Brownwashing consists of the omission of disclosing relevant environmental performances and information because of the concern that shareholders might perceive environmental investments as actions that do not contribute to value maximisation.

Brownwashing and Systemic Racism

The debate about systemic racism exploded in the United States (U.S.) on 25 May 2020 (Menendian & Powell, n.d.) with the death of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man who was killed while in police custody (Hill et al., 2020). Following the public upheaval, the Boston shoemaker New Balance issued, five days later, the following statement on their Instagram account:

> Today we're finding a voice to advocate on issues about which we cannot be silent. No one should live with the fear and perpetual injustice faced daily by communities of color across the United States and around the world. We stand with our entire roster of athletes, ambassadors, and all of our global associates in demanding justice for the wrongful death of George Floyd and too many others. We're asking that our partner and community engage with not just words, but peaceful action. To start, join in supporting the petition for Justice for George Floyd. (newbalance, 2020a)

The statement is built on two axes. The first highlights the issue at stake, viz., the systemic racism that certain minorities face in the United States ("No one should live with the *fear* and *perpetual* injustice faced daily by *communities of color* across the U.S. and around the world"[1] (newbalance, 2020a)). The second concerns the company's engagement in finding a concrete solution, namely the request to sign a petition ("We're asking that our partner and community engage with not just words, but peaceful action. To start, join in *supporting the petition* for Justice for George Floyd"[2] (newbalance, 2020a)). Some have criticised the proposed solution as not being transformative enough to tackle the pervasiveness of the issue (Birkner, 2020) – an insufficiency accrued by another company's statement released three days later after the killing of another Black American (Birkner, 2020):

> Today, running takes on a new meaning for the global community. When you go out for a run today to train, to better yourself, or just to clear your head, join us in saying his name: AHMAUD ARBERY. No one in the Black community should ever fear for their lives while running. In Ahmaud Arbery's name, we will be donating

10,000 pairs of running shoes to Black community-based programs in the Atlanta area. (newbalance, 2020b)

This benefaction that "appear[s] like an act of goodwill" has been accused of being more a "marketing action than a transformative action" (Birkner, 2020) – and has been mocked as being a "profitable donation" (Birkner, 2020). This is because the donation of shoes does not solve systemic issues such as racism but instead increases the brand's visibility and establishes a customer relationship that will ultimately help, in this case, sell more shoes (Birkner, 2020). This accusation bears the name of *brownwashing*, namely, the marketing practice of capitalising on the public outcry against systemic racism, primarily directed at people of colour (hence, the use of the colour brown) to increase brand image – while providing no concrete solutions to tackle the problem or just performative ones.

Brownwashing and the Film Industry

The second understanding of brownwashing (also referred to as "blackwashing" (Giannetti & Chen, 2023)) concerns the film industry and their casting of people of colour in roles of figures that historically were white (Blank, 2017; Case, 2022). This is the case for the TV series *Bridgerton*, where the producers cast the mixed-race actress India Amarteifio for the role of young Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and wife of King George III (Nast, 2023). Another example is Netflix casting a Black actor as the Egyptian ruler. This choice prompted a statement by Egypt's antiquities minister, Zahi Hawass, who complained, stating that "[t]his is completely fake. Cleopatra was Greek, meaning that she was light-skinned, not black" (Rose, 2023), and generated a broader backlash calling it a "politically correct casting" (Wolf, 2021). A rationale embraced by an Egyptian lawyer who is suing the streaming giant "for its promotion of 'Afrocentric thinking'" (Rose, 2023).

Despite the criticisms that accuse the promotion of false depictions of historical events (Tillet, 2021) – which some argue might even "distract us from chattel slavery and discrimination" (Case, 2022) – many support these alternatives. They claim that these provide a role model for communities that have been historically under-represented and marginalised (Nicholson, 2023) and bring "diversity to the very white world of historical drama" (Rose, 2023) – thus matching "the multicultural reality of [today]" (Wolf, 2021).

As such, in this context, brownwashing identifies the practice of film producers casting actors of colour in historically white roles to increase diversity and represent today's multiculturalism.

Brownwashing in the Academic Literature

The last meaning that brownwashing might have relates to the notion of green-hushing. In the academic literature, brownwashing is described as the practice of "hiding relevant information or making modest claims about [one's] environmental activities" (Huang et al., 2022) and revealing them only if there is some sort of pressure (Bansal & Roth, 2000), because of the concern that shareholders might perceive environmental investments as actions that do not contribute to value maximisation (Ullmann, 1985).

8.   CARBONWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

Definition

Carbonwashing is a type of greenwashing that is specifically focused on carbon emissions. It involves the use of misleading public relations tactics related to climate change (such as using vague and difficult-to-verify terms such as "carbon-neutral" or "carbon-negative"), with no real action being taken to address the issue. The goal is to create a brand or corporate image that is seen as environmentally friendly, taking advantage of the loose or non-existent regulations around carbon emissions disclosure in order to mislead consumers and investors.

Carbonwashing Cases

There is a growing awareness of the climate crisis, and many initiatives and frameworks (such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's "Race to Net Zero" or Science-based Target Initiative (SBTi)) have been put in place by governments and institutions to increase the disclosure of climate-related risks. Many companies around the world have committed to decarbonising their activities and supply chains and have pledged publicly to do so using buzzwords and phrases like "climate neutral", "carbon-negative", "net-zero", and "offsetting" (Fairs, 2021; In & Schumacher, 2021). For example, in 2020, Google declared its investment in enabling "5 GW in carbon-free energy across [its] key manufacturing regions by 2030" (Pichai, 2020), while in 2021, Apple announced its fund to "accelerate natural solutions to climate change" (Apple, 2021). Similarly, in 2020, Amazon made public its "$2 Billion Climate Pledge Fund to Invest in Companies Building Products, Services, and Technologies to Decarbonise the Economy and Protect the Planet" (Amazon,

2020). This trend of climate-friendly pledges is not limited to the tech industry; for example, in 2019, Air Co launched its "carbon-negative" vodka (Cogley, 2019), and in 2021, "the world's first and only carbon-negative hand sanitiser made from technology that actually reverses climate change by mimicking photosynthesis" (Fairs, 2021).

Despite claims of being environmentally friendly, some of these companies' actions do not match their talk. For example, as remarked by Fairs (2021), the carbon dioxide sequestered from the atmosphere used by Air Co to produce its sanitiser contributes to the reduction in carbon emissions only as long as it remains in the bottle; since once it is opened, the carbon dioxide is reintroduced into the atmosphere, thus annulling any alleged decrease in greenhouse gases. But Air Co is not the only company whose walk allegedly does not match the talk (Southan, 2022): In fact, the BBC uncovered how Google – which pledged to enable 5 GW of carbon-free energy – has nevertheless removed a "key driver of global warming out of its online carbon flight calculator" (Rowlatt, 2022) – thus altering the way its search engine calculates flight emissions, making it appear less climate impactful than it is. As such, for the same flight (say Seattle–Paris), Google Flights estimates with the new calculation that a passenger will contribute with an emission of 521 $kgCO_2e$ instead of the former 839 $kgCO_2e$ (Rowlatt, 2022). Moreover, Google's carbon goal achievement entails using carbon offsetting (namely, an instrument through which one can contribute to environmental projects that remove carbon dioxide or reduce emissions to compensate for one's emissions (Hyams & Fawcett, 2013)) as allowed by the international standard for carbon neutrality PAS 2060. However, these "merely prevent more greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere, rather than undoing the emissions the company has already caused" (Fairs, 2021). Moreover, in the last case, a recent journalistic inquiry by *The Guardian*, *Die Zeit*, and SourceMaterial has uncovered how the vast majority of carbon credits emitted are "worthless" (Greenfield, 2023a) and not helping to kerb deforestation as alleged (EARTH Journalism Network, 2023; Greenfield, 2023a, 2023b): allegations that seriously question the achievement of any climatic goal achieved through this instrument.

In conclusion, "there appears to be a significant disconnect between stated ambitions and value chain greenhouse gas (GHG) monitoring, actionable reduction strategies, efficient governance, and capital allocations towards achieving most of their self-declared targets" (In & Schumacher, 2021). Such a mismatch between the talk and the walk has been called out as "carbonwashing" (In & Schumacher, 2021; Southan, 2022): a narrower kind of greenwashing solely focused on carbon emissions. It consists of systemic, misleading climate change-related PR practices – not backed by any substantive action – aimed at establishing a climate-friendly brand or corporate image through vague and difficult-to-check terminology (such as carbon-neutral or carbon-negative) and

by capitalising on the sector's loose (or absent) regulations on carbon emissions disclosure (Fairs, 2021; In & Schumacher, 2021).

9. CLOUDWASHING

SMILE: (☹)

Definition

Cloudwashing is the accusation of a misleading marketing practice of piggybacking on the buzzword "cloud" and exploiting the sector's jargon ambiguities and technical complexities to ameliorate one's image and increase financial profits by selling non-cloud-native products or services as ones.

Cloudwashing Cases

Since 2006, when Amazon Web Services launched its Elastic Cloud Compute (VMware Aria Cost, 2019), the word "cloud" has become a buzzword (DevX, 2023; Sheldon et al., 2022). As such, companies have tried to capitalise on its positive connotations in the public consciousness, such as being "modern, flexible" (Finbourne, 2023), "cutting-edge, scalable, and on-demand" (DevX, 2023). This trend has given rise to a new phenomenon, albeit one that has fortunately seen a decline over the last five years (VMware Aria Cost, 2019): *cloudwashing.*

Cloudwashing defines the misleading marketing strategy that aims to deceptively rebrand non-cloud-native, legacy, on-premise activities, products, or services as cloud software (Plex. Manufacturing Success Stories, 2016; Sheldon et al., 2022), often using expressions such as "open cloud" or "cloud enabled" (VMware Aria Cost, 2019). Despite these labels, some of these entities might have merely been virtualised and lack essential qualities for genuine cloud computing (DevX, 2023; Doerrfeld, 2019), such as being "multitenant" and "version-less" (Plex. Manufacturing Success Stories, 2016). This practice is carried out to increase one's financial profit by gaining new or securing old customers by presenting an "innovative" and "competitive" brand image and "new, advanced, and feature-rich cloud" services (DevX, 2023).

The National Institute of Standards and Technology has listed five essential characteristics that define a proper cloud service. These are (VMware Aria Cost, 2019):

(a)   "on-demand, automatic self-service without the need for human interaction with the service provider";
(b)   "broad network access with capabilities accessible by standard mechanisms such as workstations and mobile devices";
(c)   "a pool of resources shared between multiple users, dynamically assigned and reassigned according to consumer demand";
(d)   "rapid elasticity so that consumers can provision and release resources in any quantity at any time"; and
(e)   "The service must be measurable in order that resource usage can be monitored, controlled, and reported".

Whenever such features are absent, there is the risk of a cloudwashed service, product, or activity. To better spot these cases, Sheldon et al. (2022) identified nine primary markers of cloudwashing:

(i)   "The application does not support resource pooling or multi-tenancy";
(ii)   "The application requires custom integrations, special hardware, or software";
(iii)   "Usability, performance, and security are inconsistent among users and devices";
(iv)   "The application is not easy to configure, customise, or scale";
(v)   "Application updates and improvements are few and far between";
(vi)   "The application pricing and billing structure is complex";
(vii)   "Basic operations are slow and cumbersome";
(viii)   "Setting up and configuring the application requires special training or personnel"; and
(ix)   "The application lacks on-demand self-service capabilities".

To these, Doerrfeld (2019) added:

(x)   "Overuse of 'cloud' in vague marketing jargon";
(xi)   "Lack of developer tooling";
(xii)   "Tooling not planned with redundancy in mind"; and
(xiii)   "Server arrangement is not distributed".

Such a practice is enabled by the sector's lexicon ambiguities and technical specifics proper to the cloud, which make it difficult for the lay consumer (and not only for them (VMware Aria Cost, 2019)) to distinguish between cloud-native and cloudwashed services (Moorthy et al., 2015; Sheldon et al., 2022).

10. COLOURWASHING

SMILE: (☹)

There are two understandings of colourwashing: the first and main one defines colourwashing as an umbrella term that groups all *washings that have a colour in front of the term, for example, greenwashing, pinkwashing, etc.; the second understanding is related to the notion of brownwashing and pertains to the practice of casting persons of colour actors for historically white characters.

Main Definition

Colourwashing represents the comprehensive phenomenon whereby companies are accused of employing a misleading, profit-driven, strategic co-optation of values, colours, ideals, symbols – and, more broadly, movements. This strategic manoeuvre aims to enhance or (re-)establish their corporate image by capitalising on today's consumers' heightened social and environmental awareness, projecting themselves as advocates and allies of social and environmental causes.

Secondary Definition

Within the film industry, colourwashing refers to the accusation of the practice – strategically undertaken to promote inclusivity and increase diversity – of casting persons of colour to play historically white characters.

An Umbrella Term for All the Colour-related Washings

Colourwashing represents the comprehensive phenomenon whereby companies employ a misleading, profit-driven, strategic co-optation of values, colours, ideals, symbols – and, more broadly, movements. This strategic manoeuvre aims to enhance or (re-)establish their corporate image by capitalising on today's consumers' heightened social and environmental awareness, projecting themselves as advocates and allies of social and environmental causes (Sustainable Fashion Matterz, 2020; World Law Forum, 2021). This practice is carried out through performative actions and advertisements that are not backed by any substantive and long-lasting change in the company's conduct, internal policies, or business practices.

In a blog post for Remake, Taylor (2021) categorises misleading practices such as greenwashing, pinkwashing, brownwashing, and rainbowwashing within the overarching practice of colourwashing. This taxonomy is further

expanded by Sustainable Fashion Matterz (2020) to encompass whitewashing. We propose to broaden the list by introducing orangewashing, redwashing, and purplewashing as additional deceptive practices falling under the umbrella concept of colourwashing.

Colourwashing and the Film Industry

A second understanding of colourwashing relates to the film industry and consists of casting non-white actors to play roles that historically were white characters to increase diversity (Anti-ColorwashedandWhitewashed, 2019). Such an understanding is to be considered related to, or is also known as, brownwashing [internal reference].

11.   COP-WASHING

SMILE: (☹)

Definition

COP-washing is a specific type of greenwashing that takes place on a large, industrial scale. It involves manipulating the United Nations Conference of the Parties on climate change, a significant global platform, to one's advantage. The primary objective is to use this platform, in conjunction with other public relations strategies, to project a positive, eco-friendly, net-zero, climate advocacy image. This image is often misleading, serving to divert attention away from and obscure the entity's actual climate track record.

COP-washing Cases

COP28, namely the 28th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), was held from 30 November to 12 December 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) – a major oil-producing country (Kottasova, 2023) that "controls 6% of the world's oil reserves" (Stockton, 2023). Its presidency was appointed to Sultan Al Jaber, the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, ADNOC.

On top of the clamour raised after the nomination of an oil company CEO as the president of an international conference on climate change, in the period before the Conference, Al Jaber was further accused by climate groups and politicians of having engaged in a series of PR campaigns to "boost its green credentials" (Kottasova, 2023). In May 2023, the Centre for Climate Reporting and *The Guardian* discovered that the Wikipedia page about Al Jaber had

been strategically edited to omit Al Jaber's participation in a "$4bn agreement […] signed in 2019 with U.S. investment giants BlackRock and KKR for the development of oil pipeline infrastructure" (Stockton, 2023) to promote an eco-friendly, net-zero image. The investigative report also revealed "how an army of fake social media accounts [… started] promoting the country's climate record" (Kottasova, 2023). In a subsequent journalistic inquiry by the BBC just days before the conference, it was disclosed that UAE's COP28 team had planned to exploit the Conference to meet with representatives of "at least 27 foreign governments" (Rowlatt, 2023) to jointly assess international liquefied natural gas (LNG) opportunities in Mozambique, Canada, and Australia.

The accusation of trying to seize the Conference and steer it towards the UAE's interests continued to be raised during the negotiations after Al Jaber's comments during an interview at *She Changes Climate*. The Sultan claimed, "There is no science out there, or no scenario out there, that says that the phase-out of fossil fuel is what is going to achieve 1.5C. […] unless you want to take the world back into caves" (Carrington & Stockton, 2023): a position that would favour ADNOC's position as an oil-producing company but in stark contrast with the UN Secretary-General's discourse where Guterres pinpointed fossil fuels as the "heart of the climate crisis" (Guterres, 2023).

Such greenwashing efforts "on an industrial scale" (Sloan, 2023), the "airbrush[ing] out criticism of […] blatant hypocrisy" (Stockton, 2023), and the co-optation of the COP conference to sign or discuss new fossil fuel projects, have been called out as mere efforts of COP-washing (Sloan, 2023).

12.   COVID-WASHING

SMILE: (☺)

Definition

COVID-washing is the accusation of using a misleading communication strategy that exploits the widespread fear of contracting the COVID-19 virus and capitalises on COVID-related themes in order to (i) deceive consumers into believing that a given product is safe and effective in preventing, mitigating, or even curing a COVID-19 infection, (ii) better market an unhealthy product to vulnerable consumers, and (iii) present a more positive brand image and secure customers.

Anti-COVID-19 Teas and Denims

When, in early 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak became a global pandemic, many began to look for methods and products that helped to repel or even cure the virus. Based on this new and increasing business, some companies started to capitalise on the fear of contracting the coronavirus by misleadingly promising products with antiviral or COVID-19-prevention properties, a practice that has been called COVID-washing.

Although many companies played with semantics and communicated vague statements, such as "our product helps boost your immune system", that did not mention the word Corona, others either deceitfully – and more directly – alluded to antiviral properties against COVID-19 and to other product features that might have mitigated the risk of infection or even cured the virus (Bratskeir, 2020). An example is Vivify Holistic Clinic, which – according to a warning letter from the Centre for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) of the United States (CDER, 2023) – allegedly "offered supplements, teas, and tinctures that promoted antiviral benefits; some claimed to prevent infection from coronavirus" (Bratskeir, 2020).

Nevertheless, COVID-washing does not consist only of misleading claims about the efficacy of a given product in fighting or preventing the virus infection. According to Gerritsen et al. (2021), it can also amount to capitalising on the COVID crisis through symbolic gestures of solidarity (sometimes in the form of hashtags on social media posts) aimed, in reality, at better selling one's product.

The use of this misleading communicative practice sharply increased during the pandemic period prior to the discovery of the vaccine in traditional and social media communication (Tsai et al., 2022). Until August 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had already issued more than 100 warning letters for unauthorised or "misbranded products" (Bratskeir, 2020), while Amazon had to remove 6.5 million products "with inaccurate claims" (ICE, 2020) from its website. The warning letters, as underlined by Bratskeir (2020) in an article for Fast Company, were issued because, within the American system, medical claims about a product can be made only if the product is FDA-approved.

However, in some cases, COVID-washed allegations have crossed the line that divides misleading communication from false information and have, thus, been prosecuted. This is the case, for instance, with celebrity chef Pete Evans' "BioCharger", a food processor that allegedly should "replicate light, frequencies, harmonics, pulsed electromagnetic fields and voltage that are found in nature" (Sutton, 2024), which has been sanctioned $25,200 by the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) for claiming that his machine could eradicate the virus (TGA, 2022). In a statement, the TGA declared that "claims

that the device could be used in relation to 'Wuhan coronavirus'… have no apparent foundation… which the TGA takes extremely seriously" (Sutton, 2024).

Interestingly, COVID-washing was not relegated to the sole realm of food, cosmetics, and supplements – it spread to the fashion industry too. In fact, in July 2020, the renowned denim maker Diesel announced that it had reached a partnership with Polygiene, a chemical company, to create "an ultra-innovative denim treatment that physically halts 99% of any viral activity": a "Virus-fighting Denim" (Polygiene AB, 2020). The denim has been accused of mis-leadingly promoting a deceitful sense of security (Biron, 2020).

Based on the diverse nature of COVID-washing actions, claims, and advertisements, COVID-washing can be defined as the accusation of using a misleading communication strategy that exploits the widespread fear of contracting the COVID-19 virus and capitalises on COVID-related themes in order to (i) deceive consumers into believing that a given product is safe and effective in preventing, mitigating, or even curing a COVID-19 infection, (ii) better market an unhealthy product to vulnerable consumers, and (iii) present a more positive brand image and secure customers (Bratskeir, 2020; Gerritsen et al., 2021; Martino et al., 2021; Tsai et al., 2022).

As per greenwashing, COVID-washing remains in a grey zone. However, whenever misleading COVID-washed claims are discovered to be false, such as in Pete Evans' case, the deceitful communicative practice might turn into false advertisement or advertisement infringement and can, therefore, be sanc-tionable and prosecutable.

13.   CRIPWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

The concept of cripwashing might have two different meanings. The first and main one deals with the co-optation of the discourse about disability and disa-bled people to present a better corporate image. The second understanding deals with the abortion debate in Spain and the exploitation of the disability rights movement to restrain women's reproductive rights.

Main Definition

Cripwashing consists of an accusation of a company's symbolic lip service – not backed by any substantive and sustainable action – to ameliorate the corporate image by depicting it as caring and inclusive of disabled persons, ameliorate the ESG performance to gain a competitive advantage over its com-petitors, and co-opt the discourse.

Secondary Definition

Cripwashing is defined as the accusation of the exploitation of one's group rights (namely, disabled people) to discriminate against others (namely, women).

Cripwashing and its Relation with Other Washings

In October 2022, British Cycling signed an eight-year partnership agreement (until the end of 2030) with Shell U.K. According to the terms of the partnership, there are:

> a shared commitment to help more – and wider groups of – people to people to ride, including bold plans to make cycling more accessible for people with a disability; support Great Britain Cycling Team cyclists and para-cyclists through the sharing of worldclass innovation and expertise, including bringing new lubricant technology to all levels of cycling; and take steps to help British Cycling accelerate its own journey to net zero and encourage more low- and zero-carbon forms of transport such as cycling and electric vehicles. (Shell U.K., 2022)

Such an agreement has been heavily contested on multiple (and interrelated) counts: sportswashing; greenwashing; and cripwashing (Montague, 2022). The confronters' argument for the accusation of cripwashing seems to be based on four premises. First, they claim that Shell's practices "have contributed to more people becoming disabled, sick, and dying, due to the impacts of the climate emergency" (Montague, 2022). Second, they present data ("only 35 of the 192 countries in the Paris Agreement") that shows how disabled people are disproportionately affected by climate change and its induced disasters, such as Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy (Montague, 2022). Third, they underline how disabled people have been pressured into a "car dependency" (Montague, 2022) because of the lack of public transportation, which exposes them to increasing fuel costs. Last, they point out that to get out of the car dependency trap and its related costs, cycling has been proposed as an eco-friendly possibility. They conclude that since Shell has contributed to the issue, the act of partnering with British Cycling for "helping […] to make cycling more accessible for people with a disability" and "encourage more low- and zero-carbon forms of transport such as cycling" (Shell U.K., 2022) amounts to green- and cripwashing. A charge that, according to the accusers, is reinforced by the fact that British Cycling has not disclosed how much it has received from Shell "and how much of that will be spent on the disability initiatives cited in the announcement" (Montague, 2022). The vagueness of the statements and the lack of transparency (Montague, 2022) do not permit an assessment of whether the commitment is backed up by any substantive action (Batchelor, 2023).

As such, in this context, cripwashing defines a company's (in this case Shell) symbolic lip service – not backed by any substantive and sustainable action – to ameliorate the corporate image by depicting it as caring and inclusive of disabled persons (Batchelor, 2023) with the mere goal of ameliorating the ESG performance, having a competitive advantage over its competitors (Woods, 2021), and co-opting the discourse (in Shell's case, to divert the attention from its climate change contributions) (Montague, 2022).

However, as highlighted by Batchelor (2023) in his analysis of the publishing industry, cripwashing can manifest in various ways, often through seemingly minor actions. Examples include making positive declarations about increasing the representation of disabled individuals within a company without accompanying these statements with essential infrastructure improvements, such as installing ramps for office accessibility or offering hybrid options for meetings and events. In essence, when verbal commitments to support disabled individuals lack tangible follow-through and are devoid of substantive action, it underscores the presence of cripwashing (Batchelor, 2023).

Cripwashing and the Co-optation of the Disability Discourse

The second understanding of cripwashing deals with the Spanish debate around abortion and was coined by Moscoso (2014) (who is the main – and almost sole – reference in this context) to define "the use of disability to undermine women's sexual and reproductive rights" (Moscoso & Platero, 2017) – where crip (short for cripple) is used as a derogatory term.

Spanish women's rights, secured through feminists' mobilisations and heated debates since the mid-Seventies, saw milestones such as access to birth control in 1974, the legalisation of divorce in 1981, and the legalisation of abortion in 1985 – under specific circumstances ("risk for the mother, rape or foetal abnormality" (Moscoso & Platero, 2017).

In 2010, the public debate returned to the last point after the Social-Democratic government proposed reforming the 1985 law with the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy Law, known as the 2/2010 Law. It permitted access to "voluntary termination of pregnancy with no restrictions within the first 14 weeks of pregnancy, provided to women who had already given their written consent and had had at least three days to reflect on their decision" (Moscoso & Platero, 2017) and, in those cases where a congenital disease was diagnosed, the 14 weeks would be extended to 22. This legal reform was heavily criticised and opposed by different anti-abortion groups, including the Catholic Church, and was quashed by the same Conservative Party in December 2013 (Moscoso & Platero, 2017).

Due to socioeconomic factors, Conservatives governed from 2011 to 2015 with policies meant to cut "social policies that eliminated the discourse of

gender equality from the agenda" (Moscoso & Platero, 2017). In 2013, the Spanish Minister of Justice at the time, Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón, who led the row against abortion, presented a proposal much more restrictive on the conditions that permitted the termination of a pregnancy, "rooted in the argument of defending the unborn child, excluding the possibility of terminating pregnancies with foetuses that showed 'abnormalities' and making healthcare professionals responsible if laws were broken" (Moscoso & Platero, 2017). In an interview, he declared:

> I do not understand why the unborn children are unprotected, and abortion is allowed, because of the fact that they have some kind of handicap or deformity. It seems to me ethically inconceivable we have lived so long with this legislation and I think that the same level of protection that is given to an unborn child without any type of handicap or deformity should be given to those who are known to lack some of the abilities that other unborn children have. (Moscoso & Platero, 2017)

As remarked by Moscoso and Platero (2017), starker terms have been used by Andrés Ollero, a magistrate of the Constitutional Court, who affirmed that abortion amounts to an "act of war against her own son or daughter" (Moscoso & Platero, 2017), while the Down Syndrome Federation cut short the debate stating that "abortions based on birth defects should be banned, not being a debatable issue". As such, according to Moscoso and Platero (2017), the debate is built in a "conflicting rights frame" (Moscoso & Platero, 2017) where abortion is juxtaposed with women's rights and disabled people's rights; they called this phenomenon cripwashing. In this context, cripwashing defines the exploitation of one group's rights (in this case, people with physical and mental impairments (Sandahl, 2003), which are referred to with the derogatory term 'crip' – short for 'cripple') to discriminate against others (in this case, women).

14.   CRYPTOWASHING

SMILE: (☹)

While closely associated with the phenomenon of blockchainwashing, the academic discourse on cryptocurrencies is showing an opposite trend. Unlike blockchainwashing, there is a growing body of literature on cryptocurrencies (Bariviera & Merediz-Solà, 2021). However, this scholarly discussion is still constrained to a restricted number of papers that examine the *illicit* and deceptive practice of self-trading, specifically targeting market manipulation.

Definition

Cryptowashing is the illegal practice of self-trading cryptocurrency to manipulate the market and ultimately create a false, misleading, positive evaluation of the cryptocurrency to obtain a financial benefit.

Cryptowashing and Misleading Statements

Cryptowashing is not linked to an alleged misleading statement about one's technological framework, which then does not have all the requirements (e.g., "decentralisation, immutability, traceability" (Cui & Gao, 2023)) for being defined as blockchain, but refers to the growing practice of *wash trading* (also known as "Round Trip Trading" (Friedhelm & Weintraud, 2021)): an activity that is increasing to an alarming level, with some reports going as far as identifying 70% of all crypto transactions as wash trading (Cong et al., 2023; Crypto Integrity, 2019; Sor, 2023). Wash trading is an illegal practice according to the United States Commodity Exchange Act & Regulations of 1936 (and so it is in other legislations (Schaad, n.d.)) that consists of "market manipulation in which a trader buys and sells the same financial instruments within a short time window without exposing any type of market risk in an attempt to control the price or trading activities" (Cui & Gao, 2023) – the same applies for a group of colluding actors (Friedhelm & Weintraud, 2021). Because of this self-trading – "after which they end up at the same market position that they had initially" (Friedhelm & Weintraud, 2021) – there is an increase in the trading volume, which might be observed by other traders thus misleading and influencing their choices of investment (Friedhelm & Weintraud, 2021; Pennec et al., 2021). As such, the operator provides the market with "false or misleading signals about the supply, demand or price of securities" (Schaad, n.d.) – thus making the cryptocurrency appear much more valuable than it actually is and, ultimately – if carried out properly – gaining a financial profit from it.

15. CSR-WASHING (CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY WASHING)

SMILE: (☺)

Definition

CSR-washing describes the accusation of a deceptive, instrumental, and inauthentic use (or communication of) CSR practices to achieve financial gain, promote a misleadingly positive corporate image to stakeholders, divert public

scrutiny, and gain a competitive advantage, resulting in a discrepancy between CSR "talk" and "walk".

When Touting One's CSR Goes Too Far

On 8 March 2022, Nestlé published its Creating Shared Value and Sustainability Report for the year 2021. This, following Martin et al. (2024), may be seen as an example of CSR-washing. The report's cover features a coloured picture of a group of young African girls wearing a chequered blue and white uniform. The girls are standing in a semicircle, with one dancing in the middle with the support of the others; in the background, some boys with khaki uniforms look at them. This photograph, which depicts what could be a normal scene during recess, would not be that special if it were not for *where* it was published – namely, a CSR report, and for its *caption*, which reads: "Nestlé is investing in cocoa communities such as Didoko, Côte d'Ivoire, to help children access good quality education" (Nestlé, 2022). The statement is constructed in a way that depicts Nestlé positively, as an actor engaged with local communities and a provider of opportunities. However, such a supportive and favourable corporate image is in contrast with allegations raised by eight children against Nestlé of "aiding and abetting" (Balch, 2021) child trafficking. This dichotomy between Nestlé's (alleged) corporate social responsibility – namely, supporting communities – and the actual state of affairs, that is, the accusation of "knowingly profit[ing]" (Balch, 2021) from child labour, has been defined as an example of CSR-washing (Martin et al., 2024).

CSR Here, CSR There, CSR Everywhere

We refer to corporate social responsibility (CSR) as all "context-specific organisational actions and policies that consider stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance" (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). This concept, which is also known as the 3Ps (people, profit, and planet) (Dahlsrud, 2008), traces back to the mid-1950s and can be attributed to Howard Bowen, an economist who, in his famous book *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* (Bowen, 2013), underlined how leaders have "an obligation to make decisions and to implement actions that reflect the objectives and values of our society" (Martin et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, the idea that companies have an obligation towards society only gained support with the social, feminist, civil rights, and anti-war grassroots movements of the 1960s and 1970s. These movements called out businesses as being part of many societal issues and demanded they reshape their activities (Mitnick et al., 2020). Consequently, "to survive and remain sustainable, corporations need[ed] to revise their mode of operations and reflect on

how they [could have] and should [have] create[d] a positive impact for society" (Bernardino, 2021).

Ever since, the concept of CSR has become increasingly important and widespread (KPMG, 2011). If, in 2011, only one out of five S&P 500 companies published a CSR report, just one year later, half of them did so; the number further increased, and in 2017, more than eight companies out of ten published a CSR report, a number that reached the staggering percentage of nine out of ten in 2019 (Governance and Accountability Institute, 2020). Such growth is not limited to the rise in CSR reporting but also in its advertisement (Pope & Wæraas, 2016). For instance, between 2002 and 2007, in Germany, CSR advertisement grew by 390% (Mögele & Tropp, 2010).

This attention to CSR is explicable by considering the benefits that CSR might bring to a company: CSR initiatives may (1) improve brand image; (2) increase employee satisfaction and engagement; (3) facilitate risk management; (4) provide a competitive edge; and (5) increase financial performance over the long term (Clear Space, 2023).

However, with the increase in popularity, companies started to capitalise on this consumer demand through deceptive and performative CSR initiatives (Pope & Wæraas, 2016). In 2008, in an article for CBS News, Mattis underlined how consumers and academics noticed numerous companies were capitalising on unfounded and exaggerated statements about their corporate social responsibility. This finding aligns with data collected by Katz (2008), which showed that, in the early 2000s, two in three Americans believed that corporations' claims about their social obligations and environmental commitments were overstated. Such an increase in these statements has been noticed not only by civil society, as remarked by the sharp rise in *New York Times* articles that feature these unfounded claims (Pope & Wæraas, 2016), but also by academics (Devinney, 2009; Margolis & Walsh, 2003), with Alves (2009) going as far as claiming that these types of claims are "everywhere".

The "decoupling" (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017) between a corporate social responsibility "talk" and the actual "walk" has been named CSR-washing (Boiral et al., 2017). As such, CSR-washing can be defined as the deceptive, instrumental, strategic, and inauthentic use (or communication of) CSR practices and social concerns to achieve financial profits, promote a misleadingly positive corporate image to stakeholders, divert public scrutiny, and gain a competitive advantage. The misleading nature of this strategy comes from the mismatch between the communicated corporate social responsibility, often with vague, exaggerated, or difficult-to-check statements, and the factual actions, which are performative and short-lived, or lacking altogether (Martin et al., 2024; Mattis, 2008; Pope & Wæraas, 2016).

The concept builds on the (original) understanding of whitewashing, that is, the "attempt to stop people [from] finding out the true facts about a situation"

(Cambridge Dictionary, 2024) – typically "something bad, such as a dishonest, immoral, or illegal act" (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.). Nonetheless, according to Martin et al. (2024), CSR-washing differs from greenwashing, pinkwashing, sportwashing, and wokewashing, as these "aim to earn credibility among stakeholders and consumers by presenting the appearance of doing the right thing" (Martin et al., 2024).

Responding to CSR-washing with Reforms and the Shift Towards Mandatory CSR

Although the phenomenon per se might be considered ethically dubious, if not illegal (in certain instances), positive outcomes have been reached after CSR accusations. Pope and Wæraas (2016) underline how several reforms, such as the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) and the Fair Labour Code, can be considered an institutional response that followed accusations of CSR-washing. This responsiveness, they continue, has been attained not only at an international level but also at a national one, with some states (like the U.K.) providing new guidelines on CSR advertisement (DEFRA, 2021). In addition, CSR-washing also led to the creation of "dozens of websites, magazines, and pamphlets whose aim is to educate consumers and to prevent them from being misled by false CSR advertisements" (Pope & Wæraas, 2016).

A second driver to reduce CSR-washing is the shift from voluntary to legally mandatory CSR (Gatti et al. 2019). With voluntary CSR, misleading CSR communication remains an act in the grey zone. Possibly morally illegitimate, but legally, it poses no problem. With mandatory CSR, instead of communicating in a misleading way that goes beyond mere embellishment, CSR-washing may turn into a compliance exercise with legal consequences.

How Not to CSR Wash?

According to a recent paper by Martin et al. (2024), CSR-washing can be avoided by "integrating CSR into core values" of one's activity. To achieve such a daunting goal, the authors propose employing "a bottom-up approach that encourages employees at all levels to contribute to CSR initiatives actively"; such a strategy, they believe, would foster a sense of ownership and purpose among employees that would embed goals into the organisation – thus avoiding any performative and not genuine use of CSR. Additionally, the authors call for more transparent communication. The efficacy of such an approach, they claim, is visible in virtuous examples such as that of Intel, which has been able to develop "an inclusive, bottom-up approach" that has "empower[ed] employees at all levels to contribute to societal improvement" (Martin et al., 2024).

From a broader communicative ethics perspective, CSR-washing may be prevented by an overall orientation towards credibility through deliberation (Seele & Lock, 2015), as proposed, for example, by Habermasian discourse ethics and the political role of corporations, where – at least in theory – corporations are expected to act as good corporate citizens by taking up a political role to help close global governance gaps (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011).

16.   ESG-WASHING

SMILE: (☺)

Investors sensitive to grand challenges like climate change, child labour, or integrity, particularly Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers, have shown a strong inclination towards enterprises that positively influence environmental, social, and governance factors (Wendel & Lamas, 2019). This preference for "companies that score highly on independent measures of their environmental, social and governance practices" (Smith, 2022), known as ESG, has led to a significant surge in the socially responsible investment market. On a smaller scale, many funds have experienced a 300% rise in ESG funds since 2016 (Smith, 2022). On a larger scale, the ESG market crossed the 30-billion-dollar mark in 2018, a value that is projected to exceed 50 billion by the mid-2020s (Rajan, 2022; Smith, 2022). The pervasiveness of these investments is such that "investment fund prospectuses that do not mention sustainability statements are becoming increasingly harder to find" (Lynn Taylor & Collins, 2022). However, along with this surge in ESG investments, a misleading and deceptive ESG communication phenomenon has arisen: ESG-washing.

Despite the prevalent use of the broader term "greenwashing" in academic and non-academic discourse to encapsulate such a practice, we contend that ESG-washing merits a distinct classification. It is acknowledged as a related yet independently identifiable form of misrepresentation that encompasses – but is not confined to – greenwashing. This chapter identifies the two main understandings of ESG-washing. The first pertains to the misleading representation of ESG investments and defines the misalignment between the "ESG talk and the ESG walk" (Attig & Boshanna, 2023). The second revolves around attributing ESG labels to funds "violating OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct" (Inclusive Development International, n.d.).

Definitions

•   ESG-washing is the accusation of the practice of capitalising on the trend of responsible and sustainable investment by misleadingly claiming or

insinuating to be ESG-compliant or to be investing in ESG businesses to improve one's reputation or increase financial profits while not implementing the necessary systemic changes in one's activity to be, de facto, ESG-compliant or to really invest in ESG products.

• ESG-washing describes the accusation of misleadingly attributing an ESG label to companies that are actually involved in actions, behaviours, or policies that contradict ESG principles.

ESG-washing: When the Talk Does Not Match the Walk

In 2022, three cases related to ESG investments came under the spotlight of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

The first one saw a raid on Deutsche Bank's asset management entity, known as DWS (Faske, 2023), by German law enforcement authorities. This action was part of an ongoing inquiry, prompted – among others – by disclosures from the SEC and the Department of Justice (DOJ) pertaining to potential fraudulent claims over ESG investments. The genesis of this investigation traces back to DWS' annual report of 2020, wherein a declaration was made asserting an investment portfolio exceeding $450 billion was purportedly aligned with an ESG-graded framework. Subsequent to this assertion, discrepancies emerged, notably articulated by the former head of sustainability at DWS, who attested that merely a negligible portion of the companies under consideration had undergone such grading (Investment Adviser Association, 2022).

In the second case, the SEC accused another asset management firm of failing to comply with its ESG investment policies and fined it several million dollars. As Faske (2023) remarked, the peculiarity of this case lies in the fact that the "accusation and sanction [are] not based on a breach of the law, but on the entity's not having and then breaking its own internal policies".

In the third case, the SEC charged another investment advisor company over ESG misstatements: the SEC had, in fact, discovered that, between 2018 and 2021, the company had allegedly "represented or implied in various statements that all investments in the funds had undergone an ESG quality review, even though that was not always the case" (Faske, 2023).

These cases represent examples of what is known as ESG-washing. ESG-washing is the practice of capitalising on the trend of responsible investment by misleadingly claiming or insinuating to be ESG-compliant or to be investing in ESG businesses to improve one's reputation or increase financial profits while not implementing the necessary systemic changes in one's activity to be, de facto, ESG-compliant or to really invest in ESG products (Candelon et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2024; Rajan, 2022).

According to Rajan (2022), its spread has been facilitated by historical and regulatory elements. Concerning the former, Rajan underlines how

the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted how businesses worked and their social impact; the pandemic put them "under the spotlight with more and more investors concerned about how companies treat their contractors, employees, temporary employees" (Rajan, 2022). This new attention increased the demand for ESG-attentive businesses and, as a response, businesses' interest in capitalising on it by ESG-washing their activities. Concerning the latter element, Rajan (2022) underlines how (i) the lack of a uniform and universal standard to assess a company's progress in social aspects (an issue complexified by the qualitative nature of social benefits) and (ii) the fact that "ESG depends upon third-party rating organisations to assess companies on their bonafides" (Smith, 2022) (see next subchapter), have created a regulatory framework with loopholes that permit ESG-washing one's claims.

After the recent scandals, regulatory agencies, most of all American ones, such as the SEC, have noticed this worrying trend and started "cracking down on companies that use ESG as a marketing ploy to exploit investors' best intentions" (Smith, 2022) by proposing new rules and standards for disclosure.

Questionable ESG Labels

Another meaning of ESG-washing relates to the misleading assignment of ESG labels to companies that are actually involved in actions, behaviours, or policies that contradict ESG principles (Inclusive Development International, n.d.; Scatigna et al., 2021).

As meticulously presented by Inclusive Development International (n.d.) (IDI), the ESG assignment process starts with ESG research firms, which analyse the company at stake by collecting and gathering evidence such as media coverage or self-reporting. These research entities then sell the collected data to ESG rating firms, which analyse the material and assign a score to the company. However, as remarked by IDI (n.d.), "ratings focus on how ESG factors could affect a company's profitability, not how the company affects people and the planet". Then, these ratings are used by ESG index providers who compile ESG indexes and "lists of companies they consider to have rated highly on ESG factors" (Inclusive Development International, n.d.). These companies, among which the most important are MSCI, FTSE Russell, and S&P Dow Jones Indices, work as gatekeepers: they decide who makes it on the list and who does not. Being listed entails being approved as an ESG-labelled company, which makes it possible to enter investment index funds such as the MSCI World ESG Screened Index, the "World ESG Leaders Equity Index Fund" (Northern Trust Asset Management, 2024) or the "ACS World ESG Screened Equity Tracker Fund" (BlackRock Fund Managers Limited, 2024) and being listed as a responsible investment.

However, IDI (n.d.) has raised concerns over the low threshold that has been set to provide such a label:

> The low bar for securing a place in ESG funds does more than direct "responsible investment" to the wrong place. It makes it harder to hold some of [the] worst corporate offenders accountable. The "ESG" stamp of approval undermines the efforts of communities and human rights defenders to secure redress for corporate abuses by making investors less likely to engage and use their leverage to compel action.

This mismatch between a positive ESG rating, which should imply a positive social impact, and the actual state of affairs has been called out by IDI as "ESG washing" (Inclusive Development International, n.d.).

An example of such an understanding of ESG-washing is IDI's latest report. Although IDI compiled its first report in September 2022 (Inclusive Development International & ALTSEAN-Burma, 2022), highlighting issues in the assignment of ESG labels to some questionable companies, due to the lack of response by index providers, in February 2024, IDI formally compiled a complaint against MSCI, FTSE Russell, and S&P Dow Jones Indices for violating the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct (Parekh, 2024). The report highlights how these firms promoted "ESG-labelled investment in companies linked to Myanmar's military, despite its history of abuses, including the Rohingya genocide and ongoing violent crackdown on pro-democracy activists" (Inclusive Development International, n.d.). According to IDI's research, the index providers under accusation placed 23 firms with links to Myanmar's military on their ESG lists. These companies were then included in ESG-labelled funds managed by giants such as "BlackRock, Deutsche Bank, Northern Trust, State Street, and Vanguard": an inclusion that "directed $13.7 billion in equity investments" to, allegedly, socially responsible companies which, however, were discovered to be involved in dealing weapons and providing technological support to the military (Inclusive Development International, n.d.).

17.   ETHICSWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

Main Definition

(Digital) Ethicswashing is the accusation of a form of image lip service that consists of publicly claiming to engage in ethical considerations while actually failing to enforce or adopt any meaningful or systemic change. As such,

ethicswashing transforms genuine ethical reflection into instrumentalised ethical discussions set to divert attention from negative press, avoid regulation, or maintain a positive reputation (for a review of definitions and the literature, see Schultz et al., 2024).

Ethicswashing Cases

In March 2016, Microsoft presented Tay, a bot designed to resemble a Twitter user. However, shortly after its launch, Tay transformed "from a seemingly innocent 19-year-old girl into an antisemitic, racist miscreant" (Prahl & Goh, 2021), causing the company to shut it down and make a public amend in a press release (Lee, 2016). Such a disastrous occurrence could be considered a precursor of the many AI-related incidents that, a couple of years later, would have hit the AI world, sending a "major wake-up call" (Hao, 2019). In fact, in 2018, a series of incidents garnered media attention: a self-driving Uber ran over and killed a pedestrian in Arizona (U.S.) (Griggs & Wakabayashi, 2018), a "Tesla driver died using autopilot with hands off steering wheel" (Hull & Smith, 2018), and "Amazon's face recognition falsely matched 28 members of [the U.S.] Congress with mugshots" (Snow, 2018). These events tarnished the positive narrative surrounding AI applications, like cancer detection (Patel et al., 2019), and further fuelled societal and economic concerns (Furman & Seamans, 2018; Pazzanese, 2020) regarding AI's utilisation in surveillance (Helbing, 2018), social control (Engelmann et al., 2019), social sorting (Lyon, 2008), and disinformation campaigns (Lazer et al., 2018).

The industry promptly responded to these concerns by creating *ad hoc* ethics boards, listing ethical principles, draughting ethical guidelines, or "produc[ing] their own declarations for fear of being seen to be left behind" (Floridi, 2019a). Such a call for action was also taken up by the European Union, which in 2019 had its European High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence (HLEG AI) present its deliverable "Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI" (Metzinger, 2019). Despite its good intentions, namely, to "support a reasonable approach to the development of AI" (Floridi, 2019a), the HLEG AI document has faced several criticisms. Thomas Metzinger, a German philosopher and one of the 52 members of the Group, argued that the idea of "trustworthy AI" – which is becoming widely used (Freiman, 2022) – is "nonsense" because machines cannot be trustworthy; "only humans can" (Metzinger, 2019). As such, according to Metzinger, the idea of trustworthy AI is merely a "narrative […] about developing future markets and *using ethics debates as elegant public decorations* for a large-scale investment strategy"[3] (Metzinger, 2019). In an article for *Der Tagesspiegel*, Metzinger underlined two important elements to support his claims. First, among the members of the Group that was tasked to set the *ethical* guidelines for the use and development of AI, 48 out of 52 were *neither*

ethicists nor philosophers – but mostly representatives of the tech industry, as later remarked by Leufer and Hidvegi (2019), and Niklas and Dencik (2020). Second, the instrumentalisation of ethics is not only observable in the dubious composition of the Group but also in the Guidelines' content. The final document has also been altered significantly: the section on "Red Lines" of AI (which sets out the ethical principles that should *not* be violated) has been changed not to include the phrase "non-negotiable" or "Red Lines" (Klöver & Fanta, 2019; Metzinger, 2019) to provide a softer framework.

Such manipulation of the ethical debate is, however, not confined to the realm of institutional boards but is a practice that is also present in the private sector. In 2019, in an article for *Nature*, Yochai Benkler underlined how the industry "has mobilised to shape the science, morality, and laws of artificial intelligence" (Benkler, 2019). In the piece, he calls out Facebook's investment of "U.S. $7.5 million in a centre on ethics and AI at the Technical University of Munich (Germany), and Google's AI ethics board, which was dissolved a week later amid controversy" (Benkler, 2019) – a case also mentioned by Bietti (2020) to show the instrumentalisation that the ethical debate is undergoing – as examples of how the tech industry is working on framing research and shaping the future of AI by co-opting and channelling the ethical discussions around it.

Such instrumentalisation of ethics and ethical debates has been called "ethicswashing" by Metzinger (2019). Although ethicswashing has been developed in the AI world, it has become a buzzword used to define all types of ethics trivialisation in all fields. Ethicswashing can be defined as the misleading, inauthentic, self-serving practice of publicly and widely announcing to "reflect, analyse, and work on ethical aspects" (Buedo & Waligora, 2022) while actually failing to enforce or back any meaningful and systemic change or even plainly working in violation of those principles. Such a practice often entails the organisation, fostering, and/or financing of entities, boards, or research groups that deal with ethics or are tasked to develop ethical guidelines only with the goal of co-opting the ethical discussion – thus making it "superficial" (Hao, 2019) – to favour one's interests or be expressed through vague (Hakansson, 2022) or unsubstantiated claims. This instrumentalisation could be carried out to (i) "shop for the kind of ethics that is best retrofitted to justify their current behaviours, rather than revising their behaviours to make them consistent with a socially accepted ethical framework" (Floridi, 2019b), (ii) divert attention from the company's conduct and/or bad press or crises (van Maanen, 2022), (iii) delay, block, or avert any market regulation (Metzinger, 2019; Munn, 2023; Wagner, 2018) and strive for self-regulation (Bietti, 2020), or (iv) increase or maintain the firm's reputation, image, and legitimacy (Kölbener, 2022). As such, ethicswashing results in the mere "being loud about ethics but without taking serious actions to implement meaningful

change" (Buedo & Waligora, 2022): a mere "lip service or window dressing" (Eliot, 2022).

Finally, as with many other types of washing, if discovered, ethicswashing might cause serious reputational damage (Eliot, 2022).

18. GREENWASHING (ALSO KNOWN AS OR SIMILAR TO: CLIMATEWASHING)

SMILE: (☺)

As the discourse on sustainability gains prominence, companies face the imperative of aligning their public image with environmentally responsible actions. However, since the efficacy of green communication transcends the actual implementation of environmentally conscious practices, as it has the potential to enhance corporate reputation and performance, a noteworthy number of organisations have opted for the disconcerting path of "greenwashing" their actions, that is, to strategically mislead consumers and portray a façade of ecological stewardship, often diverging from substantive, tangible environmental commitment: not walking the talk.

Within this subchapter, we shed light on an ongoing investigation into an alleged case of greenwashing communication, presenting a broad definition of the concept and enumerating key indicators that serve as crucial tools for identifying potential greenwashing instances. For those seeking a more in-depth analysis of the most renowned *washing phenomena, we recommend turning to Chapter 2.

Definition

Greenwashing is a symbolic and deceptive strategy that fosters a misleading perception of environmental responsibility. This is achieved by amplifying a corporation's commitment to environmental protection, environmental performance, sustainability, or a product's eco-friendliness by disseminating ambiguous, exaggerated, or unsubstantiated claims. As with all *washing-phenomena, they are constructed in the eye of the beholder, which is incorporated in the following definition: Greenwashing is defined "as co-creation of an external accusation toward an organisation with regard to presenting a misleading green message" (Seele & Gatti, 2017).

Environmental Claims: Delving into Alleged Greenwashing Practices

In December 2023, *The Guardian* published an article detailing an ongoing investigation conducted by the United Kingdom Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), an entity serving as a regulatory watchdog overseeing competition-related matters (Kollewe, 2023). The inquiry focuses on the veracity of sustainability claims made by Unilever, a multinational corporation, and stems from concerns regarding Unilever's potential utilisation of misleading, vague, broad, and/or exaggerated statements in characterising certain products as environmentally friendly. In other words, Unilever is being investigated over greenwashing.

As elucidated by Kollewe (2023), the author of the article, the Chief Executive of the CMA expressed apprehension over the possibility of the company exploiting shoppers' inclination to support environmental causes. by purchasing eco-friendly products. According to an initial review, the CMA's concern centres on "a range of concerning practices" (Ziady, 2023) wherein products labelled "green" may not align with their purported environmental attributes, thus misleading consumers. The CMA's apprehensions encompass several dimensions. The CMA is scrutinising claims related to specific product features, expressing concern that such assertions might contribute to a misleading overall image of a product as wholly eco-friendly, claims about the use of certain ingredients – suspecting potential overstatements that may misleadingly enhance the perceived natural character of the product – and it is attentive to the potentially misleading impact of visual elements, such as colours and specific forms (e.g., green leaves), which might create an inaccurate impression of the product's environmental friendliness (Kollewe, 2023).

Unilever responded by refuting the misleading character of its claims (Ziady, 2023). It expressed its disappointment in the CMA's announcement, maintaining its commitment "to making responsible claims about the benefits of [its] products on [its] packs and to these being transparent and clear" and affirming the presence of "robust processes in place to make sure any claims can be substantiated" (Kollewe, 2023).

However, scepticism about Unilever's credibility regarding its sustainability assertions extends beyond the confines of institutional scrutiny. Non-governmental organisations, such as Greenpeace, have cast doubt on the veracity of the British multinational's claims. They argue that Unilever is breaking its commitment to "create a 'waste-free world'" (Horton, 2023) by shifting away from using single-use plastic, as it would allegedly be "on track to sell 53bn non-reusable sachets" (Horton, 2023) – thus also breaking its commitment to halve its consumption of virgin plastic by 2025. Greenpeace has criticised the dissonance between Unilever's self-professed status as a "force

for good" and a "purposeful company" (Horton, 2023) and its actual contribution to plastic pollution.

The accusation levied against Unilever, a company among a much longer list of firms engaged in analogous practices, is that of greenwashing, namely the deceptive practice aimed at presenting an environmentally responsible image by claiming to be doing more to protect the environment than one actually does (CorpWatch, 2001). This practice is posited to "promote false solutions to the climate crisis that distract from and delay concrete and credible action" (United Nations, n.d.).

The Origins and Development of Greenwashing

The first greenwashing cases may be traced way before Unilever's allegedly misleading claims in the 1960s, with Westinghouse's nuclear power division (Karliner, 2001; Watson, 2016). In those years, a growing anti-nuclear movement started to question the safety of power plants. Westinghouse responded by developing four-colour promotional campaigns highlighting the cleanliness and safety of its nuclear power plants. Among the ads created, one featured a power plant set in a natural environment accompanied by the statement "We're building nuclear power plants to give you more electricity" and the reassurance that nuclear plants were "odourless […] neat, clean, and safe" (Watson, 2016). These initiatives, costing public utilities over $300 million by 1969, overshadowed expenditures on anti-pollution research, epitomising a scenario wherein the promotional discourse exceeded substantive actions (Karliner, 2001).

In the mid-1980s, amid the heightened environmental awareness sparked by devastating incidents like the Bhopal, Chernobyl, and Exxon Valdez disasters, the environmental movement gained significant momentum (Karliner, 2001). However, this period also witnessed a surge in greenwashing practices. A notable illustration is Chevron's 1985 "People Do" campaign – a multimillion-dollar initiative designed to highlight the company's environmental endeavours. Regarded as a "textbook case of successful greenwashing" (CorpWatch, 2001), the campaign strategically targeted a "hostile audience" of socially conscious individuals. A post-campaign poll underscored its remarkable success, revealing that Chevron had transformed into the most trusted oil corporation in environmental protection just two years after the campaign's conclusion (CorpWatch, 2001).

Nevertheless, the term "greenwashing" originates in an incident involving Jay Westerveld, an undergraduate student, during a 1983 research trip to the Samoa islands. Before reaching his destination, Westerveld stopped in Fiji to surf. As he "sneaked in [the Beachcomber Resort] to steal some clean towels" (Watson, 2016), he found a note that cited:

Save Our Planet: every day, millions of gallons of water are used to wash towels that have only been used once. You make the choice: a towel on the rack means "I will use again". A towel on the floor means "Please replace". Thank you for helping us conserve the Earth's vital resources. (Sullivan, 2009)

The polite request by the resort to reuse their towels to help reduce the ecological impact and protect the ocean, however, clashed with the expansion of the resort that was building new bungalows. This incongruity between environmental messaging and actual practices, captured by Westerveld with "[w]e'll destroy the environment, but make sure you reuse your towel" (Enviral, n.d.) led him to coin the word "greenwashing" three years later in a paper on multiculturalism.

The concept of greenwashing remained confined to the realm of environmental activists until the early 2000s. The burgeoning phenomenon of globalisation, the increasing identification of companies as instigators of environmental and social crises, and the evolving legislative frameworks demanding enhanced corporate responsibility prompted companies to reassess their communications and environmental impacts. This paradigm shift manifested in concepts like triple bottom line, eco-efficiency, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Bergquist, 2017), with greenwashing emerging as the term encapsulating "faux environmental responsibility" (Sullivan, 2009).

Today, greenwashing defines the "symbolic" (Bowen, 2014) practice of misleading consumers through vague, exaggerated, and/or unsubstantiated claims regarding a company's environmental performance, sustainability, or the eco-friendliness of a product or service – while this is not the case or not to the levels touted. It is a mismatch between communicating an alleged positive environmental performance (or "less environmentally damaging" (Merriam Webster, 2024)) and the actual poor or insufficient state of affairs (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

Despite ongoing debates on the precise definition of greenwashing (Pizzetti et al., 2021), two integral features are discernible. First, such a practice is enabled by an information asymmetry, whereby companies utilise diverse communication channels to project an eco-friendly image while the public faces limited access to information for validation (Watson, 2016). Second, greenwashing is a phenomenon that lies in the eye of the beholder: it is a co-creation of a misleading green message and an accusation of misleading communication. As such, without an allegation of misleading communication, there cannot be a greenwashing case (Seele & Gatti, 2017).

To spot greenwashing, one might rely on several indicators. The most famous ones were identified by Greenpeace in 2005. Unfortunately, due to alleged complaints, the original webpage containing these criteria is inaccessible, necessitating reliance on the archival efforts of scholars such as Zanasi et al.

(2017) and Seele (2022) for retrieval. Greenpeace's first sign of greenwashing, called "dirty business", consists of touted environmental programmes or products that conflict with the corporation's core product or business. An example of such a case is oil companies that promote their green research and development projects while their core activity (oil extraction) is inherently unsustainable. The second indicator, termed "ad bluster", encompasses public relations campaigns and advertisements exaggerating environmental achievements, particularly those surpassing the cost of the promoted project, as exemplified by the previously mentioned Chevron's 1985 People Do campaign (Karliner, 1997). The third identifier, labelled "political spin", pertains to advertisements or statements proclaiming "green" commitments while concurrently lobbying against environmental laws, constituting a notable incongruity. The last indicator of a potential greenwashing case identified by Greenpeace is known as "It's the law, stupid!" Under this category fall all those advertisements or branding of a product with environmental achievements that are de facto required or mandated by existing laws. For example, products that claim to be CFC-free since chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) have been banned under the Montreal Protocol.

19.   HEALTHWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

While the term healthwashing was coined in 2017 (Stan, 2017), the academic literature about this practice remains confined. Two major understandings of healthwashing are identifiable. The first and major one defines healthwashing as the mismatch between health "talk" and health "walk". Understanding of healthwashing under these terms has been significantly improved by a recent paper by Delerm et al. (2023), in which the authors mapped the multiple levels at which this practice occurs, thus providing a first systematic analysis. Moreover, since healthwashing consists of the accusation of co-opting the health discourse to promote unhealthy products as healthy ones, often through statements that link to scientific research, this understanding of the concept is strictly related to that of sciencewashing – as science is instrumentalised to achieving a given goal, and, when the unhealthy products or habits at stake are promoted as healthy while, in reality, they have high concentrations of sugar (Heiss et al., 2021), the concept of healthwashing may overlap with that of "sugarwashing". The second (and minor) understanding of healthwashing relates to the co-optation of international health conferences and forums by industries that create health risks; such a conception of healthwashing relates to the notion of COP-washing.

Main Definition

Healthwashing is the accusation of a multi-levelled, deceptive communication that, by co-opting and instrumentalising the health discourse, exploiting the lack of scientific and medical evidence, or omitting health-related risks, aims to mislead consumers with symbolic and deceptive information or associations about the healthfulness of legal unhealthy products and habits or the company's health-related values. This practice is carried out to better one's brand image, increase profits, or divert attention from controversial behaviour and practices and the health risks created by these.

Secondary Definition

Healthwashing is the accusation of a misleading communication strategy by health-risk-creating industries. These industries exploit multi-stakeholderism to co-opt and strategically use international health forums to secure a continuation of the status quo or even the deregulation of the sector while displaying a symbolic, deceptive, health-caring public image – which is in opposition to the company's core business and not met by actions and conduct.

The Tobacco, Food, and Alcohol Industries: The Trinity of Healthwashers

The use of tobacco has been proven to cause millions of deaths per year worldwide (World Health Organization, 2023). To curb these numbers, governments have developed policies and guidelines aimed at restricting and controlling the use of this and similar health-risk *legal* products (Moodie et al., 2013). However, as per greenwashing, the new legislation prompted companies to start sophisticating their tactics to divert the public's attention away from reputation-damaging data and news to more positive ones. This increasingly used communication strategy (Herbert, 1987) aims – through misleading actions and statements – to divert, omit, and deceive consumers (Wexler, 2013) into believing that the company is actually engaged in socially acceptable behaviours and practices and that their product or a given habit that relates to it are healthy – when, in reality, this is not the case (Delerm et al., 2023).

For instance, the tobacco industry has continuously downplayed its harms by casting doubts into the scientific literature (Drope & Chapman, 2001; Houghton, 2022; Ong & Glantz, 2001; Yach & Bialous, 2001), as well as shifting the burden from itself to consumers, claiming that these are well-informed about the risks by the packages' labels – now mandatory – and common knowledge (Smith, 2007). Such a tactic has been deployed to the level that Smith (2007) pointed out that "it's interesting how few people die from smoking".

In the article for the *European Journal of Public Health*, Smith (2007), by analysing tobacco industry documents and news databases, discovered that the tobacco industry has manipulated the press to present smoking as a "'health-ful' pleasure" and "discredit health promotion information and practices".

Nevertheless, such a strategy aimed at better portraying cigarettes and smoking as a healthy habit did not remain confined to mere denial and information manipulation but also encompassed PR actions conceived to public attention divert attention. An example proposed by Delerm et al. (2023) is Philip Morris Industry's 2017 launch of the Foundation of a Smoke-Free World. The Foundation, which Philip Morris Industry claims to be independent (Yach, 2017) – but which has Philip Morris Industry as the sole funder (Pattemore & Edwards, 2022) – has the goal of "improv[ing] global health by ending smoking in this generation" (Delerm et al., 2023): a statement at odds with the firm objectives of its sole funder.

The food industry has also taken up strategic advertising and PR campaigns. According to Delerm et al. (2023), two examples in this field are Charal's, a French meat producer, who promoted its red meat also to pregnant women – while omitting all the health risks linked to such consumption in this phase (Marí-Sanchis et al., 2018) – and Danone's promotion of its "ultra-processed and calorie-dense product (Actimel)" (Delerm et al., 2023), which did not actually yield the alleged health benefits that were promoted (United States of America Federal Trade Commission, 2011). Recently, such marketing actions have been expanding to social media (Ares et al., 2023), where unhealthy food (e.g., ultra-processed food) is promoted in a way that creates an association with healthfulness and other concepts (Antúnez et al., 2021; Buchanan et al., 2018; Gugliucci et al., 2023). These various campaigns were conceived to create a connotation of healthfulness that is not backed up by scientific, relevant, and factual evidence: a mismatch between the health talk and the health walk that has been called "healthwashing".

Healthwashing: A Complex, Multi-level Concept

Like greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011), healthwashing can occur not only at the product level but also at the firm and the frequent-habit levels (Delerm et al., 2023).

1. *Product level*: At this level, healthwashing consists of exaggerated, deceptive, contradictory, or overstated health benefits that do not find factual or scientific correspondence; however, it also encompasses all understatements of health-related risks linked to the use of the advertised product.

2. *Firm level*: At this level, healthwashing is visible in strategies and arguments that co-opt the health discourse (see the case of Philip Morris Industry's Smoke-Free World Foundation), downplay the negative effects on public health, or engage in PR or CSR activities, such as sponsorships, philanthropy, or support programs (Houghton, 2022), that divert attention from negative and health-risk-related behaviours and practices.
3. *Frequent-habits level*: At this level, healthwashing might consist of companies' attempts to influence "eating and drinking behaviour" (Ares et al., 2023). An example of such a type of healthwashing is Kellogg's advertisement of breakfast as being the most important meal of the day, a strategy aimed at misleading consumers into believing this fact to sell them breakfast products (Delerm et al., 2023). This alleged case of healthwashing is further backed up by the fact that, as underlined by Delerm et al. (2023), Kellogg's on its website claims that breakfast is "associated with improved diet quality, feelings of well-being, enhanced cognitive performance, and weight control. Furthermore, some studies have reported reduced risk of cardiovascular disease as well as Type 2 diabetes among regular breakfast consumers". However, such a statement – which is built on scientific data and could also be classified as "sciencewashing" or "sugarwashing" – might be called out as healthwashed since there is "deceptiveness, hypocrisy, and contradiction of promoting breakfast based on medical recommendations when Kellogg's product for breakfast is high-sugar content cereals" (Delerm et al., 2023).

Based on these features, healthwashing can be defined as the accusation of a multi-levelled, deceptive communication that, by co-opting and instrumentalising the health discourse, exploiting the lack of scientific and medical evidence, or omitting health-related risks, aims to mislead consumers with symbolic and deceptive information or associations about the healthfulness of legal unhealthy products and habits or the company's health-related values. This practice is carried out to better one's brand image, increase profits, or divert attention from controversial behaviour and practices and the health risks created by these (Ares et al., 2023; Delerm et al., 2023; Heiss et al., 2021). Fundamentally, healthwashing defines a company's mismatch between the health "talk" and health "walk". As such, similar to greenwashing, this multifaceted practice remains at the border of what is legally permissible, a feature that complexifies its definition and, coupled with the multiple forms in which it can be found, its identification (Delerm et al., 2023)

Healthwashing and the Co-optation of Health Forums

A second understanding of healthwashing, which is strictly linked to the notion of COP-washing, has been proposed by Loffreda et al. (2023) in a recent opinion paper in the *BMJ*. The authors defend that the fossil fuel industry has been co-opting not only climate change conferences but also international climate negotiations at the intersection of climate change and health, such as the Prince Mahidol Award Conference (January 2023) in Bangkok, Thailand. Because of their inclusion as stakeholders, they have forestalled change, not only "undermining action on the climate and ecological crisis [but also] putting corporate interests over health" (Loffreda et al., 2023). They underlined how such a tactic had already been used by the tobacco industry, which, through the manipulation of information, lobbying, and "false narratives", has diverted the health debate away from the health dangers caused by tobacco and obstructed any policy in this regard; a situation that led the World Health Organization (WHO) to exclude tobacco companies from health forums and "helped to delegitimise the tobacco industry globally". Therefore, the authors suggest that the same exclusion is applied to fossil fuel industries and that the "global health community joins forces with the climate justice movement" (Loffreda et al., 2023). Overall, Loffreda et al. (2023), underline how such application of "multi-stakeholderism" (Knai et al., 2021) has led to accepting "alcohol, diet, gambling, arms, milk formula, agribusiness and pharmaceutical companies" in the health forum "despite significant evidence of bad faith and interference" – putting business profits above health.

Therefore, although not explicitly defined in the article, healthwashing might be inferred to be the accusation of a misleading communication strategy by health-risk-creating industries, such as fossil fuels, "alcohol, diet, gambling, arms, milk formula, agribusiness, and pharmaceutical companies" (Loffreda et al., 2023). These industries exploit multi-stakeholderism to co-opt and strategically use international health forums to secure a continuation of the status quo or even the deregulation of the sector while displaying a symbolic, deceptive, health-caring public image – which is in opposition to the company's core business and not met by actions and conduct.

20.   HUMANWASHING OF MACHINES

SMILE: (☺)

With the fast-paced progress in the field of robotics and robots that increasingly resemble humans, there is a growing concern for the practice of the humanwashing of machines. The concept, coined by Seele in 2021, is still underexplored but is likely to represent the next phase of machinewashing.

Definition

Humanwashing of machines refers to the accusation of intentional or unintentional misleading corporate communication strategy that uses anthropomorphic robots with human-like gestures or features to provide a deceptive sense of amicability, friendliness, and harmlessness or to mislead stakeholders on a machine's true capabilities and to conceal its real configurations. Such a strategy is implemented to divert attention from the harmful characteristics of robots or negative perceptions associated with them and to provide a positive corporate image.

The Hidden Issue of Dancing Robots

On 29 December 2020, a captivating video featuring the performance of a dancer dancing on the notes of "Do You Love Me?" by the Contours was published on YouTube (Boston Dynamics, 2020). Over the weeks, this performance was watched by millions of viewers. The choreography starts with a moving gesture, as the dancer, in response to the lyrics "you broke my arms, because I could not dance", crunches its shoulders in a motion that seems to convey a sense of despair. Then, the dancer slowly raises its head, only to lower it when the lyrics say, "You didn't even want me around". The rhythm intensifies, and when the song arrives at the "and now I'm back, to let you know", the dancer raises the arm, pointing it towards the camera, accentuating the "you" in the lyrics. With the onset of its blues vibes, typical of the Motown years, the dancer transitions into a musical dance, swaying its hips following the catchy rhythm.

What made the video viral? The dancer was not human but a "two-legged humanoid" (Metz & Aguilera-Hellweg, 2018) by Boston Dynamics. This is one of the examples that have been used to identify a new shift in the AI narrative (Seele, 2021). If one compares the dancing robot with a video from the same company, dated 2017, which depicts a clumsy robot stacking a box on a shelf only to lose its balance and awkwardly fall to the ground (HAL 90210, 2017), one can notice that machines are increasingly portrayed as "personable and friendly" (Seele, 2021) – a process that is not only relegated to the external appearance but also on a design level (Scorici et al., 2022). Nevertheless, this added friendliness must be framed in the wider context: Boston Dynamics, like many other companies in the robotic sector, comes from a background in the defence industry and the production of robots that increase companies' efficiency (Metz & Aguilera-Hellweg, 2018). However, such a human-like character of machines – known as "humanisation of machines" or "anthropomorphisation" (Coeckelbergh, 2022; Riva et al., 2015) – might create new normative grey zones (Seele, 2021) and cause a sense of "loss of distinctiveness"

or "loss of human uniqueness" (Giger et al., 2019). Moreover, some claim that it may also undermine or even entrench mistrust over the capabilities of machines (Scorici et al., 2022).

This dual character of the company, namely the development of robots for the defence industry and the use of videos that depict friendly dancing robots, has been coined "humanwashing of machines" (Seele, 2021). The notion builds on the concept of greenwashing (Scorici et al., 2022), where the consumer is misled about the company's actual engagement in favour of the environment, and represents a subcategory and the next evolution of machinewashing, where companies use strategic misleading communication to create a positive corporate image concerning the use of AI (Seele, 2021). Humanwashing of machines refers to the intentional or unintentional misleading corporate communication strategy that uses anthropomorphic robots with human-like gestures or features to provide a deceptive sense of amicability, friendliness, and harmlessness or to mislead stakeholders on a machine's true capabilities (e.g., the fact that it still necessitates a human operator to guide the robot, as it is the case with Boston Dynamic's robot) and to conceal its real configurations. Such a strategy is implemented to divert attention from the harmful characteristics of robots or negative perceptions associated with them and to provide a positive corporate image (Scorici et al., 2022; Seele, 2021).

In an article on *Medium*, Seele (2021) highlights three elements that need further examination. First, the reactions to the first cases of humanwashing of machines. Second, akin to the "in the eye of the beholder" character of greenwashing, the field of AI ethics must explore the instrumental use of robots within marketing. Finally, Seele also suggests that normative robots-perception must be incorporated into the development of intelligent machines. Scorci et al. (2022) also highlight the necessity on a practical level of focusing on power asymmetries involved in the anthropomorphisation of machines.

21.   LABWASHING

SMILE: (☹)

The concept of labwashing is relatively new. The scholarly discussion remains confined to a sole Master's thesis, while other references are present in urban reports and blog posts. Three distinct interpretations are identifiable and differ on the contextualisation given to the term "lab": the first one interprets as scientific laboratories; the second as innovation laboratories; and the third as urban laboratories.

Definition

Labwashing consists of the accusation of misleadingly displaying scientific equipment, such as white lab coats, pipettes, or ampules with liquids, in advertisements to evoke a sense of scientific endeavour, clinical accuracy, and overall trustworthiness – qualities that may not actually be present in the advertised product.

Labwashing is the accusation of strategically using the word "lab" to create a misleading image of innovation to external stakeholders.

Labwashing consists of the accusation of a strategic, symbolic use of – or cooperation with – an urban lab (or the mere label "lab") to improve an urban project's public image and promote an innovative, experimental brand image – without implementing any substantial, long-lasting transformative change.

The Various Meanings of "Lab"

The first understanding of labwashing, closely related to the practice of sciencewashing, consists of the accusation of misleadingly displaying scientific equipment, such as white lab coats, pipettes, or ampules with liquids, in advertisements to evoke a sense of scientific endeavour, clinical accuracy, and overall trustworthiness – qualities that may not actually be present in the advertised product (Bander & Hartvig, 2021).

In the second understanding, the word "lab" is to be conceived as referring not to a scientific laboratory but to an *innovation* lab. As underlined by Silberzahn (2015), the use and establishment of labs have become widespread: "Countless companies are opening their lab, with a variation on the name they are given: iLab, xx-lab if the company name is xx, etc". Within this context, labwashing consists of the accusation of strategically using the word "lab" to create a misleading image of innovation to external stakeholders, an innovation not present in the firm.

The final understanding of labwashing is linked to *urban* labs, and consists of the accusation of a strategic, symbolic use of – or cooperation with – an urban lab (or the mere label "lab") to improve an urban project's public image and promote an innovative, experimental brand image – without implementing any substantial, long-lasting transformative change that "challeng[es] the status quo" (Lochard et al., 2014). Such a performative action causes a diversion of "scarce resources from where they could make a greater difference" (Lochard et al., 2014).

22.   MACHINEWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the concept of "machinewashing" and its implications in the tech sector.

Definition

Machinewashing is an accusation of a strategic effort that utilises misleading practices and instrumentalises the ethical – through various channels and mediums, communicative strategies, and symbolic actions – to appease the public, gain a competitive advantage, present one's public image or AI products and policies as ethically compliant, and forestall further regulations in the tech sector. It is defined as:

> a strategy that organisations adopt to engage in misleading behaviour (communication and/or action) about ethical Artificial Intelligence (AI)/algorithmic systems. Machinewashing involves misleading information about ethical AI communicated or omitted via words, visuals, or the underlying algorithm of AI itself. Furthermore, and going beyond greenwashing, machinewashing may be used for symbolic actions such as (covert) lobbying and prevention of stricter regulation. (Seele & Schultz, 2022)

The Concept of Machinewashing and its Implications in the Technological Sector

AI systems have become integral in various aspects of our lives. They are used in medical treatments, such as neurosurgical procedures, and to determine insurance and mortgages; they have entered courtrooms by providing risk assessments and markets; and we now find them on our roads in self-driving cars or in facial recognition softwares (Benkler, 2019; Hao, 2019; Hao & Stray, n.d.; Huang & Rust, 2022; Seele & Schultz, 2022; Yuste et al., 2017). Despite their positive impact, the increasing instances of misuse, abuse, and harm linked to these systems (Allyn, 2020; Hao, 2019; Obermeyer et al., 2019) have prompted concerns from civil society, leading to a call for ethical reviews underlying these technologies.

In response to these concerns, the AI sector, operating within an uncertain regulatory landscape (Benkler, 2019; Jobin et al., 2019; Wagner, 2018), has adopted various strategies. These include the establishment of corporate ethics boards, the formation of multi-stakeholder ethics working groups, and the hiring of in-house philosophers (Seele & Schultz, 2022) – to navigate the moral challenges presented by AI without inviting negative publicity or legal

repercussions (Knight, 2019). International conferences have also been platforms for discussions on building "human-centred AI" (Roose, 2019).

However, these actions have been criticised as being merely symbolic since they do not produce any substantive action or organisational change (Bietti, 2020; McMillan & Brown, 2019), and instrumental because the results of the findings obtained are often never shared (Papazoglou, n.d.). Similarly, political statements on the quest to develop ethical AI have been contradicted by the talks behind closed doors where there is a "race to automate their workforce to stay ahead of the competition, with little regard for the impact on workers" (Seele & Schultz, 2022). Moreover, often, such statements and efforts are made and advertised through abstract (Stix, 2021) and "vague" (Hao, 2019) declarations, exaggerations, or "meaningless claims" (Seele & Schultz, 2022) that defend alleged conformities to human-centred principles or ethical values, or adherence to guidelines and standards (Floridi, 2019b; Jobin et al., 2019; Umbrello & van de Poel, 2021; Yeung et al., 2020). A commonly cited example (Seele & Schultz, 2022) of such deceptively vague statements is IBM's flagship AI shows, where it is stated that "IBM Watson is helping doctors outthink cancer, one patient at a time" (Brown, 2017). In addition, machinewashing can also involve (covert) lobbying both directed at the institutional level – to avoid, minimise, or delay any regulation of the sector – and academia – to steer the research towards the industry interests (Bietti, 2020; Ochigame, 2019; Rességuier & Rodrigues, 2020).

This discrepancy between the talk and the walk has been referred to as "machinewashing", a concept "closely related to or used interchangeably with competing concepts [such as] AI washing [which will be discussed later in the chapter], (AI) ethics washing, ethical whitewashing, ethics bluewashing, and ethics theatre" (Seele & Schultz, 2022) – first coined by Wagner (2018) and then more precisely defined in an article for the *Boston Globe* by some MIT Media Lab researchers. According to the latter, to

> [a]ddress[es the] widespread concerns about the pernicious downsides of artificial intelligence (AI) – robots taking jobs, fatal autonomous-vehicle crashes, racial bias in criminal sentencing, the ugly polarisation of the 2018 election – tech giants are working hard to assure us of their good intentions surrounding AI. But some of their public relations campaigns are creating the surface illusion of positive change without the verifiable reality. (Obradovich et al., 2019)

The concept was further developed by Seele and Schultz (2022), who identified six main pillars of the machinewashing phenomenon. First, it consists of a communication to various stakeholders framed in ethical language. Second, it "focuses on misleading actions (e.g., symbolic and lobbying activities)" (Seele & Schultz, 2022). Third, it is an intentional action. Fourth, it relates not exclusively to AI and is "an organisational phenomenon". Fifth, its downsides are

born by society while the benefits are secured by the organisation. Sixth and last, it "relates to AI issues" (Seele & Schultz, 2022).

As such, machinewashing encapsulates this gap between rhetoric and action. It is a strategic effort that utilises misleading practices and instrumentalises the ethical – through various channels and mediums, communicative strategies, and symbolic actions – to appease the public, gain a competitive advantage, present one's public image or AI products and policies as ethically compliant, and forestall further regulations in the tech sector (Floridi, 2019b; Johnson, 2019; Seele & Schultz, 2022).

23.   ORANGEWASHING (BITCOINWASHING OR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE)

SMILE: (☹)

Orangewashing might have two distinct understandings. The first one relates to cryptocurrencies and builds on the popularity of Bitcoin (whose logo is a B in capital letters on an orange background); the second understanding refers to the injustices suffered by Indigenous people and may be understood as a related concept to that of redwashing and rainbowwashing.

Definitions

*   Orangewashing or Bitcoinwashing is the accusation of misleading communication that promotes lower-quality cryptocurrencies by piggybacking on the values of Bitcoin.
*   Orangewashing is the co-optation of the orange shirt symbol – which commemorates the injustices and suffering by Indigenous communities in Church-run residential schools – by companies that want to capitalise on the public support provided to the cause without implementing any substantive action or being financially involved.

Orangewashing and Cryptocurrencies

Orangewashing refers to the deceptive marketing tactics used by cryptocurrency sellers to promote their lower-quality cryptocurrencies or services that might not be in the best interest of investors (Kohler, 2023). They use the established brand image of Bitcoin, which is associated with "economic freedom, digital energy, and innovation" (Kohler, 2023), and piggyback on its popularity. This practice is named after the orange colour of Bitcoin's logo.

Orangewashing and Indigenous People

A second understanding of orangewashing relates to the injustices suffered by Indigenous communities in Canada.

For over a century, Canadian church-run residential schools have been used for the forced assimilation of Indigenous children. As reported by *The Guardian* (2021), more than 150,000 Indigenous children have been cruelly torn from their families and placed in residential schools, where they suffered systematic sexual and physical abuse. Stripped of their Indigenous identity, they were forced to adopt the coloniser's culture, religion, and values, forsaking their own heritage and language: they endured a "cultural destruction" (International Federation of Social Workers, 2023) of their Indigenous culture. In addition, to the physical abuses, contacts with families and siblings were severely restricted, and, in many cases, family visits were outright prohibited. During school breaks, moreover, children were forced into laborious conditions and sent to live with settler families as domestic servants (International Federation of Social Workers, 2023). Estimates suggest that up to 15,000 Indigenous children lost their lives in these schools (Leyland, 2021); those who survived them were left with enduring emotional and psychological damages (International Federation of Social Workers, 2023). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 2015 report unequivocally condemned this operation as a "cultural genocide" (APTN National News, 2015).

The origins of orangewashing emerge in this dark period of Canadian history. In 1973, Phyllis Webstad, a six-year-old Indigenous girl, was stripped of her newly bought orange shirt upon entering the St. Joseph Mission Residential School. Fifty years later, Webstad decided to turn that orange shirt into a symbol for all those who suffered injustices and abuses in Residential Schools and founded the Orange Shirt Day. The event is held each 30th of September, which is the day that children used to be taken from their homes and brought to the residence, to "commemorate[e] the residential school experience, witnessing and honouring the healing journey of the Survivors and their families" and to "to create meaningful discussion about the effects of Residential Schools and the legacy they have left behind" (Orange Washing Society, n.d.).

However, the genuine intentions behind Orange Shirt Day have allegedly been co-opted by businesses such as the retail giant Walmart, who commodified the symbol by selling orange shirts in its stores. Webstad laments that Walmart's actions amount to mere "performative allyship", devoid of substantive action to address the systemic issues at hand (Atherton & Writer, 2023). Such co-optation has been called out as orangewashing.

24.   PEACEWASHING

SMILE: (☹)

The academic literature on peacewashing is scarce, and civil society's broad uses are scattered and diverse. We identified six major understandings and tried to group them according to their context. The first understanding concerns the language used to define and frame the long-standing Israeli–Palestinian war and its implication in the perception of its dynamics; the second identifies the allocation of funding by funding groups to peace organisations according to a lobbying strategy; the third refers to the hypocritical justifications set up to defend new fossil fuel explorations; while the fourth addresses the misleading communication of certain companies which publicly endorse and support one side of a conflict but then continue doing business with the other one. Finally, the fifth and sixth understandings of peacewashing deal, respectively, with the mismatch between the statements and operations of developmental organisations and with the attribution of the Nobel Peace prizes to persons that can be linked with war operations.

Definitions

- Peacewashing is the use of language and framing to display a specific dynamic in the Israeli–Palestinian war that omits alleged war crimes and abuses.
- Peacewashing involves channelling peace organisations' funds to complacent entities to lobby interests or promote an agenda – but not foster peace efforts.
- Peacewashing consists of using war-related geopolitical manoeuvres to justify new fossil fuel explorations – thus juxtaposing such energy policy with the latest environmental reports.
- Peacewashing defines a company's misleading communication that conceals a mismatch between its public statements supporting one side of a conflict and its actual operations – which oftentimes involve the other side in the conflict.
- Peacewashing refers to the mismatch between the private sector development actors' positive statements about their project and their actual destructive implementation.

Peacewashing, Peace Organisations, and Money

The interpretation of peacewashing, as proposed by Lindorff (2021) in an article in *Consortium News*, delves into a funding strategy prevalent within the U.S. system. In this context, peacewashing refers to the practice wherein a funding group, like the Peace and Security Funders Group, channels funds to organisations that align with their established consensus position and political stance. Moreover, these organisations may be coerced into adopting these positions, with the threat of being excluded from accessing influential figures, receiving grants, or succumbing to self-censorship due to such potential repercussions (Lindorff, 2021). Consequently, the funds that should ideally support peace-focused organisations end up diverted towards "security-may-bring-some-peace (for us) revolving-door" ones. This covertly fuels a form of "old-fashioned lobbying", where genuine protests are not truly supported, and those who attempt to organise protests find themselves side-lined (Lindorff, 2021).

Peacewashing, Energy Transition, and Fossil Fuels

A second use of peacewashing has been proposed by the Ukrainian environmentalist Romanko Svitlana when invited to a radio broadcast by DW on the funding of Putin's aggression to Ukraine through oil and gas. In the interview, Romanko uses the word peacewashing while referring to the need to decrease the use of fossil fuels to underline the hypocrisy of justifying new fossil fuel explorations through claims that these are necessary for facing the current gas shortages (provoked by the weaponisation of fossil gas carried out by Vladimir Putin against the EU), while all the latest reports are narrowing the timeframe at disposal to decrease the worse impact of climate change: "we should never replace [oil] with another oil and gas supply – just brought from another country" (Laycock, 2022).

The third use of peacewashing also pertains to the energy transition and fossil fuel use context. The concept was presented in a blog post on Global Witness to define the misleading communication by those companies that, after public pressure, have publicly stated their support to Ukrainians and pledged to pull out from Russian fossil fuels – while continuing "buying (and even in some cases producing) the Russian oil and gas which made that invasion possible" (Global Witness, 2022). Examples of such understanding of peacewashing are Total's and Wintershall's communications. Concerning the French multi-energy company, Total released a statement in March 2022 demonstrating its support to Ukraine – while a couple of days later, it stated that it would not have withdrawn from its Russian projects unless obliged to by the EU. Similarly, Wintershall's CEO also expressed his support, saying that "the 'Russian President's war of aggression against Ukraine has shaken the

foundations of the company's work in Russia to the core'" (Global Witness, 2022). Nevertheless, such a statement does not find correspondence with the company's work: Wintershall "piped €14 billion worth of Russian gas across Germany and made €400 million from its Siberian gas and oil fields in the first three months of the year" (Global Witness, 2022).

Peacewashing and Development Programs

A fourth understanding of peacewashing has been proposed by Brian Ganson in 2022 in a piece for the Institute for Security Studies. Ganson (2022) used the notion to refer to the mismatch between the "ostensibly 'good' private sector development actors", which should have allegedly had a positive benefit on the country, and their implication in "destructive conflict". He supports his accusation with the example of the "African Development Bank [which] won a Deal of the Year 2020 award for the Mozambique Liquefied Natural Gas Area 1 Project, the largest direct investment in Africa" (Ganson, 2022). Although such a project should have been a major developmental project for the country, it is now "at the heart of social divisions and violence that have left thousands dead and as many as a million displaced". Moreover, due to "a toxic mix of mercenaries, foreign troops and a terrorist insurgency [the project] has resulted in gross human rights abuses" (Ganson, 2022): a mismatch, according to Ganson, between what one alleges to do and what one actually does that bears the name of peacewashing.

Peacewashing and the Nobel Prize

The fifth and last major understanding of peacewashing that we identified is the use made by Tentokali and Koutoupis (2012) in their conference paper "Preemptive and Virtuous". They define peacewashing as the act of cleaning (both past- and forward-looking) a public figure's image from war episodes through the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Peace. As instances of such a practice, they cite the examples of the Vice President of the United States, Al Gore, and former President Barack Obama (Tentokali & Koutoupis, 2012). The former was awarded the Prize in 2007 after its fundamental campaign in favour of the environment, the latter because of its efforts to "strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples" (Tentokali & Koutoupis, 2012). Nevertheless, the two authors underline how Vice President Gore was involved in the bombing – with depleted uranium bombs – of the former Yugoslavia in 1999, while the President was awarded the Prize at the beginning of his presidency, thus "pre-washing" his hands from any possible future war-related decisions (Tentokali & Koutoupis, 2012).

25.   PINKWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

The literature on pinkwashing is divided into different, controversial, and ambiguous understandings (like no other of the *washing phenomena mentioned in this book). The first and main one concerns the pink ribbon used in the breast cancer debate; the second mention in the literature deals with LGBTQ+ issues going back to the pink triangle homosexual inmates of the Nazis' concentration camps had to wear (see also rainbowwashing). Finally, the term is sometimes used also in the context of the Israel–Palestine-conflict (O'Rourke et al., 2013), or is used synonymously with purplewashing or femwashing addressing gender-equality issues. Let us present them in order.

Main Definition (Breast Cancer)

Pinkwashing is accusation of a misleading practice that legitimises products and promotes a positive corporate image by (i) establishing partnerships with specific organisations engaged in the fight against breast cancer or (ii) by making use of breast cancer symbols such as the pink ribbon, with the alleged goal of raising awareness or money for curing the disease, while actively piloting the discourse away from its practices that are known to contribute to its insurgence.

Secondary Definition (Sexual Rights, LGBTQ+, Israel–Palestine Conflict)

Pinkwashing is the accusation of the misleading communications with various other activities linked to the colour pink. This may be linked to gender equality (femwashing), homosexuality or in selected cases as an accusation of diverting attention away from politically controversial activities (like the settlement policy in Palestine) by communicating LGBTQ+ issues or other support and recognition of sexual rights.

Pinkwashing and the Fight Against Breast Cancer

Ribbons were first used as a symbol in 1979 when the wife of one of the American hostages taken at the American embassy in Teheran (Iran) attached yellow ribbons to the trees in her front yard to express her desire to see her husband come home. Soon, the entire country took over the symbol to signal solidarity. Nevertheless, the use of ribbons in a health-related cause came only

11 years later when the activist art group Visual AIDS redesigned the ribbon (adding the loop) and coloured it red, "the colour of passion" (Fernandez, 1998), to show support for AIDS patients and to call out the lack of awareness on the issue. The new ribbon gained popularity when the actor Jeremy Irons wore it during the Tony Awards (Green, 1992). Thus, in the following years, the use of ribbons exploded to the extent that *The New York Times* dubbed 1992 "The Year of the Ribbon" (Green, 1992). Every cause had one. And so did cancer.

In 1992, Charlotte Hayley started attaching peach-coloured ribbons to informative cards to point attention towards the irrisory part (5%) of the 1.8 billion dollars budget set for the National Cancer Institute devoted to cancer prevention (Fernandez, 1998). The cards handed out by Hayley caught the attention of Alexandra Penney, the editor-in-chief of *Self*, who was designing a ribbon for her second annual Breast Cancer Awareness Month to be distributed in all New York stores by the cosmetic giant Estée Lauder. Due to difficulties in collaborating with Mrs Hayley and advised by her lawyers, Mrs Penney stuck with the ribbon idea. Still, she changed the colour to pastel pink, a colour later described as the "quintessential female colour" and defined as "everything cancer notably is not" (Fernandez, 1998). The pink ribbon had become the symbol in the fight against breast cancer (Fernandez, 1998) – and with it, its misleading uses began.

One of the most known examples of such abuse is the campaign launched by the cosmetic Avon (Lubitow & Davis, 2011), "Kiss Goodbye to Breast Cancer", who had created for the event six new lipsticks – all with catchy names: Courageous Spirit, Crusade Pink, Faithful Heart, Inspirational Life, Strength, and Triumph (Ehrenreich, 2001) – to raise awareness about breast cancer. However, those products – as well as other 250 products of the cosmetic giant, which were ranked as being of "the highest concern" because of the presence of possible carcinogens (Lubitow & Davis, 2011) – were later found to contain hormone-disruptive ingredients that could be linked to the insurgence of breast cancer (Lubitow & Davis, 2011). To silence such types of accusations, many cosmetic producers started a fierce lobbying campaign for scraping a measure requiring cosmetic companies to disclose the carcinogenic ingredients present in their products – intending to muddle "the links among the production, suffering, and obfuscation of disease" (Lochlann, 2007). Besides the lobbying, some companies decided to publicly display their efforts towards the cause by raising millions of dollars through specific actions and events, such as the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer, then proudly advertised to have been donated to numerous organisations and research centres (Avon, n.d.). Such efforts did not silence the criticisms as some of the money raised was claimed to have been redirected back to Avon (Lubitow & Davis, 2011) and, due to the power dynamics involved in the donations, the donations were condemned for having

"dictate[d] how and where that money [was to be] spent" (Lubitow & Davis, 2011): a co-opting the general discourse in a specific manner.

Despite the public scandal generated by such condemnations, these types of campaigns are still widely used by companies. Every year in October, that is, the breast cancer awareness month, many companies apply recognisable pink ribbons on their campaigns or products to express their support for this cause (Carter, 2015). Nevertheless, such campaigns may amount to a mere appropriation and monetisation of a token that "began as a grassroots movement, with survivors wearing ribbons to show solidarity with each other" (Carter, 2015) with the mere goal of "build[ing] goodwill, mov[ing] product, and cover[ing] up their production of carcinogens" (Lochlann, 2007): a strategy called *pinkwashing*.

Pinkwashing can be defined as the misleading practice where a company legitimises its products and promotes a positive corporate image by (i) establishing partnerships with specific organisations engaged in the fight against breast cancer (Lubitow & Davis, 2011) or (ii) by making use of the cause marketing tool of the breast cancer symbol, viz., the pink ribbon (Carter, 2015) or other pink items (McHenry, 2017), with the alleged goal to raise awareness or money for curing the disease, while actively piloting the discourse away from its practices that are known to contribute to its insurgence. As such, pinkwashing, by building on everyone's assumed familiarity with the disease and its absent risks of alienating potential consumers ("unlike HIV/AIDS, poverty, obesity, or other 'uncomfortable' epidemics" (Lubitow & Davis, 2011)), is the golden egg of marketing tools to "increase[e] brand recognition, image, loyalty, and ultimately profits" (Lubitow & Davis, 2011).

One of the main consequences of pinkwashing lies in the donor's co-optation of the discourse around the disease. Such piloting involves shifting the focus away from the environmental factors causing the illness, which could be linked to the company, to its cure and prevention (Blackmer, 2019; Lubitow & Davis, 2011). As such, the cancer issue is framed "in terms of pharmaceutical interventions or treatments", stressing the necessity to find a cure yet "possible, vague, and presently unknown" (Lochlann, 2007). Such a framework, however, avoids any debate on the "environmental research as a primary mode of cancer prevention, unequal exposures in some disadvantaged populations, and the complexity of how low doses of certain chemicals can act in our bodies during certain windows of development (e.g., in the womb, in puberty)" (Lubitow & Davis, 2011). Overall, the co-optation produces the perception in consumers that their choices of which product to buy are sufficient to eradicate the disease (Lubitow & Davis, 2011).

Pinkwashing and Israel's Settler Colonialism

Noteworthy is that, nowadays, pinkwashing is not solely used to define the fraudulent and misleading communication that portrays an engagement in the cure to the disease while contributing to its insurgence – but has spilt over to encompass the LGBTQ+ community. In this sense, the use of the colour pink has different historical reasons: during World War II, the Nazis used to put inverted pink triangles on the uniforms of gay male prisoners held in concentration camps "to shame them for their 'inverse' gender identification" (Blackmer, 2019). Because of this, the pink triangle was adopted by the LGBT activist ACT-UP movement to "symbolise political resistance to homophobia and the plight of HIV+ people and those living with AIDS" (Blackmer, 2019). A highly cited use of this understanding of pinkwashing considers it as the practice of certain states, such as Israel, to shun the attention from its "ongoing settler colonialism of historic Palestine" (O'Rourke et al., 2013) by highlighting its support and recognition of sexual rights "as evidence of the degree of its advancement as a 'civilisation' […] to justify the need for intervention, education, or training" (McEwen, 2016).

26.   POORWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

Definition

Poorwashing is the accusation of misleading promotion of humanitarian aid policies with messages that stress how beneficial it is for the poor while, *de facto*, they only benefit the promoter's political agenda or economic interests.

Poorwashing Cases

In 2002, southern African states were facing one of the decade's most severe food crises. According to aid agencies, around 15 million people were hungry and on the verge of starvation (Oliver, 2002). However, despite the famine, Zambia refused the United States' food aid. The reason lied in the type of corn and soya the United States offered: genetically modified (GM) crops. Mwananwasca, Zambia's president, called the offered seeds "poison" (Plaut, 2002) and refused to let them in the country – despite the United Nations' pressures (*The Economist*, 2002). In response to the refusal, the United States ambassador, Tony Hall, called out Zambia's food policy as a crime against humanity and for its leaders to be prosecuted (Walters, 2006). According to

him, the prudent policy – defended in terms of biosafety (Manda, 2016) – implemented by Zambia was illogical since the aid food provided "has passed U.S. food safety and environmental impact testing – the most rigorous in the world. For this reason, U.S. biotech and non-biotech foods are mixed together. We do not, and see no need to, separate them" (Mittal, 2003).

Because of this behaviour, Mittal (2003) has accused the U.S. of poorwashing its GM crops. Poorwashing consists in the promotion – through a hunger and humanitarian relief justification – of one's personal interests and agenda by "conferring legitimacy and preventing debate per a policy by [the] spurious suggestion that the poor will benefit from it, and that any objection necessarily contradicts the interests of the poor" (Mittal, 2003). Specifically, in the Zambia case, the poorwashing charge amounted to the U.S. "politicisation of hunger" (Walters, 2006) as a communicative façade – staged at an international relations level – that "conceal[ed] bitterly unfair and predatory trade policies" (Dixon, 2007) aimed at promoting the North American country's economic interests (Walters, 2006). In fact, food aid was used (1) as a foreign policy "weapon […] to control and pressure the poorer African nations" into accepting genetically modified (GM) food "owned by northern multinational corporations" (Walters, 2006); and (2) to allocate unsold surplus GM crops and use the system as "covert subsidy for U.S. farmers" (Vidal, 2002). In promoting such interests, emerges a mismatch between the talk, that is, the justification of humanitarian aid, and the walk, namely, the substantive actions carried out to substantially tackle the issue. This discrepancy is even more evident if one considers that, as underlined by Walters (2006), if the United States genuinely wanted to help, they could have eased the transportation of the cassava surplus that Zambia had in the northern part of the country to the southern part where there was the food deficit.

It is noteworthy that poorwashing charges are addressed not only to states but also to non-governmental organisations. Mittal underlines how the "misguided philanthropic efforts", such as those "of the Gates Foundation's Alliance for a New Green Revolution in Africa" (Mittal, 2009), aimed at implementing "Western-led plans for a genetically engineered revolution in African agriculture". It is worth mentioning that this accusation rests on an underlying criticism against Western countries and non-governmental organisations for presuming Africans' needs and then materialising them through a "dumping of food aid" and an imposition of an agrotechnological food system: an approach that does not consider possible adverse effects or whether there is, in the first place, a willingness by the African country to switch towards the "industrial-style agriculture based on chemicals and 'high-yielding' seeds" (Mittal, 2009) that the West promotes.

27. PURPLEWASHING (ALSO KNOWN AS OR SIMILAR TO: FEMWASHING, FEMPOWERWASHING)

SMILE: (☺)

The primary understanding of purplewashing, also known as femwashing, is the co-optation of the feminist and gender-equality debate for commercial benefits – without implementing any real transformative action in this context. The second and subordinate understanding is the marketisation of feminist debate in advertisements targeted towards women (femvertising); this practice is known as fempowerwashing. Finally, the last related understanding of purplewashing consists of the film industry's practice of casting actresses for roles that historically or traditionally were for male actors. Let us present them in order.

Main Definition

Purplewashing amounts to the accusation of a marketing, political, and communicative strategy aimed at misleadingly ameliorating the corporate image (to gain an audience, voters, or customers) by supporting feminist values and female empowerment or embracing gender equality – without backing such statements with any real or transformative actions.

Secondary Definitions

- Fempowerwashing is a specific application of purplewashing to the field of femvertisment and is defined as the accusation of a misleading practice of using advertisements to promote an empowering, positive, feminist, women's-right-advocate, gender-equal corporate image – without backing such statements.
- Purplewashing consists of the accusation of casting female actresses in roles traditionally or historically for male actors to increase gender diversity and audience.

Purplewashing as the Co-optation of the Women's Rights and Gender-equality Debate

On the eve of Women's Day in 2017, a bronze statue representing a small girl was placed opposite the New York Stock Exchange and in front of the famous "Charging Bull" statue erected in 1989 "as a symbol of Wall Street resilience"

(Bellafante, 2017). Sculpted by the artist Kristen Visbal and sponsored by the Boston-based asset-management State Street Global Advisors (SSGA), the "Fearless Girl" allegedly celebrates – as its plaque states – "the power of women in leadership" and has been praised for calling out "the glass ceiling regarding pay and promotion of women in the Wall Street community" (Kolhatkar, 2022).

However, despite the noble intentions, the placing of the statue has been heavily criticised for being a "sly (perhaps too sly) ad by State Street" (Zacks, 2017) and "an example of fake corporate feminism" (Kolhatkar, 2022). In an article on the *Nasdaq*, the investment firm Zacks underlined how SSGA astutely used the work of art to promote their new index on gender diversity, "SHE, and carefully timed its commission to only implicitly link it to the fund" (Zacks, 2017). On the other hand, Kolhatkar, in an article in *The New Yorker*, highlighted the discrepancy between SSGA's "talk" and support of women's rights and equal representation in senior-level positions – epitomised by the statue – and their "walk": SSGA had, in fact, just settled with the U.S. Department of Labour for claims of racial discrimination against black female employees (Kolhatkar, 2022) and pay gap differences against several hundreds of its top female employees (Bellstrom, 2017; Stevens, 2017). Moreover, SSGA, at the time, still had a low percentage, five out of twenty-eight (Bellafante, 2017), of female executives within the company: data in sharp contrast to their claims of striving for gender equality. Because of these reasons, many called out the sponsorship of the statue as a "corporate hypocrisy" (Wagner et al., 2009) and "an example of fake corporate feminism" (Kolhatkar, 2022): a charge that takes the name of *purplewashing.*

Purplewashing (also known as femwashing) amounts to a marketing, political, and communicative strategy aimed at misleadingly ameliorating the corporate image (to gain an audience, voters, or customers) by leveraging and supporting feminist values, female empowerment, women's rights, or embracing gender equality – without backing such statements with any real or transformative actions (Martinez-Fierro & Garza-Veloz, 2022; StealthFem, 2017). The use of the colour purple to identify feminism and related concepts and movements traces back to the early twentieth century when it was used as the official colour by the National Women's Party Suffragettes (The Purple Campaign, n.d.).

Such a practice is often carried out by giving "'only one time' meetings and speeches about gender parity and equality" (Martinez-Fierro & Garza-Veloz, 2022) where women are tokenised by making them attend so that executives can then "take a picture of them with the invited group" to show their support to the cause (Martinez-Fierro & Garza-Veloz, 2022).

One of the numerous downsides of such practice is the fragmentation of the debate and diminishing the "visibility of women's struggle" (Martinez-Fierro & Garza-Veloz, 2022).

Purplewashing and Femvertisment

A particular application of purplewashing goes under the name of fempowerwashing (written with a hyphen by Sterbenk et al. (2022)). It applies to the realm of "femvertisment", namely "advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages and imagery to empower women and girls" (Stampler, 2014), also known as "ad-her-tising" (Baxter, 2015).

Although the use of feminism and feminist values to better sell products has been in use since the Sixties –when Virginia Slims developed the slogan that referenced women's independence, "You've Come A Long Way, Baby", to sell cigarettes (Baxter, 2015) – the term "femvertisment" was coined only in 2014 by SHE Media. They used it to categorise the increasing number of advertisements that promoted a representation of women in power roles, addressed women's body perception (Bahadur, 2014), celebrated women, or sought to reduce gender stereotypes (Zeisler, 2017). This type of advertisement normally consists of "short videos, 30-second commercials, or experiential brand activations [that] allow companies to reach large audiences with simple, feel-good messages that connect their brands to social causes in positive ways" (Sterbenk et al., 2022). Examples of this practice are the Bud Light commercial, where Amy Schumer and Seth Rogan discuss equal pay (Sterbenk et al., 2022), or Dove's "Real Women" campaign (Feng et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, consumers are starting to question femvertisment (Feng et al., 2019), its motivations (Duffy, 2010; Millard, 2009), the authenticity of its pro-women messages (Taylor et al., 2016), and whether the promises will be upheld (Jones, 2019), or whether they are a mere response to the increasing pressure put on companies to tackle such social issues (Castaldo et al., 2009; Varghese & Kumar, 2020) and a way to financially capitalise on it (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). With an increasing number of companies using this strategy, the first cases of fempowerwashing have been reported (Sterbenk et al., 2022), that is, a mismatch between the talk and the walk. It has been remarked how numerous companies "that have won prestigious femvertising awards have simultaneously received negative media coverage for lack of female representation at the leadership level" (Sterbenk et al., 2022), accusations of sexism (Hsu, 2018), or because of the promotion of contradictory points in advertisements that dealt with body image (Blay, 2016). As such, fempowerwashing can be defined as a specific application of purplewashing to the field of femvertisment that consists of misleadingly using advertisements to promote an empowering,

positive, feminist, women's-rights-advocate, gender-equal corporate image without backing such statements with any substantive or transformative action.

Similarly to the other types of washings, when discovered, can have severe negative impacts on the company's reputation and the stakeholders' trust (Sterbenk et al., 2022; Wagner et al., 2009; Yoon et al., 2006).

Purplewashing in the Film Industry

The last understanding of purplewashing consists, similarly to brownwashing, of casting a female actor for a role that historically and traditionally was of a man, with the mere goal of increasing gender diversity (Realequality, 2018). An example of such a practice is the casting of actress Lucy Liu to play the role of Sherlock Holmes's friend, John H. Watson (Coren, 2012).

28.   RAINBOWWASHING

SMILE: (☹)

Definition

Rainbowwashing is defined as the accusation of a mismatch between an entity's professed commitment to the LGBTQIA+ community and its actual action. It involves the appropriation of the LGBTQIA+ community symbols, colours, values, and popularity to increase financial profits, retain customers and employees, ameliorate (or create) a progressive corporate image that embraces diversity and acceptance, and improve or (re-)establish public reputation and credibility. Such misleading communication is achieved through selective disclosures of information, performative actions (such as public endorsing and supporting of the LGBTQIA+ community), and vague, exaggerated, or deceptive statements, which are not backed by any substantive changes in the company's conduct, investment, or actions – and, in some instances, outright contradict them.

The Origins of the LGBT Community

Before and since the 1970s, the gay and lesbian community, along with other sexual minorities, frequently faced condemnation, vilification, social exclusion, and threats of violence. In many countries, the manifestations of homophobic sentiments even reached an institutional criminalisation, with severe sentences for individuals who were discovered to be gay (Blakemore, 2021). An emblematic case of this institutionalised discrimination is the case of

Alan Turing, a world-renowned British mathematician that cracked the Nazis' Enigma encrypting machine during World War II, thus permitting Britain to decipher coded Nazi communications. Despite these crucial contributions to the war efforts, Turing was arrested and chemically castrated because of the discovery of his sexual orientation. Further historical accounts, such as the targeting of gay and lesbian government officials during the Cold War, reveal similar persecutions (Shibusawa, 2012).

Although the first events that would have later shaped the LGBT civil rights debate started in the late 1950s, such as the 1958 U.S. Supreme Court's decision to reverse the ruling that proscribed open discussions of homosexuality as unlawful (see *One, Inc v. Olesen*, 355 US 371, 371 (1958)), the origins of the LGBT civil rights movement can be traced to the mid-1960s.

In 1965, the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organisation (ERCHO) began its orderly picketing and protesting (the protesters stuck to a "strict professional dress code and encouraged marching in an orderly picket line to put a non-threatening face forward" (Blakemore, 2021)) in front of the Philadelphia's Independence Hall (Blakemore, 2021).

Nevertheless, the crucial turning point in the fight for the dignity and equality of the Community was marked by the Stonewall Inn Riots (Velte, 2020) that began on 29 June 1969, in New York City's Greenwich Village. Triggered by an abusive police raid at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, the riots lasted for six nights. The frustration of the protesters would have galvanised the LGBT community, sparking the creation of many new organisations and large demonstrations (Blakemore, 2021); as nicely evidenced by Rice (2022), "[t]he message was clear: the [LGBT] Community would no longer be erased or oppressed".

The momentum created by these pivotal riots culminated one year later on 27 June 1970, in Chicago – where 150 activists "marched from Civic Centre Plaza to Washington Square shouting slogans like 'Gay power to gay people'" (Blakemore, 2021) and one day later in New York for the first Pride parades. According to a report by *The New York Times*:

> [t]housands of young men and women homosexual from all over the Northeast marched from Greenwich Village to the Sheep Meadow in Central Park [...], proclaiming "the new strength and pride of the gay people". (Fosburgh, 1970)

Differently from the orderly Philadelphia picketing of 1965, men were seen publicly kissing, walking hand in hand, and displaying banners with their sexual orientation (Vincenz, 1970). It was the first time that "a large group of LGBTQ people celebrat[ed] their sexual orientation in public" (Blakemore, 2021), advocating for rights and equality. Michael Brown, founder of the Gay Liberation Front, stated that day:

[w]e [the LGBT community] are probably the most harassed, persecuted minority group in history, but we'll never have the freedom and civil rights we deserve as human beings unless we stop hiding in closets and in the shelter of anonymity. (Fosburgh, 1970)

It was in the late 1970s that the rainbow flag, which identifies the LGBT movement ever since, was designed. Requested by Harvey Milk to be used at the 1978 San Francisco march and designed by the veteran and artist Gilbert Baker (who decided not to trademark it), "the symbol took hold immediately" (Shamsian, 2018). Initial versions of the flags featured eight (two more than what is present on today's flag) bright (the use of bright colours has been a code among gay people to signal their homosexuality (Wickman, 2012)) colours. Each colour was chosen to convey symbolic meaning: "pink for sex, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sun, green for nature, turquoise for magic, blue for peace and purple for spirit" (Haag, 2017). However, because of economic reasons (the pink dye was exorbitantly expensive) and practical ones ("to do four-colour printing for photographs like this was complicated" (Millar Fisher & Antonelli, 2023)), by 1979, the number of colours featured on the flag was cut down to six (Shamsian, 2018) – turquoise and blue combined into royal blue (Haag, 2017). Ever since, the flag has been used as "a universal symbol for inclusion, peace and love" but also to signal solidarity (Haag, 2017).

In the 1980s, concurrently with the first events and the first successes, such as the decriminalisation of sodomy in various U.S. states (Fitzsimons, 2018), a backlash against LGBTs and LGBT civil rights grew. Its promoters held the belief that "gays were immoral, repugnant, and unworthy of participation in civil society" (Rice, 2022). They were captained by figures such as Anita Bryant and were also supported by many evangelical Christian leaders such as Bob Jones III, who once said that "God's judgement [would have fallen] on America as on other societies that allowed homosexuality to become a protected way of life" (Fitzsimons, 2018). These homophobic stances coincided with the surge in AIDS cases.

The sexual revolution of the 1970s and the easier transmissibility of HIV caused the virus, which entered the U.S. at different times, to spread "silently among gay male populations in large American cities" (Fitzsimons, 2018). In June 1981, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report reported the first cases (and deaths) of homosexuals who contracted HIV, and soon after, more cases were reported in the San Francisco area, initially described by *The New York Times* as a "rare cancer seen in 41 homosexuals" (Altman, 1981).

Furthermore, the anti-LGBT civil rights movement gained traction and found an ally in Ronald Reagan, who mentioned for the first time the word "AIDS" in 1985 (Fitzsimons, 2018) – after over 12,000 Americans had already died because of the virus. Due to the absence of a governmental response to

address the "gay plague" (as described in 1982 by a journalist at a press conference with press secretary Larry Speakes), AIDS activists organised and formed the first groups, such as the Gay Men's Health Crisis – the oldest HIV/AIDS organisation in the world – to care for ill patients (Fitzsimons, 2018). However, in 1987, building on a growing frustration caused by the continuous governmental inaction, the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power – better known as ACT UP – was founded in New York. The group, famous for its pink triangle on a black background (see also Pinkwashing), also designed by Gilbert Baker (Haag, 2017), organised several protests to object to the exorbitant price (up to $10,000 per year) of AZT, a drug approved in 1987 to treat AIDS (Fitzsimons, 2018).

Since its origins in the 1960s, the LGBT community has been referred to by different names. Before the movement started, the non-heterosexual community was referred to as "the gay community" (Gold, 2018). Then came the abbreviation LGBT, where "L" stood for lesbian, "G" for gay, "B" for bisexual, and "T" for transgender. Nevertheless, since then, new letters have been added. Afterwards, the letter "Q" was added to include also individuals that identified as queer – although some defend that it stands for "questioning" – "a catchall term that has shed its derogatory origins and is gaining acceptance" (Gold, 2018). Today, two additional letters have been added, namely, "I" for intersex and "A" for asexual, and a plus sign to incorporate all the other sexual and gender variations that differ from heterosexuality.

Marketing the LGBTQIA+ Community

The increasing recognition of the LGBT community prompted companies and marketing agencies to recalibrate their communication. This transformation was particularly evident in the 1990s, as niche advertising gradually expanded its reach to regional and national audiences (Miettinen, 2021).

One illustrative case of a company that took advantage of this new market segment was the carmaker Subaru. In those years, Subaru undertook comprehensive analyses to identify the demographic composition of their new all-wheel-drive car buyers. Beyond typical consumer groups like teachers, engineers, and technical professionals, Subaru discovered that "pockets of the country like Northampton, Massachusetts, and Portland, Oregon, where the head of the household would be a single person – and often a woman" (Mayyasi, 2016). Upon further investigation, they discovered that those women identified as lesbians.

Armed with this information, Subaru started marketing its cars to the lesbian community with subtle techniques – referred to as "gay vague" (Cummings, 2016). The company employed double entendre taglines, such as "It's not a choice. It's the way we're built", "Get out, And stay out", or

"Entirely comfortable with its orientation", and incorporated symbolic elements in advertisements, such as custom licence plates like "P TOWNIE", a moniker to the Provincetown, a place with "a worldwide reputation as an LGBTQ safe haven" (Provincetown Business Guild, 2023), or "XENA LVR", which stands for "Xena lover" and was a reference to a TV show character very much appreciated by lesbian audiences (Alsop, 1999; Cummings, 2016; Mayyasi, 2016; Miettinen, 2021).

Contrary to the notion of establishing a general acceptance of the LGBT community, Subaru's former marketing director, Tom Bennett, emphasised that the primary objective was to sell cars: "We were never saying it was a gay car. It wasn't a gay brand. But it was simply that we were admitting that we were selling cars to gay consumers" (Miettinen, 2021). The success of this strategy was evident: Subaru, dubbed "Lesbaru" after its marketing campaigns, distinguished itself from other carmakers that experienced declines in market shares to Toyota and Ford (Cummings, 2016; Mayyasi, 2016).

Over time, the portrayal of the LGBT community in advertising became more explicit. In 1994, IKEA aired the first TV ad that featured a homosexual couple shopping for a dining table (Agency Search, n.d.): a choice that increased the brand's popularity but also sparked controversy – with even a bomb threat in an IKEA New York store (Miettinen, 2021).

Rainbowwashing and the Co-optation of the Gay Pride Month

Today, the nuanced and covert marketing that characterised the 1990s has left the place for open and public statements, and what was once a daring act, such as marching with a banner that signalled one's sexual orientation, has become common in many cities (Blakemore, 2021).

Each June in the U.S. and all around the world, manifestations and pride parades are organised to commemorate the first pride and, for the U.S. context, to honour several important rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court in favour of the LGBTQIA+ community (see, *United States v. Windsor*, 570 U.S. 744 (2013); *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015); and *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia*, 140 S. Ct. 1731 (2020)) (Rice, 2022). The 2019 New York edition, which marked the 50-year anniversary of the famous Stonewall Inn riots, gathered more than 150,000 marching people and five million attendees (Caserta & Gibian, 2019).

However, with the rise in support for Gay Pride Month and the increasing number of advertisements featuring an LGBTQIA+ presence, a new market was created. Soon after, reports of strategic exploitations of public attention and co-optations of media focus started to surface. Many companies' philanthropic gestures, expressions of public support through temporary additions of rainbow flags to logos "in almost all publicly available spaces such

as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok or even the company facilities" (Rusch, 2023) (facilitated by the flag's lack of trademark protection (Mücksch et al., 2024)), and commitments to the LGBTQIA+ community, including the use of queer language, were observed to be short-lived and mere surface lip services (Bandera, 2022; Kose, 2021): examples of rainbowwashing.

Rainbowwashing refers to the co-optation of the rainbow symbols and colours, as well as the LGBTQIA+ values and popularity, that exploit the consumers' concerns about diversity and inclusion (Hampole & Pinilla, 2020) to increase financial profits, retain customers and employees, ameliorate (or create) a progressive corporate image that embraces diversity and acceptance, and "bolster, maintain, or re-establish the corporation's public reputation" (Rice, 2022) and credibility (Establishment, 2015). Such misleading communication is achieved through selective disclosures of information, performative actions, such as public endorsing and supporting of the LGBTQIA+ community, and vague, exaggerated, or deceptive statements that are not backed by any substantive changes in the company's conduct, investment, or actions – or even plainly contradict them.

The performative gestures can even reach hypocritical levels, with some companies having been discovered to be endorsing the LGBTQIA+ cause while funding anti-gay politicians and legislations (Champlin, 2019; Legum & Zekeria, 2023) – in a strategy that could be labelled, similar to Greenpeace's criteria for greenwashing, as "political spin".

In an article for Urban List (2022), Czepanski gives 11 examples of actions that, when not backed by tangible outcomes for LGBTQIA+ individuals, might signal a company's engagement in rainbowwashing. The author suggests to check "if during June they: (1) launch pride initiatives; (2) use LGBTQI+ team members as props in content; (3) use the rainbow to push products; (4) have corporate groups marching in parades; (5) offer false incentives for queer talent; (6) underpay queer talent; (7) change logos temporarily; (8) make empty gestures; (9) foster an unsafe workplace for queer staff; (10) don't donate to LGBTQI+ causes; (11) run a Pride campaign while contributing to anti-LGBTQI+ organisations/public figures".

As per greenwashing, whenever rainbowwashing is detected, there might be serious financial and reputational repercussions (Czepanski, 2022; Rice, 2022). At the same time, the anti-woke movement put pressure on corporations to communicate about topics of diversity, equality, or tolerance towards minorities, which led to the first appearances of rainbowhushing.

29.   REDWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

Redwashing has three different meanings. The first concerns the relations between companies or organisations with Indigenous populations. The second has a socio-political connotation, while the third relates to the notion of green-washing but in a twisted manner.

Main Definition

Redwashing amounts to an accusation of a misleading communication – not backed by any substantive action, or in contrast with the perpetrator's core activities or investment strategies – that aims at favourably portraying the perpetrator, or diverting the public's attention from its detrimental activities, through the sponsoring and financing of pro-Indigenous educational, artistic, and cultural projects.

Secondary Definitions

- Redwashing amounts to the accusation of a misleading communication that tries to portray an organisation or company in a way that shows sensitivity to social equality or being pro-community to increase its public perception while not backing its communications by any substantive action.
- Redwashing is the accusation of the embracement of anti-sustainability or anti-climate change stances to secure votes and the conservative electorate while benefitting from the pro-sustainability legislation.

Redwashing and Indigenous Populations

In 2020, the Royal Bank of Canada published its report "The Chosen Journey". The document highlighted the bank's efforts to work with and support Indigenous communities by financing and investing in various projects. However, such efforts have been accused of "redwashing" (Houle, 2022). Similarly to greenwashing, redwashing consists of misleading, performative, and non-transformative actions aimed at responding to "urgent social and or legal issue[s]" (Houle, 2022) with the goal of painting oneself "as 'benevolent' – a good neighbour – through sponsorship schemes for Indigenous education, art and culture". The overall communicative façade tries to cover up or divert attention from "the detrimental effects of corporate initiatives" (Thomas-Müller, 2017) and projects such as the financing and investment in oil sand

extraction or transportation are on territories near or on Indigenous reserves (Houle, 2022). As such, redwashing displays a performative rhetoric of reconciliation without actually walking the talk.

Redwashing and the Left

Redwashing amounts to misleading communication that tries to portray an organisation or company in a way that shows sensitivity to social equality (hence the reference to the red of communism (Uttam, 2012)) or being "community-oriented" (*Redwashing er The New Standard*, 2012) to increase its public perception while not backing its communications by any substantive action. Similarly to Greenpeace's list for greenwashing, seven criteria that signal redwashing have been proposed in the article "Redwashing as the New Standard", published on *KForum* in 2012. (1) "*It's all talk and nothing more*": the commitment of the communicator is not met or is willingly vague in terms of objectives and timeframe: talking without walking. (2) "*Small good part = whole of goodness*": a small positive action or its first steps are amplified and portrayed as if they were representative of the company's behaviour. (3) "*The victim's good intentions in an evil, complicated world*": the company portrays itself as making an effort in the right direction but being hindered by greater forces such as "globalisation, markets, competitors, politicians, national interests and relationships or capital flows" (*Redwashing er The New Standard*, 2012). (4) "*Process and only process*": the communication of the company revolves around the notion of change and progress by underlining change through the recounting of previous steps and the promises of future ones. (5) "*Backing using a fake referee*": the company's actions are certified by an alleged independent third party – which is not independent but aligns with the company's interests. (6) "*An agreement is sold and communicated as fair and voluntary*": the company advertises the constitution of an agreement and portrays it in ethical and social terms – without specifying whether there was some sort of coercion or pressure from its side to have it signed. (7) "*Politicisation is merely symbolic communication and […] legally, economically and socially non-binding*": the company's actions are presented as if they were binding and necessary, while legally are not.

Redwashing as the Opposite of Greenwashing

The final meaning of redwashing has a direct link with greenwashing. In this context, redwashing is the opposite viewpoint of greenwashing: if the latter exaggerates one's actions in favour of the environment, the former aims at publicly "espousing an anti-sustainability, ESG or climate viewpoint while simultaneously engaging in, or benefitting from, pro-sustainability actions on

the ground" (Williams, 2023) – with the goal of securing votes or align with donors' interests (AFP, 2023). Examples of this practice are the Republican-held states (hence, the colour red) in the United States that strongly oppose pro-environment legislation while, at the same time, being the ones that are bringing the country towards the goal of net-zero by 2050. In fact, despite their fierce opposition (many Republican leaders discredit the notion of climate change (Harvey, 2022)), the credit benefits and tax reductions promoted by the Inflation Reduction Act are boosting the country's clean energy market: Iowa and Oklahoma are leading the wind power production, while Texas is leading solar and wind production (Dvorak, 2023; Uteuova, 2023).

30.   SCIENCEWASHING (ALSO KNOWN AS OR SIMILAR TO: SCIENCEPLOITATION, LABWASHING)

SMILE: (☺)

Sciencewashing has two main definitions. The first and major one relates to the practice of using science to create a more attractive brand image; this is done by making exaggerated or misleading claims that give the impression of scientific credibility. The second definition is linked to the concept of artwashing, which involves using artistic events to justify the gentrification of poor neighbourhoods. In the case of sciencewashing, the accusation is that scientific research and the benefit it may bring are used as justification for expanding campuses and research facilities in adjacent poor neighbourhoods.

Main Definition

Sciencewashing is the accusation of misleadingly co-opting science and creating instrumental, symbolic, overstated, but scientific-looking claims aimed at improving one's brand image by evoking a sense of trustworthiness, scientific endeavour, quality, and accuracy, and at differentiating one's products from similar ones by competitors, or to cast doubt onto commercially harming research.

Secondary Definition

Sciencewashing defines the accusation of using science and the alleged benefit it may produce for the overall population as a justification for expropriating properties or the gentrification that follows the arrival or the construction of a new research facility in a poor neighbourhood.

Sciencewashing: When Science is Everywhere and on Every Label

Consumers have been shown to prefer products whose effects have "scientific evidence[s]" (Raphael, 2023). Consequently, companies have started exploiting this willingness by dressing their products in "scientific feathers" (Tomala, 2022). For instance, many skincare products are now being marketed with catchy slogans, such as "Our *scientists* have found a new compound that reduces wrinkles" or "Our *scientifically* tested product slows ageing"; others use stealthier and more elaborated techniques, like claiming that X% (always almost 100%) of consumers say that the conditioner Y gives them more wavy and healthy hair – with a small footnote that states that the *experiment* was carried out on a dozen consumers (Raphael, 2023; Tomala, 2022). This is a prime example of a growing trend in misleading marketing known as *science-washing*, which is also becoming increasingly prevalent in the pharmaceutical and food industries.

Sciencewashing refers to the accusation of deceptively co-opting science and creating misleading, symbolic, overstated, but "scientific-sounding" (Siegel & Terdenge, 2023) claims aimed at improving one's brand image by evoking a sense of trustworthiness, scientific endeavour, quality, and accuracy, and at differentiating one's products from similar ones by competitors (Siegel & Terdenge, 2023; Walker, 2022; Wong, 2019).

Sciencewashing and Lobbying

The tobacco industry, for decades, has been found to have manipulated and misled the public opinion into believing that smoking was not dangerous – or not as dangerous as scientists were saying, that certain smoking products were safer than others, or plainly denied the science behind the studies that pointed to health hazards (Drope & Chapman, 2001; Houghton, 2022; Ong & Glantz, 2001; Yach & Bialous, 2001). Their use, in their public affairs "disinformation playbook" (Reed et al., 2021), of "scientific-sounding" (Siegel & Terdenge, 2023) arguments or the co-optation of science to deceive, mislead, gain profits, and ultimately secure the consolidation (or even deregulation) of their sector might be accused of amounting to sciencewashing.

Such a use of sciencewashing is not confined to the use made by the lobbyists of the tobacco industry to downplay the health risks of smoking (see Healthwashing), but has also been employed by those from the oil and gas (Center for International Environmental Law, 2016), sugar (Kearns et al., 2015) (see also Sugarwashing), and lead industries (Markowitz & Rosner, 2014) as well as by climate change deniers (Gelbspan, 2005). The strength of this misleading communication strategy stems from science's own foundation in doubts (Reed et al., 2021), which is co-opted and exploited by industries

to cast strategic, unfounded, or ill-funded doubts on research that might have detrimental commercial effects on their businesses (Goldberg & Vandenberg, 2021; Michaels, 2020; Oreskes & Conway, 2022). Fundamentally, this use of sciencewashing by public affairs experts might be understood as "using science or something that sounds like science against science itself".

Red Flags that Hint at Sciencewashing

Such a phenomenon, also known as "scienceploitation" (Raphael, 2023), might be carried out in various forms: from "selective disclosure of data, that is, the cherry-picking of results or studies that support a particular argument or perspective" to completely "ignoring or downplaying conflicting evidence" (Siegel & Terdenge, 2023). Siegel and Terdenge (2023) have identified eight red flags that hint at the possible presence of sciencewashing. There might be sciencewashing when there are:

(1) "Questionable claims and/or unsupported conclusions";
(2) "Overuse of jargon vagueness";
(3) "Deliberately (mis-)using statistics";
(4) "Selective disclosure of data/evidence";
(5) "Relying on eminence rather than evidence";
(6) "Intentionally citing flawed studies";
(7) "Intentionally concealing conflicts of interest"; and
(8) "Conducting symbolic instead of substantive research".

To these points, Wong (2019), who through a blog post helped make sciencewashing a buzzword in the cosmetic world, adds:

(9)   The use of words such as "science", "scientific", "scientifically" in an honorific and performative way;
(10) Adopting a technical terminology irrespective of its actual usefulness; and
(11) "Looking to sciences for answers to questions beyond their scope".

In addition, sciencewashing can also occur whenever vague words such as "aids", "promotes", "supports", "stimulates", "boosts", and "optimises" are used to mislead the consumer about the efficacy of the product – while, on a small footnote, there is written that there is no scientific evidence for it. The same applies to "clinically tested", "research-backed", "doctor recommended", or "evidence-based" – without the necessary information about *who* did *what* type of test and what the results were (Raphael, 2023).

The Consequences of Sciencewashing

Sciencewashing might have multiple downsides for stakeholders. At the consumer level, sciencewashed claims might mislead consumers into considering certain products as science-based or science-backed-up when they are not (Siegel & Terdenge, 2023). At the firm level, sciencewashing might be considered "an unfair advantage in the marketplace" (Siegel & Terdenge, 2023). Similar to other forms of *washings, when discovered, it might cause reputational damage and legal issues. Furthermore, such negative effects can also spill over to the science community, leading civil society to lose trust in science, an issue further amplified by today's "info-abundance". Additionally, Siegel and Terdenge (2023) have also underlined how such a practice might "create a toxic work environment if employees are expected to support ideas or products that are not based on solid research".

Sciencewashing and Gentrification

A second understanding of sciencewashing was proposed by Free Radicals in 2017 in a blog post. In this case, sciencewashing is more closely related to artwashing and defines the accusation of using science and the alleged benefit it may produce for the overall population as a justification for expropriating properties or the gentrification that follows the arrival or the construction of a new research facility in a poor neighbourhood.

An example of such use of sciencewashing is, according to Free Radicals (2017), the expansion of Columbia University into a 17-acre area of West Harlem known as Manhattanville. The project has been defended by its supporters on the grounds that "the expansion would bolster the city's knowledge based economy and, as a consequence, serve the 'public good'" (Gregory, 2013). Under these terms, scientific research is conceived to be "so intrinsically valuable that it trumps any consideration of material harm to the people in the to-be-demolished neighbourhood, or in the surrounding areas who are sure to see their rent and cost of living rise dramatically as a result of development projects" (Free Radicals, 2017).

31.   SHAREWASHING (ALSO KNOWN AS OR SIMILAR TO: PSEUDO-WASHING, WEWASHING)

SMILE: (☹)

Definition

Sharewashing is the accusation of a corporation's misleading communication, driven by opportunistic legal, financial, or image-related reasons, consisting of using terminology that creates a communicative façade that depicts the corporation as being part of the sharing economy while lacking substantive involvement in authentic sharing initiatives.

Sharewashing Cases

From sharing cars at railway stations through platforms such as Swiss Mobility, or even just a seat in a ride with BlablaCar, to one's unused apartment through Airbnb, thanks to technological development, the past decade has been characterised by the growth of the sharing economy (Baumeister et al., 2015; Frenken, 2017b). This evolution signifies a shift from the traditional sharing unused goods with family and acquaintances to a broader concept known in the literature as "peer-to-peer sharing" (Hawlitschek et al., 2018), where individuals engage in resource-sharing with strangers (Schor, 2014).

The core idea of the sharing economy consists of providing potentially remunerated, temporarily granted, mutual "access to under-utilised physical assets ('idle capacity')" (Frenken & Schor, 2017), whether wholly or partially (Frenken, 2017a), to increase utilisation (Botsman & Rogers, 2010) and ultimately efficiency (Hawlitschek et al., 2018; Teubner & Hawlitschek, 2018). This economic system is seen as a powerful and promising way to reach sustainability goals (Heinrichs, 2013; Martin, 2016) and, consequently, ameliorate the corporate's image by portraying "a positive and sustainability-related image" (Hawlitschek et al., 2018) but also a "flexible, innovative, and forward-thinking" (Lehr et al., 2021) one.

Nevertheless, because of its positive effects on a corporate's image, there has been a rise (Gheorghe, 2017; Lehr et al., 2021) – yet not particularly addressed by the scientific literature (Hawlitschek et al., 2018) – in what has been defined as "pseudo-sharing" (Belk, 2014), "wewashing" (for those who use a community jargon) (Huang, 2015), or "sharewashing" (Kalamar, 2013). Sharesharing can be defined as the communicative strategy undertaken for opportunistic, financial, legal (Spacey, 2023), and image reasons (Hawlitschek et al., 2018)

by platforms or corporations that consists in the misleading touting (framed in a "positively connoted" (Netter, 2016) "language [of] sharing" (Light & Miskelly, 2015)) of being part of the sharing economy – thus implicitly suggesting to be driven by social and ecological principles (Hawlitschek et al., 2018) – while actually not being involved in any "*sharing* per se" (Kalamar, 2013) or having one's core activity based in a different type of economy (Hawlitschek et al., 2018; Lehr et al., 2021; Spacey, 2023).

32.   SNOWWASHING

SMILE: (☹)

Definition

Snowwashing consists of an accusation of setting up tax planning structures in Canada to leverage the country's globally recognised legitimacy and positive democratic image aiming to evade taxes and launder money – while maintaining a positive façade distanced from the questionable reputation associated with traditional offshore tax havens.

Snowwashing Cases

In 2016, the Panama Papers scandal came to light through the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) investigations. They uncovered a widespread practice of using anonymous shell companies to conceal money from tax agencies, which, according to conservative estimates, cost the world's governments more than 190 billion dollars per year (Transparency International Canada, n.d.).

In this concealment world, Canada does not have the drawbacks of traditional offshores (Kassam, 2018), as is well documented in an internal memo of Mossack Fonseca (the law firm revealed in the Panama Papers leaks), where it is stated that "Canada is a good place to create tax planning structures to minimise taxes like interest, dividends, capital gains, retirement income and rental income" (Cribb & Chown Oved, 2017). According to Transparency International Canada, tax avoidance is possible thanks to the country's "opaque" (Kassam, 2018) jurisdiction (Transparency International Canada, n.d.), developed in the 1960s, with Canada's tax agreements: among the most important ones, there is the agreement with Barbados that "effectively encourage[d] Canadian businesses to route their international profits through the low-tax island" (Cribb & Chown Oved, 2017), and the TIEAs "with offshore tax havens like the British Virgin Islands and Luxembourg, offering them the same tax-free benefits at

treaty partners" (Cribb & Chown Oved, 2017). Canada's veil of concealment is provided, in particular, by a corporate registration system under which Canadian limited partnerships (LPs) have fewer tax filing requirements (Cribb & Chown Oved, 2017) "and unless they do business in Canada they need not engage with the tax authorities" (St. Denis, 2022). This framework, both at the federal and provincial level, is "shrouded in the same kind of secrecy that exists in tax havens such as the British Virgin Islands, Panama and the Bahamas" (Cribb & Chown Oved, 2017). Moreover, such behaviours are further enabled by low sentences if caught: as Chris Mathers, a former RCMP officer, stated in an article for the *Toronto Star*, "if you launder money in Canada and get caught, FINTRAC [Financial Transaction and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada, a financial intelligence unit] suspends your golf membership. No one goes to jail in Canada for even the most significant financial crimes. Things you'd do 20 years for in the U.S., you might get a fine in Canada and that's not lost on criminals" (Cribb & Chown Oved, 2017).

Because of these reasons, Canada is becoming "a popular tax haven for the global elite" (Cribb & Chown Oved, 2017) where billions of dollars are laundered each year (over 47 billion dollars were laundered in 2018, data that others estimate bring up to 100 billion (#endsnowwashing, n.d.; Todd, 2022)). The consequences of such a flow of foreign capital in Canada's legal economy are visible in the real estate market, where there has been a skyrocketing increase in house prices in the Toronto and Vancouver areas (Transparency International Canada, n.d.); of these, "nearly half of the 100 most expensive homes in Vancouver […] were bought using shell companies, trusts or nominees" (Kassam, 2018). Overall, these capitals brought "the industry, estimated to be worth $41.3 billion in 2015, [to grow] 11.6% in only three years to an astounding $46.7 billion in 2018" (Todd, 2022). In addition to the price increases – felt the most by the locals – these capitals are also depriving the government of important tax revenues (Transparency International Canada, n.d.).

To describe the exploitation of the Canadian system, a new term was coined by *The Toronto Star*: snowwashing. It defines the practice of benefitting from Canada's internationally recognised legitimacy, positive image of a "law-abiding" (Deering, 2022), "stable modern liberal democracy" (Todd, 2022), and its opaque "opaque beneficial ownership system" (Transparency International Canada, n.d.) to launder money with "purposes of tax evasion or terrorist financing" (#endsnowwashing, n.d.) – while maintaining a positive façade distanced from the questionable reputation associated with traditional offshore tax havens. The reference to the snow stems from the act of cleaning dirty money and making it white as the snow (#endsnowwashing, n.d.; Transparency International Canada, n.d.). As the literature is explicitly on

Canada, other cases of snowwashing in other countries with a secretive business culture may apply, particularly if they have snowy mountains.

33.   SOCIALWASHING (☺)

The demand for businesses to be mindful of social issues is increasing every day. To meet this demand, companies have started to take a stand by declaring their intent and efforts to improve the social conditions of their workers and suppliers (Williams, 2022). However, with more and more businesses claiming to be engaged in pro-social practices, there has also been a worrying trend of misleading claims. Some companies claim to be actively engaged in pro-social practices but do support their claims or operate in contrast to their alleged social goals. This practice is known as socialwashing, and it is an umbrella term for a series of practices that can be classified also under other more-defined types of *washings, such as rainbowwashing, ESG-washing, purple-washing, brownwashing, or blackwashing. In this chapter, we will explore socialwashing and its impacts.

Main Definition

Socialwashing refers to the practice by companies of portraying themselves as supporters and upholders of human rights and social values – while failing to take any meaningful action to back up these claims or blatantly disregarding them. It is essentially a form of misleading corporate image lip service meant to create a false and deceptive impression of social responsibility for investors and the public and increase financial returns.

Socialwashing Cases

In 2010, Amnesty International released a report that accused the mining company Vedanta Resources of "gross human rights violations" (Amnesty International, 2010). According to the report, Vedanta had allegedly "buil[t] a bauxite mine on a mountain sacred to the Dongria Kondh tribe, and […] a refinery at the base of the hills". Moreover, Vedanta would have ignored the obligation to consult with and disclose important information to the affected local populations and failed to "respect the human rights of the people of Lanjigarh and the Niyamgiri Hills" (Amnesty International, 2010). A year prior, these failures had been institutionally recognised by the British government, which ruled that the London-registered mining company "had failed to respect the human rights of the Dongria Kondh and said an 'immediate change in the company's behaviour' was 'essential'" (Amnesty International, 2010).

This condemnation promptly brought the Church of England to divest from the mining company (Raman, 2022).

Vedanta came under scrutiny again in 2018, when UN human rights experts condemned (OHCHR, 2018):

> the apparent excessive and disproportionate use of lethal force by police against protesters calling for the closure of a copper smelting plant [run by a business unit of Vedanta Resources] in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu over health and environmental concerns.

However, despite these serious allegations, the company continues to publicise its commitment to promote and uphold the highest standards (Raman, 2022), defending that (Vedanta Resources Ltd., 2018):

> Protecting and respecting human dignity is central to our everyday business operations. Moreover, as a global company working in a range of developing countries, we believe we have an important contribution to make through the example we set by our behaviors. Our Human Rights Policy is aligned to the UN Guiding Principles on business and human rights and includes strict prohibition of child or forced labor – either directly or through contract labour. Additionally, our Code of Business Conduct and Ethics (Code) commits us to comply with all relevant national laws and regulations, underpinning our approach to protecting the fundamental rights of all our direct and indirect employees.

Such statements and stances seem at odds with the mining company's track record: a mismatch called out as an example of "socialwashing" (Raman, 2022). Socialwashing is a concept similar to that of greenwashing: if, in the latter, companies misleadingly claim to be green, in the former, they portray themselves as socially responsible (Goldman & Zhang, 2022) through "unsubstantiated" (Goldman & Zhang, 2022), "misleading, [or] exaggerated" (Williams, 2022) claims – while not backing with any substantive action their pledges, statements, and announcements. Such a form of corporate image lip service, meant to create a false and deceptive impression of social responsibility for investors and the public and increase financial returns (Etica Funds, 2020; Rajan, 2022), is carried out on a vast array of topics (Williams, 2022) such as (among others) human rights, diversity, inclusion, products security, or privacy. According to a RepRisk analysis, human rights abuses are the most common form of socialwashing both in the U.S. and in the U.K.; however, in the U.S., social discrimination is much more subject to socialwashing than in the U.K. (RepRisk, 2023).

As per greenwashing, if detected, socialwashing can have dire consequences (Kick, 2019) – as the Church of England divesting from Vedanta Resources highlights.

34.   SPORTSWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

Since ancient times, sport and sport events (*panem et circenses* – bread and games) have been used as an instrument to distract from pressing issues or to ameliorate one's public image; this instrumental use today bears the name of sportswashing.

Definition

Sportswashing consists of the accusation of the instrumental use of an athletic event or sport-related actions (such as purchases of clubs or sponsorships) by states (authoritarian or democratic) – targeted both at an international and domestic audience. Its goal is to increase legitimacy and promote a positive, democratic, mindful-of-minorities, human-rights-caring image – while simultaneously diverting attention from chronic controversial behaviour such as human, women's, workers', or Indigenous people rights violations.

Sportswashing Cases

Some scholars trace the origin of sportswashing back to the first Olympics in 416 BCE (Boykoff, 2022), when Athenians used the victory in the chariot race to divert the attention away from the heavy losses that they were facing on the battlefield in the war against Sparta (Golden, 2008), and, in "a straight-up geopolitical manoeuvre" (Rosenberg, 2022), to present a positive winning image.

In modern times, the Olympics have continued to be used by regimes "as a trampoline for their own political power" (Boykoff, 2022). The 1936 edition, notably embraced by infamous German Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, was strategically manipulated into a powerful propaganda instrument. One illustrative example of such a manipulation was the introduction of the torch relay tradition, conceived to spread their ideology through "central and southeastern Europe" – regions that would later have become "key zones of Nazi geopolitical ambition and future war-making" (Boykoff, 2022) – and create a tight link between ancient Greece and German Aryans (Mandell, 1987). This same strategic manipulation was mirrored in 1978 by the military junta of Argentina with the World Cup, which hoped to "show the world that Argentina [was] a trustworthy country, capable of carrying out huge projects" (MacInnes, 2023), thereby attempting to silence critics exposing their "systematic human rights abuses", including the "killing between 10,000 and 30,000 people – in a campaign known as the Guerra Sucia" (MacInnes, 2023).

More recent instances displaying the co-optation of sports for political and public image purposes are the Beijing Summer Olympics of 2008 and the Sochi Winter Olympics of 2014 (Boykoff, 2022). Concerning the first, in 2001, during the bidding process, the Beijing Olympic Bid Committee asserted that holding such an international event in China would "not only promote our economy but also enhance all social conditions, including education, health and human rights" (Hadad, 2008): a statement not backed by any substantive action in this regard (Byler, 2021; Frommer, n.d.) – since all "previous promises went unmet and […] human rights violations […] continued, and even intensified, […] against ethnic Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang Province, people in Tibet, or democracy activists in Hong Kong" (Boykoff, 2022). With regard to the Sochi Winter Games, Russia has been accused of hosting the Winter Olympics to deflect public attention away from the negatively perceived anti-LGBTQ+ laws (Boykoff & Yasuoka, 2014). The hosting of these international events worked as a soft power technique (Grix & Kramareva, 2017) aimed at "imagebuilding" (Alekseyeva, 2014) and producing "diffused symbolic support for the government and wider political system" (Boykoff, 2022). In the case of the Sochi Winter Olympics, the alleged objective was to "solidify a singular sense of 'Russian-ness'" (Boykoff, 2022) and patriotism, thereby creating a "potent new Russian myth" (Grix & Kramareva, 2017).

Recently, the spotlight has shifted towards Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates and Dubai (Amnesty International Italia, 2021b). These nations have made significant inroads into the sports arena through:

- *Strategic acquisitions* of soccer clubs, such as Newcastle by Saudi Arabia, Paris St. Germain by Qatar, and Manchester City by Abu Dhabi;
- *Sponsorship deals* with notable teams, such as Arsenal and Real Madrid by the United Arab Emirates (Martinez, 2022);
- *Testimonial agreements*, such as the one between Qatar and David Beckham for the World Cup;
- By hosting events, such as the new grand prix for Formula One and Formula E, as well as for the motorcycle racing circuit (Amnesty International Italia, 2021b), boxing events (Reuters, 2019), and tennis cups like the Diriyah Tennis Cup.

Nevertheless, humanitarian NGOs (such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) and the international press have heavily criticised such events as being the poster child examples of sportswashing. For instance, Saudi Arabia has been accused of using sports events to cover human rights and women's rights violations (Amnesty International Italia, 2021b), "mass executions and

[…] exorbitant prison sentences for peaceful activists" (Boykoff, 2022), or negative press coverage for incidents such as Saudi Arabia's alleged involvement in the killing of the *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi (Amnesty International Italia, 2021b). Remarkably, these accusations have gone uncontested by Mohammad bin Salman (member of Saudi Arabia's royal family and current PM) who, in an interview with Fox News, openly stated: "If sport washing is going to increase my GDP by way of 1%, then I will continue doing [it]" (MacInnes, 2023).

Similarly, Qatar has been accused of using the World Cup to sportswash its worrying human rights condition, its lack (or heavily limited) of freedom of expression (Amnesty International Italia, 2021b), banning labour organising, and criminalisation of same-sex relationships (U.S. Department of State, 2021). Notorious in this regard is *The Guardian*'s investigative report that brought to light the worrying working conditions of the more than 6,000 migrant workers who worked in the construction of the World Cup infrastructure (Amnesty International Italia, 2021a, 2021b; Editorial, 2022; Pattisson et al., 2021) and Human Rights Watch's work on documenting the labour abuses suffered by the workers (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

It must be underlined that the practice of sportswashing is not restricted to dictatorships or autocratic countries that have a questionable track record on human, women's, and workers' rights but is also carried out within democratic contexts. The United States' utilisation of the 2002 Winter Olympics and Canada's 2010 Winter Games are clear examples. The Salt Lake City Olympics have been accused of having been used as an instrument to tell "an international audience that the United States was 'the safest place in the world'" (Boykoff, 2022) – even after the 9/11 terrorist attack. As such, the allegation is that "the U.S. government used the Olympics to sportswash the terrorist attacks and to reassert technological and security dominance […]. The hegemonic narrative also created a glide path for the U.S. invasion of Iraq" (Boykoff, 2022).

Conversely, Canada's conduct during the 2010 Winter Games has been criticised for promoting the event as beneficial for Indigenous people (some referred to it as a case of "redwashing" (Thomas-Müller, 2017)) – tokenising them to portray the country as a multicultural and obscuring the ongoing disputes on Indigenous rights (Kaste, 2010). The promised new jobs for the Indigenous people never materialised as in 2006–2007 the percentage of Indigenous people involved in the Organising Committee amounted to a mere 1.2%, a data that did not go over the 3% of the period 2007–2009 (Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, 2010). Moreover, the purported Indigenous-friendly Games have been accused of having been hosted on unceded Coast Salish land – reigniting concerns about dispossession (Boykoff, 2022).

These instrumentalisations of sports were first defined as sportswashing in 2015 by Rebecca Vincent in a press release for Sport for Rights (Boykoff, 2022). Sportswashing consists of the instrumental use of an athletic event or sport-related actions (such as purchases of clubs or sponsorships) by states (both authoritarian and democratic) – targeted both at an international and domestic audience. Its goal is to increase legitimacy and promote a positive, democratic, mindful-of-minorities, human-rights-caring image – while simultaneously diverting attention from chronic controversial behaviour such as human, women's, workers' or Indigenous people rights violations (Amnesty International Italia, 2021b; Boykoff, 2022; Frommer, n.d.).

35.   SUGARWASHING

SMILE: (☹)

Definition

Sugarwashing refers to an accusation of a strategic corporate sponsorship tactic wherein a company engages in deceptively altruistic practices by associating itself with a reputable charity to enhance its image for financial profit or political advantage either by misleadingly suggesting to consumers that by purchasing the company's products they would be doing good, or by financing their operations through conspicuous donations.

Sugarwashing Cases

In 2008, the Canadian section of the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) signed a partnership with the candymaker Cadbury Adams Canada Inc, whereby Cadbury pledged to donate half a million dollars to UNICEF to construct 25 schools in Malawi and Rwanda. As part of this collaboration, Cadbury gained the right to a "promotional space on 4 million packets of treats" (*Lancet*, 2010). In other words: "Cadbury is allowed to put the widely recognised UNICEF logo on packaging for its products" (Collier, 2010) – allegedly to raise donations and awareness for the charity's schools program in Africa (*Lancet*, 2010).

Despite its noble intentions, the partnership backfired, particularly due to Cadbury's production of high-calorie foods targeted at children, a factor seemingly at odds with UNICEF's cause of promoting proper nutrition for children in developing countries (Collier, 2010). Critics argued that UNICEF's sponsorship funding strategy appeared to disregard the nutritional implications of its partner's products (Thomas, 2011). As such, UNICEF's willingness to secure

the money needed to finance its project was obtained by selling its world-wide-recognised reputation; an act which, according to Thomas (2011), is even backed up by the same statements of the charity which, on its website, claims:

> We invite you to involve your organisation in a rewarding partnership and unique business opportunity. Enhance your brand. Support UNICEF Canada through a corporate initiative. We are the leader in our field, with a history spanning more than six decades and a reach extending to more than 150 countries and territories around the world. Our long experience and worldwide presence have made us experts in navigating global markets. We have built direct relationships with governments, businesses and community leaders in every jurisdiction where UNICEF is present. No other aid organisation engenders greater trust. None has greater impact. Make us part of your business strategy. (Thomas, 2011)

The Cadbury–UNICEF case is emblematic of what New York University Professor Marion Nestle termed "sugarwashing" (Collier, 2010). This concept refers to a company's deceptively altruistic corporate sponsorship leveraging a reputable charity's image to create a positive "halo effect" (Collier, 2010) and thereby enhance financial profits or achieve political gains. This may involve misleadingly suggesting to consumers that, by purchasing the company's products, they would be doing good or financing operations through conspicuous donations (Collier, 2010; Thomas, 2011).

Additional instances of sugarwashing comprise Cadbury's association with the American Diabetes Association (Collier, 2010) – whose logo appeared on their SnackWell's Sugar-Free Lemon Creme cookies (Santora, 2006) – aimed at allying Cadbury with "a respected voice for healthful eating" (Santora, 2006). Another example from 2010, involves Save the Children's five million dollar donation received from the PepsiCo Foundation (Thomas, 2011), allegedly leading to the discontinuation of the charity's campaign to tax soft drinks to fight childhood obesity. Both Save the Children and PepsiCo denied any link between the donation and the change in Save the Children's stance on soda taxes (Neuman, 2010).

36.   VEGANWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

Veganwashing is related to marketing practices aimed at increasing non-vegan products. It may also be used with a political connotation and consists of the promotion of vegan products to divert attention from social issues.

Definition

Veganwashing amounts to the accusation of an ethical-compliance façade that misleadingly portrays, with the mere goal of increasing all products' sales, a company's commitments, actions, and products as aligned with vegan tenets while they are not or there is no substantive or transformative action to contrast the business's core anti-vegan activities.

Veganwashing and the Growing Vegan Market

Although veganism is mostly known for its dietary prescriptions of complete abstention from animal products, it is defined as a lifestyle (Haenfler et al., 2012), ethical way of life (McAlpin, 2019), choice of consumption (Wrenn, 2011), philosophical current (Zamir, 2004), and even as a religion (Johnson, 2015) that "refuses any use (for food, clothing, entertainment or anything else) of non-human animals" (Bertuzzi, 2022) and promotes animal rights (Cherry, 2006). Such a philosophy is on the rise, with more people trying vegan products or switching their dietary choices (Michalski, 2021), and the market has responded to such a request by expanding the space given to vegan options. Parallel to this market rise (Creswell, 2021), the first cases of veganwashing were observed. Through various communication channels and strategies (e.g., identifications on packages (Oramus, 2021)), veganwashing aims to misleadingly portray a company's commitments, mergers and acquisitions, product lines, or products as aligned with vegan tenets (Vieira et al., 2021) while they are not. The ethical-compliance façade has the mere goal of increasing all products' sales (Michalski, 2021); as such, it is not backed by any substantive or transformative action to contrast the business's core activities that continue the "traditional practices of animal, human and environmental exploitation" (Vieira et al., 2021). Examples of veganwashing comprise the marketing practice of developing plant-based vegan alternatives by leading producers of non-vegan products (e.g., meat processors) to secure a share of the growing vegan market and ameliorate the corporate image by portraying the company as caring for animal rights and vegan tenets – without significantly decreasing their contribution to animal suffering (Hendricks, 2018; Michalski, 2021).

37.   WARWASHING AND WARHUSHING (ALSO KNOWN AS OR SIMILAR TO: UKRAINE-WASHING, WESTWASHING)

SMILE: (☹)

Capitalising on war has distant origins; nevertheless, the term warwashing has only recently entered the lexicon. This practice is accompanied by the co-optation of the discourse, with a particular focus on the West, and the fear of being accused of warwashing. In this context, akin to the concept of green-washing, we suggest naming this phenomenon "warhushing". Let us present them in order.

Main Definition

Warwashing is the accusation of the exploitation of a conflict and leveraging its visibility to obtain financial and/or political benefits – oftentimes through unsubstantiated, performative promises and statements.

Definitions of Related Concepts

- Warwashing might turn into Westwashing whenever the public discourse around a war scenario is co-opted and refocused on what its consequences could be for the West.
- Warhushing is the refrainment from acting in fear of being accused of warwashing.

Warwashing

In the wake of Russia's invasion, European politicians started to show their support for Ukraine and its Prime Minister, Volodymyr Zelens'kyj, through official visits and public statements. Companies demonstrated solidarity by suspending their operations in Russia (Marketing Weekly Reporters, 2022), adding ribbons to their logos with the blue and yellow colours of the Ukrainian flag, or naming colours after the virtues expressed by the Ukrainians, such as Pantone's renaming of its blue "Freedom blue" and its yellow "Energising yellow" in support of Ukrainians (Gambirasio, 2022). Some even removed mascots from their corporate image (Hsu, 2022). Others have gone as far as renaming cocktails such as the Moscow Mule with Kyiv Mules and White Russians with White Ukrainians – in a strategy like the notorious renaming of French fries as "Freedom Fries" after France's refused endorsement of the U.S.

invasion of Iraq (Hannum, 2022). Others ordered the ban of Russian vodka (Glenza, 2022) – even when it was not distilled in Russia (Adams, 2022) – pushing liquor makers such as Smirnoff to put on their website a reminder of the American origin of their products (Hannum, 2022).

Despite the allegedly noble intention, some of these have been accused of being cases of *warwashing*. The term warwashing has been recently coined by Beat Schmidt (2022) in an article for *tippinpoint*, but its origins may be traced back to World War I (Doran & McCarthy, 2014). It refers to the practice of exploiting a conflict (in this case, the Ukrainian war – hence, the use by some of the expression "Ukraine-washing" (Gherasim, 2022)) and piggyback-ing on its visibility to obtain financial and/or political benefit (Gherasim, 2022; Schmidt, 2022) – oftentimes through unsubstantiated, performative promises and statements (Orenlevko, 2023).

According to Gherasim (2022), Boris Johnson's or Emmanuel Macron's vis-its to Kyiv are other examples of such a practice. Following Churchill's advice of never letting a good crisis go to waste, Johnson allegedly used the trip to the Ukrainian capital to divert attention from the purported violations of COVID-19 restrictions. The "savoury tactic" of "camouflag[ing] […] domestic problems and sagging fortunes" (Gherasim, 2022) behind official visits has also been used by Emmanuel Macron, who also visited the country during the election run-up and was photographed wearing a hoodie and unshaved in solidarity with Ukraine's PM – in hope to "be more popular with voters" (Gherasim, 2022). Nevertheless, the European politician that exploited such a practice the most is, according to Gherasim (2022), Poland's President Andrzej Duda: in fact, he was capable of overturning the EU's reproach – generated by Warsaw's controversial politics on abortion and LGBT – by offering help to the Ukrainian refugees (Gherasim, 2022).

Warwashing and Westwashing

Tightly linked to this first understanding of warwashing is the notion of Westwashing. This accusation consists of the co-optation of the public dis-course around war and the atrocities carried out in it, shifting the focus from the war front to the West. As such, the Ukrainian war is read through the lens of the West and what it could mean for it, for example, "the prospect of a 'new Cold War' and how it will impact the future of the European Union" (Tyler, 2022).

Warhushing

Another concept related to warwashing is what we propose, based on the lit-erature on greenwashing, to be called "warhushing". Akin to greenhushing,

warhushing defines the behaviour of firms and other entities of not referring to or nor taking a stance on a widely public ongoing war because of fear of being accused of warwashing (Marchenko & Roeraade, 2022). To avoid such an accusation and not incur in warhushing, Marchenko and Roeraade (2022) have identified five actions that minimise such risks. First, they propose to "create space": creating space for dialogue or news does not entail a connection (most notably a financial one) – but can help share and spread awareness over the conflict. Second, "acts, not ads". This point consists in acting – without advertising what one is doing in favour of one side of the conflict. This links to their third point, "be specific rather than generic", that is, practical help rather than void statements or general actions. Their fourth and fifth elements are Ukraine-specific and consist of "show[ing] and celebrat[ing] Ukrainian traditions and culture" and "read[ing] the news about Ukraine".

38.   WHITEWASHING

In its original meaning, whitewashing is defined as the "attempt to stop people finding out the true facts about a situation" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024) – typically "something bad, such as a dishonest, immoral, or illegal act" (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.). Nevertheless, other understandings of this practice have developed: the first one refers to the act of casting a white actor to play a non-white role, while the second one – more relegated to the academic discussions around race, ethnicity, and representation – refers to privileging of whiteness and the ideas correlated to it at the detriment of minorities.

Main Definitions

• Whitewashing describes the accusation of the practice of casting a white actor in roles intended for non-white characters – thus, oftentimes, requiring the use of prosthetics, wigs, makeup, and skin-darkening techniques that might lead to caricatured portrayals. It is typically done to cater to public expectations, maximise profits, or comply with industry norms and might exacerbate racism, cause minority underrepresentation or ethnic misrepresentation, and engender an unfairness of opportunities.
• Whitewashing consists of holding the dominant ideals, values, and norms associated with whiteness in a privileged status, leading to the marginalisation of minorities and the perception of White superiority.

Whitewashing in the Film Industry

In 1972, the actor David Carradine was cast to play the main character of *Kung Fu* (a TV series about the adventures of a Shaolin monk) instead of Bruce

Lee – despite having little martial arts training compared to the latter, who is known for its kung fu skills (Lowrey, 2016). Allegedly, one producer would have defended the casting of Carradine by asserting that: "If we put a yellow man up on the tube, the audience will turn the switch off in less than five minutes" (Lowrey, 2016). Such a false depiction has been called whitewashing, that is, the practice of casting a white actor in roles intended for non-white characters. This practice often leads to caricatured portrayals, relying on prosthetics, wigs, makeup, and skin-darkening techniques. It is typically done to cater to public expectations, maximise profits, or comply with industry norms and might exacerbate racism, cause minority underrepresentation or ethnic misrepresentation, and engender an unfairness of opportunities (Brook, 2015; Lowrey, 2016).

Whitewashing has been carried out through the infamous practice of "blackface", that is, the racist practice of painting an actor's face black or yellow to mimic the skin tone of a different race. For instance, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), a film directed by D. W. Griffith that narrates the forming of the Ku Klux Klan, featured white actors in blackface "to portray blacks as subhuman savages" (Lowrey, 2016) – with even actor Walter Long listed in the final credits as "renegade Negro" (Simons, 2022). Although such casting choices might be perceived as single acts of racism, their implications go beyond this, as pointed out by Mark Calney (1993), who identified the film as one of "the main catalysts for the revival of the Ku Klux Klan" and of its "recruiting tool[s]" (Lowrey, 2016). Similarly, Laurence Olivier's portrayal in blackface of the Moor of Venice (Simons, 2022) in a British version of *Othello* in 1965 stirred controversy and led Bosley Crowther to write, in a piece for *The New York Times*, "[Olivier] plays Othello in blackface! That's right, blackface – not the dark-brown stain that even the most daring white actors do not nowadays wish to go beyond" (Crowther, 1966).

Painting an actor's face is not something that has been done only to falsely portray white actors as black: the same process has also been carried out with Asians in what is known as "yellowface", with Latinos in what is known as "brownface", and Indigenous people through "redface" (Zhang, 2017). One of the most cited examples of yellowface is the drama about Chinese farmers, *The Good Earth* (1937). In this famous motion picture set in China, "the majority of the roles were filled with actors in yellowface" (Lowrey, 2016). Its leading role was assigned to Luise Rainer instead of Anna May Wong – because casting the latter would have breached the Hays Code (a set of guidelines of the film industry which forbade miscegenation, namely the romantic or sexual mixing of people of different races (Lowrey, 2016). Such a practice has been defined as an act of "erasure that asserts that the physical presence of whiteness is more worthy, desirable, and sympathetic than Asian/American" (Oh, 2021).

Whitewashing is, nevertheless, not only about painting someone's skin black or yellowish but can also entail adding some prosthetics, as was the case in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), where Mickey Rooney played a Japanese businessman by wearing "fake buck teeth and coke bottle glasses" (Brook, 2015), in *Charlie Chan Carries On* (1931) with Warner Oland having, before the takes, a "few drinks to make his speech more halting and to put a grin on his face – like a perpetually congenial Chinese sleuth" (Scherker, 2014), or Angelina Jolie in *A Mighty Heart* (2008), where she depicts Mariane Pearl, a dark-skinned woman with curly hair through the help of skin darkeners and a wig (Scherker, 2014).

Although such infamous practices are not used anymore, whitewashing remains an issue for the film industry as the *Washington Post*'s article by Meredith Simons, "98 times a white actor played someone who wasn't white", and the recent outcry for the lack of diversity among Oscars' nominees pointed out (Izadi, 2020). In fact, recent films, such as *Dragonball: Evolution* (2009), *30 Days of Night* (2007), and *Prince of Persia* (2010), continue to be accused of whitewashing their casting (Lowrey, 2016), and so did actors such as Richard Gere, Russell Crowe, and Christian Bale for playing biblical heroes, which historically were not "dashing white men with well-trimmed beards" (Simons, 2022), Johnny Depp for interpreting a Native American in *The Lone Ranger* (2013), Emma Stone for playing a woman with Hawaiian and Chinese heritage (Brook, 2015) in *Aloha* (2015), or Scarlett Johansson for playing a Japanese cyborg in *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) (Oh, 2021).

Scholars have identified several causes of whitewashing (Zhang, 2017): Ginneken (2007) emphasised the fact that most American filmmakers are from Anglophone settler states, the U.K., and four other European countries – this, according to the scholar, would have some "limitations in their cosmopolitan worldviews" (Zhang, 2017); while Denzin (2002) recognised the systematic character of racism in cinematic representations and the difficulty in eradicating it. On the other hand, others have fingered Eurocentrism as one of the main forces of this practice and the reason why many Americans who grew up in a Eurocentric framework go to the movies to have their Eurocentrism belief reinforced – the reason why "[i]f a film contradicts Americans' predispositions, it would not be successful in box office" (Zhang, 2017).

Having established possible triggers of the phenomenon, we can now move on to analyse how accusations of whitewashing are dealt with. Four main responses are observable. The first one consists of stating that in the casting process, the actor's skin colour had not been considered but only who was best for the part. Such a line of argument, which has been put forward by, for example, M. Night Shyalaman, the director of *The Last Airbender* (2010), has been labelled as "colourblind" (Lowrey, 2016). Although, at first sight, such an approach might be a fair explanation, it has been contradicted by the casting

call for the film that read "Caucasian or any other ethnicity" – a wording that, allegedly, "biases the casting process in favour of white actors" (Lowrey, 2016). A second response amounts to defending dubious casting choices by pointing out the non-historical character of some films, which, therefore, did not demand full accuracy in the choosing of a non-white actor to play certain roles (Lowrey, 2016) – as did Jake Gyllenhaal while addressing the accusation of whitewashing for his interpretation in *Prince of Persia* despite being of Swedish and Jewish heritage (Brook, 2015). The third common response by studios is "simply to tough it out and limit the spread of the stain by denial" (Rose, 2017) – a strategy that oftentimes shifts the burden of the response to actors who find themselves in awkward positions. This was the case for Scarlett Johansson, who had to justify her role in *Ghost in the Shell* and defended herself from accusations of whitewashing by claiming that the character was "essentially identity-less" and that "[she] would never attempt to play a person of a different race, obviously" (Rose, 2017)). Lastly, a final excuse to respond to such accusations might consist of claiming that starring famous white actors instead of less-known non-white ones is necessary for "mak[ing] a project commercially viable" (Rose, 2017); yet, as underlined by Steve Rose in an article for *The Guardian*, few of the films accused of whitewashing have been a financial success at the box office (Rose, 2017).

Finally, it is important to point out that whitewashing does not only cover racial issues and representational issues, but also a fairness of opportunities problem. To explain: Guy Aoki, co-founder of the Media Action Network for Asian Americans, pointed out how, oftentimes, roles of non-white characters are assigned to famous white actors and actresses. He highlighted the case of *Aloha*, a film directed by Cameron Crowe that featured Emma Stone in the role of a woman with Hawaiian and Chinese heritage, and how its casting was unfair: "[a]s opposed to just hiring an actor who was part Hawaiian and Asian, [Crowe] gave the role to a woman who has her pick of roles, Emma Stone can play whatever role she wants, she's not hurting for parts" (Brook, 2015). As such, actors from minorities lose the possibility of playing roles that represent their origins because of the casting of some white movie star and are thus deprived "from the narrative it portrays" (Smith, 2021). Because of this some have argued that whitewashing might even be considered as a form of colonisation of "the imagination, taking from people of colour to benefit White racial hegemony" (Oh, 2021).

Whitewashing in Academic Debates

A second understanding of whitewashing, more confined to the academic debate around race, ethnicity, and representation, defines whitewashing as "part of a larger process in which hegemonic ideals, values, and norms of

whiteness are privileged, resulting in the subsequent oppression of minorities and perceived White superiority" (Ferguson & Dougherty, 2022). Such a practice is used to explain different patterns, such as the lack of diversity within the archival narrative of Britain, which "contribut[es] to racist stereotypes, educational attainment gaps, perpetuation of social inequalities, and unbalanced policy-making" (Chilcott et al., 2021), or the fact that people, when trying to portray themselves in a positive manner (such as "trustworthy or competent" (La Macchia et al., 2016)), tend to whitewash their contacts, meaning that they present more White contacts.

39.   WOKEWASHING

SMILE: (☺)

Although the practice of wokewashing has deep roots, research around this practice is quite recent. In the last five years however, literature about wokewashing is expanding, with articles published in the *European Marketing Journal*, the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, and the *Journal of Business Research* (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2024; Sobande, 2019; Vredenburg et al., 2020).

It is important to note that some of the subjects covered by wokewashing are also the object of other types of *washing, such as socialwashing, blackwashing, rainbowwashing, or purplewashing.

Definition

Wokewashing describes the accusation of a marketing strategy involving the co-optation of idealism, social activism, or social justice issues by using progressive imagery, language, and values as an image lip service for increasing sales, which contrast with the company's internal track records or are not backed by any meaningful, substantive, transformative action.

Wokewashing Cases

In 2019, to mark the gay Pride parade, Marks and Spencer (M&S) released the "LGBT" sandwich, a new version of the classic BLT wrapped in a rainbow packaging. The acronym represented the sandwich's ingredients: lettuce, guacamole, bacon, and tomatoes, aligning with the celebration of diversity (Duffin, 2019; Young, 2019). The campaign aimed at raising funds for the AKT (formerly the Albert Kennedy Trust), a charity supporting homeless young LGBTQ people (Jones, 2019), and the BeLong to Youth Services, an organisation aiding LGBT+ young people in Ireland (Young, 2019). M&S

claimed to have donated £10,000 to the former and £1,000 to the latter (Young, 2019). Nevertheless, despite the allegedly noble intentions, such a campaign has been accused of "wokewashing" as M&S's pro-LGBTQ stance and focus on homelessness did not match the internal conduct, with employees allegedly not being paid a "real living wage" (Jones, 2019).

M&S is not the only company accused of such a practice. Burger King's "Real Meal" campaign, which purportedly tried to bring awareness to mental health issues, drew heavy criticism when it was highlighted that the fast-food giant failed to provide professional psychological support for its employees, nor were their wages adequate for them seeking support on their initiative (Ghenghini, 2023). Nike was criticised for its Kaepernick ad and then the Dream Crazier ad that featured Serena Williams, with critics pointing out that the equal pay demands presented in the campaigns were more of a marketing strategy than a commitment backed by substantive actions. This was evident when Nike-sponsored runner Alysia Montaño criticised the running brand for not granting her paid maternity leave (Jones, 2019). Pepsi encountered severe backlash for its ad featuring Kendall Jenner, accused of co-opting the protest movement against U.S. police brutality for marketing its soft drink (Pitcher, 2021). Audi was slammed for its 2017 Super Bowl ad, where the carmaker committed to "equal pay for equal work" – only to be called out soon after for not having any women on its executive board (Gontcharova, 2017). This led to comments highlighting the necessity of hiring women before championing equal pay (Mahdawi, 2018).

The criticism against such companies is that of wokewashing, a term that gained traction in 2020 after an online lecture by the writer Aja Barber (Pitcher, 2021) – but whose origins can be traced back to Romanticism, according to the historian Audrey Millet (Anguelova, 2023). The term "woke" and the notion of "wokeness", although they vary, mean, among others, awareness of social issues and injustices (Caputo, 2021) and include "acts of resistance and solidarity in response to systemic racism, capitalism and structural oppression" (Sobande, 2019). As such, the accusation of wokewashing consists of the marketing strategy involving a co-optation by "profit-driven companies" (Jones, 2019) of idealism, social activism, and social justice issues. *In concreto*, wokewashing companies use progressive language and imagery as an image lip service for increasing sales without backing any of the claims with meaningful, substantive, transformative action; moreover, the public statements are often not matched by internal track records (Dowell & Jackson, 2020; Ghenghini, 2023; Spry et al., 2021).

NOTES

1. Italics added.
2. Italics added.
3. Italics added.

4. The washing machine and counting: outlook

THE LATEST: GREENWASHING TRUTHERS, GREENLASH, AND GREENHUSHING AS PART OF THE ONGOING POLARISATION IN SOCIETY

This book's final chapter outlines some of the latest trends primarily sourced from general media, given that there is no research literature yet. The two trends we explore in this chapter – greenwashing truthers and greenhushing – are indicative of the broader societal polarisation, where the ends of the spectrum drift apart and are characterised by a certain incommensurability.

As previously highlighted, both the early stages of the environmental movement and the evolution of greenwashing, along with its perception, have undergone profound transformations. Over the years, a certain professionalisation has become visible when comparing campaigns from recent years with advertisements from the 1980s and 1990s. The bluntness of green advertisements has been replaced by subtler, more nuanced, and more sophisticated communication strategies. An illustration of this refinement is evident in word choices like "natural", which lacks protection and may mean anything. To capture this fluid concept, organisations have proposed diverse criteria, some of which still remain difficult to verify, for spotting greenwashing. The complexity of such identification is further compounded, as articulated in the definition of greenwashing, by the fact that the misleadingness of communication is insufficient: a greenwashing accusation must also be formulated, even potentially for strategic reasons, by competitors.

In recent years, the polarisation between (uncritical) boosterism of green businesses and (over-)criticism has further increased. The former, paired with naivety or a selective focus, has led to embracing sustainability messages and falling into the greenwashing promise – or trap: a practice established in green PR for many years now, if not decades. On the other hand, the overcritical stance that sees greenwashing or misleading communication in all corporate activities and engagements is a recent phenomenon. Such behaviour has been termed "greenwashing truther". According to Baur (2022), "greenwashing truthers suspect lies and deception behind all sustainability promises made

by companies. What companies call green, they call greenwashing. In other words, they accuse companies of faking sustainability to increase sales with a green cloak" (translation from German into English by authors). From Baur's definition emerges a crucial point: the greenwashing truther tends to rely more on perception ("suspects"), heightening the subjective (in the eye of the beholder) nature of greenwashing and contrasting the call for terminological clarity in definitions, criteria, and theoretical foundations in greenwashing accusations. This behaviour of "attacking companies no matter how good or bad their actions or intentions" (Visram, 2023) – while still a rare exception – represents the radicalisation of consumers' and other stakeholders' scepticism, spurred by the long-standing tradition of (legal) embellishment tricks and greenwashing.

On the other side, whether prompted by greenwashing accusations, general accusations (as in the case of greenwashing truthers (Baur, 2022)), or "false greenwashing" (Seele & Gatti, 2017), companies have adopted the strategy of under-communicating their green engagement or even refraining from communication altogether (Ginder et al., 2021). This trend, known as "greenhushing", is relatively recent but plays a crucial role in understanding the current state of greenwashing within the ongoing societal polarisation. It was identified in 2017, while the first scholarly work is from 2018 (Font & McCabe, 2018). As per the greenwashing phenomenon, the hospitality industry has been a frontrunner and trendsetter. Font and McCabe (2018) found that, in the U.K., small rural tourism businesses communicate only 30% of their sustainability actions to enable "customers' hedonistic use of the landscape, while downplaying complex issues and normalising sustainability to reduce customer guilt" (Font & McCabe, 2018).

The findings by Font and McCabe (2018) align with more recent marketing research revealing that when emotionally adverse states are presented, such as "anxiety, shame, guilt, regret, distress, reduced enjoyment, frustration, discomfort, stress, and embarrassment […] that are responsible for unintended negative side-effects resulting from product and service sustainability" (Acuti et al., 2022), "sustainability backfires". Another study identifies "green perceived risk" as drivers for greenhushing, such as: "functional risk, financial risk, hedonic risk, and self-image risk" (Sharma et al., 2023). Additionally, they list "perceived consumer scepticism, fear of greenwashing, pure altruism, and environmental certification in the greenhushing practice" (Sharma et al., 2023).

Therefore, greenhushing is not only about the fear of greenwashing accusations from NGOs, consumer advocate groups, concerned citizens, or other stakeholders but also, according to the backfiring concept, about losing consumers or consumers' willingness to consume. As such, the backfiring concept is about marketing, not about sustainability, since overconsumption within

given planetary boundaries is the key issue. To counter this trend, Acuti et al. (2022) recommend "simple corporate sustainable communication that does not require consumers to dedicate substantial cognitive resources", suggesting that consumers should not engage in extensive thought about sustainability, as it may reduce their consumer confidence. Conceptually, the authors – in a brilliant way – term this phenomenon the "sustainability liability trap", suggesting that for businesses sending sustainability messages and fearing this trap, greenhushing becomes a logical consequence.

Although sustainability and CSR have been used for years to attract consumers or even to benefit from a higher willingness to pay for ethical products with fewer harmful side effects for the planet and people, sustainability has become a factor to be omitted and un-sustainability, in even more blunt cases, to be promoted. Such is the case for non-sustainable products labelled "non-bio", like Henkel's Persil detergent, which Acuti et al. (2022) use as an illustration for non-enzyme detergents that may have adverse health effects for some consumers. This shift signals a new chapter in greenhushing: the anti-ESG (Keter, n.d.) and the greenlash movements.

As the legislation making greenwashing and the use of misleading terminology a legal issue advances (in the EU), some are trying to render any activity against profit only against the law. This anti-ESG movement advocates against environmentally and socially conscious investing principles, arguing that such principles prioritise issues beyond a business's financial and employee interests, which they claim should be against the law (Keter, n.d.). This movement is led by influential figures in the U.S., such as Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, and Bill Ackman – known for their adherence to libertarianism and their efforts to institutionalise anti-ESG principles (Petrucci & Subramanian, n.d.).

If the legislative level is the arena for negotiating green issues, the polarisation becomes evident as some legislators promote more mandatory CSR and sustainability legislation while others aim to render sustainability unlawful. In this polarised scenario, greenhushing emerges as one of the strategies companies use to navigate the escalating polarisation. Barbosa De Andrade Aragao et al. (2024) shed light on the greenlash through the example of how Brazilian politics is promoting deforestation. While Brazil certainly is a drastic example, the global emergence of the greenlash phenomenon coincides with overwhelming crises, aggressive wars, and accelerating climate change data. The motivations behind the greenlash may be traced to political and/or tribal polarisation, weariness, fatigue, or ignorance during times when democracies and open societies are in retreat.

Some actors have identified greenlash as a danger to democracy and society at large due to its harm to the world, the planetary boundaries, and the social dimension of sustainability (namely human rights, anti-corruption, or

responsible technology) and because of its antagonistic discourse that produces and exacerbates a starker polarisation.

Cornago (2023) has identified two principles to "minimise" the greenlash in the European Union: affordable decarbonisation strategies and a highlighting of the social benefits of decarbonisation (Cornago, 2023). Using the Italian political landscape as an example, Cornago refers to the greenlash as "the political and societal backlash against 'green' policies" (Cornago, 2023). Despite potential biases from defending green policies of the Centre for European Reform (a think tank), the argument proposed is that "an ambitious green agenda is essential for Europeans' welfare and the competitiveness of European firms" (Cornago, 2023). This stance is, however, debatable, as other major global economies joining the greenlash might turn ambitious green policies into factors negatively affecting competitiveness, particularly when combined with greenhushing by companies or the hesitancy of consumers when confronted with green messages (Acuti et al., 2022).

The greenlash now has also entered the fake news and disinformation realm. An article reveals how right-wing parties have instrumentalised greenlash "using the cost of living crisis to roll back green policies" (Euronews Green, 2023).

In conclusion, the recent trends in the evolution of greenwashing, such as greenwashing truthers, greenhushing, and the overall greenlash, have broadened the scope of greenwashing. It has transitioned from being mere corporate strategic communication, marketing, advertisement, and PR to the political governance level – an arena where everything, even the whys and hows of green communications, may be instrumentalised and weaponised.

CHANGE OF SCOPE AND MEDIA: FROM CORPORATE COMMUNICATION TO POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ("EU TAXONOMY") AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In this outlook chapter, we analyse the evolving landscape of greenwashing and other *washing phenomena in recent times. Our primary focus is on the notable shift in scope, extending beyond the corporate domain to encompass the political one, as exemplified by phenomena like greenwashing and machinewashing. In addition, we focus on the introduction of social media and its impacts, which have not only opened the debate from traditional media gatekeepers to all members of civil society but also enabled and facilitated disinformation and hate speech.

To frame this shift, it is essential to go back to the foundational phase of greenwashing. As described in the Introduction, the roots of greenwashing trace back to the 1980s and the hospitality industry with its request to customers to re-use towels to save the environment. Later, in the 1990s, NGOs like

Greenpeace played a crucial role in defining greenwashing as corporate green-washing by publishing on greenwashing and its criteria.

We argue that the scope of greenwashing has changed since then, particularly in recent years. We hold that greenwashing does not apply exclusively to the corporate world anymore but has now entered the political arena and permeated political communication. In other words, greenwashing as misleading green communication is no longer only a communication strategy of private business organisations, but the same tactics are being used by political actors from the public sphere to make phenomena appear greener and (more) sustainability-friendly, despite evidence to the contrary.

The most famous example in this context is the so-called taxonomy of the European Union, which categorises both gas (which is a fossil fuel) and nuclear energy (carbon-free but with an unsolved nuclear waste problem spanning over more than 10,000 years) as green energy. This categorisation has been called out as the "biggest greenwash ever" by EU observers (Sanchéz Nicolás, 2022). Notably, environmental NGOs like Greenpeace have taken legal action against the EU to underscore the contentiousness of this classification (Greenpeace, 2023). The EU's taxonomy, according to the official statement:

> is a cornerstone of the EU's sustainable finance framework and an important market transparency tool. It helps direct investments to the economic activities most needed for the transition, in line with the European Green Deal objectives. The taxonomy is a classification system that defines criteria for economic activities that are aligned with a net zero trajectory by 2050 and the broader environmental goals other than climate. (European Commission, 2024)

So what makes it the "biggest greenwashing ever," and why is it crucial as a bridgehead from the private to the governmental sphere? As highlighted in the above-mentioned definition, the taxonomy serves as criteria to define what is in line with the so-called European Green Deal. In monetary terms, the taxonomy decides *what* and *who* is eligible to receive funds from the European Green Deal. In simpler words, assets, entities, and organisations working in the energy sector with gas or nuclear power are eligible to access the more than 1 trillion Euros designated for "sustainable investments" over the next decade – the EU's priority for the period 2019–2024 (European Commission, 2023).

The EU taxonomy is currently the most visible and drastic example of *governmental* greenwashing. It programmatically symbolises the transition and broadening of the scope of greenwashing from corporate communication to public communication. The taxonomy is also an example of governments engaging in tackling green issues. However, engaging in tackling does not necessarily entail tackling; hence the analogy from the business world: to walk the talk and talk the walk.

What started in the 1980s with the Green Party in some countries, and what has been a subculture – both in politics and civil society – has become mainstream, with green parties as part of governments and green parties scoring high in elections. Green has become mainstream, mirroring the trend in the business world. In addition, established parties now also "talk" green or mandate new legislation aiming to tackle climate change – or, at least, be perceived as tackling climate change. As big money is involved in new, green, and clean technology, and existing technologies and industries (like oil, coal, or fossil fuels in general) are challenged, the debates are not only heated but also professionalised. In this context, with professionalisation, it is meant that professional lobbying and public affairs are involved – ever since they have discovered green issues to be high on the agenda. Such a phenomenon is also visible in the EU taxonomy, which – following a report from Greenpeace (2023) – has been identified to have been subject to strong lobbying from Russian energy companies like Gazprom, Lukoil, and Rosat.

This change of scope from corporate to political communication can not only be found in environmental issues, but is increasingly evident with technology-related issues like AI. The term "machinewashing", following the literature, incorporates the corporate political activity dimension in its definition.

> Machinewashing is defined as a strategy that organisations adopt to engage in misleading behaviour (communication and/or action) about ethical Artificial Intelligence (AI) / algorithmic systems. Machinewashing involves misleading information about ethical AI communicated or omitted via words, visuals, or the underlying algorithm of AI itself. Furthermore, and going beyond greenwashing, machinewashing may be used for symbolic actions such as (covert) lobbying and prevention of stricter regulation. (Seele, 2022; Seele & Schultz, 2022)

The common denominator between environmental (greenwashing) and digital technology issues (machinewashing) is the large-scale transformation of existing businesses and business models, up to entire industries. Both greenwashing and machinewashing are responses to the two most prevalent and urgent communications on disruptive transformations. When established business models are at stake and entirely new industries emerge, big money is involved. Through lobbying and public affairs, big money aims to steer the discussion on these issues, particularly as regulation is the "hard" currency of transformation.

This dynamic is observable in industries like oil, where the transformation is impacting both the automotive sector (which is shifting from combustion engines to electric ones) and heating systems (where gas and oil heating are being increasingly substituted in favour of photovoltaic and heat pumps). The processes of lobbying and public affairs are not always public and transparent; as such, covert lobbying is part of both definitions. With regard to

greenwashing, we may find it in Greenpeace's "political spin" criterion, while in the case of machinewashing, it comes to regulation and expert ethics boards (Conti & Seele, 2023; Metzinger, 2019). Those who prevent new legislation secure multi-billion contracts for the old industries, while those who shape them create multi-billion contracts for new industries – thus leading the new paradigm of disruption.

Hence, *washing communication is not only relevant for companies seeking to create a more favourable image among consumers, but it is also crucial for legislators as they use it to engage with constituents and voters regarding the uncertainty of disruptive transformations.

The second major change in scope in this outlook chapter revolves around the introduction of social media, misleading communication, and *washing accusations. Conceived to democratise public opinion, social media turned out to be a platform-based technology that enables hate speech and systematic disinformation – two phenomena that, in a polarised world, have close ties to greenwashing as a well-established technique of misleading information.

Academic research underlines the crucial role of social media in shaping the discourse around greenwashing. Blazkova et al. (2023) have found that greenwashing debates on Twitter (now "X") are "dominated by a relatively narrow network of stakeholders". In addition, the interplay between "accusers, accused, accomplices, and allies" has gained momentum and importance (Blazkova et al., 2023) – a finding that aligns with the accusation-based definition of greenwashing from Seele and Gatti (2017). As such, the introduction of social media has substantially changed the greenwashing debate. It has lowered the threshold for accusations (now literally everyone – including fake profiles), and the dynamics of straw fires and issue management have increased the communicative effect of greenwashing accusations. Hence, although social media have democratised media contributions, they have also enabled the dissemination of accusations, falsifications, and instrumental misinformation, which have enabled more green- and other *washings.

However, amidst the backdrop of today's societal polarisation into camps and tribes, greenwashing seems to be a minor challenge compared to looming threats of war, biodiversity loss, and massive climate change that go beyond the scope of corporate communication – and, more recently, also political communication.

CHANGE OF LEGAL STATUS: FROM VOLUNTARY TO MANDATORY CSR AND GREEN COMMUNICATION

Increasingly, the greenwashing discourse has not only moved into the political debate but also into the legislative one. The absence of legislation governing green communication and the variations in regulations across countries have

created an uncertain regulatory landscape for companies involved in green marketing, leading to an incentive to greenwash. This is why several scholars and political and civil society actors are advocating for the need to redefine the legal framework for green marketing and, more broadly, for CSR, questioning the voluntary nature of both concepts. Given the extraordinary importance of the transition towards a regulatory-based CSR currently underway, the following chapter summarises the current academic debate around the topic, as discussed in the *Journal of Business Ethics* article "Are We Moving Beyond Voluntary CSR?" (Gatti, Vishwanath et al., 2019). This discussion highlights a paradigmatic shift where mandatory elements are being assimilated into a redefined understanding of CSR.

In 2008, Dahlsrud (2008) conducted a content analysis of CSR definitions presented in the literature. The study allowed for the identification of key aspects of CSR, such as the concern for the environmental or social impact of business operations, and the adoption of a stakeholder perspective. The characteristics observed in multiple definitions were subsequently categorised as essential elements describing the nature of the concept. Among the different aspects, Dahlsrud identified the voluntary nature of CSR as a fundamental element of the concept. Prior to 2008, most scholars agreed that CSR meant "going beyond obeying the law" (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001).

In 2015, Dentchev et al. (2015) published an article entitled "On Voluntarism and the Role of Governments in CSR", corroborating this finding. They highlighted how voluntarism remained the predominant view in the CSR literature, asserting that many academics still understood CSR as practices beyond legal obligations and that the role of governments in the CSR debate should be minimised.

In 2019, Gatti et al. (2019) argued that one of the main contributions to the establishment of the perception of the voluntariness of CSR comes from Carroll's foundational work of 1979, published in the *Academy of Management Review* (AMR). The well-known AMR article distinguishes between legal and ethical/discretionary responsibilities, suggesting that CSR goes beyond compliance with regulations.

However, as national governments began to enact CSR laws and regulations (e.g., Indonesia – 2007, Denmark – 2008, France – 2010, Philippines and Spain – 2011, Argentina and Brazil – 2012, India and Norway – 2013), new questions and perspectives have entered the voluntary vs. mandatory nature of the CSR debate.

Proponents of the mandatory approach underscore several positive outcomes resulting from government intervention. Mandatory CSR may increase awareness of social and environmental issues among society, thus elevating CSR to a proper policy priority (Cominetti & Seele, 2016). Additionally, the transition from a voluntary to a mandatory system could facilitate establishing regulated

and comparable CSR and sustainability indicators (Gatti, Vishwanath et al., 2019). This offers benefits to customers and other stakeholders, providing them with comparable and trustworthy metrics to evaluate products and companies. The issue related to the dubious transparency and credibility of voluntary CSR seems, therefore, to be overcome (Gatti, Vishwanath et al., 2019).

Despite these advantages, several management scholars have criticised the mandatory perspective, contending that it encourages a reactive rather than proactive approach (Matten & Moon, 2008). This reactive stance, according to some authors, may lead to reduced corporate engagement in terms of creativity and investment, potentially leading to less effective CSR programs (Reid & Toffel, 2009).

Up until 2010, the debate was polarised, and the contradictions between the two perspectives were emphasised. However, in the last 15 years, new definitions have been introduced and some scholars have claimed the need for a paradigm shift that combines both voluntary and mandatory aspects in the conceptualisation of CSR.

In this context, the evolution of the European Union's discussion of CSR exemplifies the attempt to blur the line between voluntary and mandatory CSR. In 2001, the European Commission presented its well-known Green Paper "Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility" where CSR was defined as "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (COM, 2001). This definition remained one of the most cited in the literature for years (Gatti, Vishwanath et al., 2019). In line with the voluntary perspective, for almost ten years, the EU emphasised the voluntary and strategic approach to CSR. However, a shift occurred in 2011. The Commission started re-evaluating CSR, introducing some mandatory aspects. In its Renewed EU Strategy for CSR (EU, 2011), the Commission highlighted the role of public authorities in supporting CSR "through a smart mix of voluntary policy measures and, where necessary, complementary regulation". The EU definition of CSR has been simplified to "the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society".

In the academic field, following the institutional and neo-institutional frameworks, Sheehy (2015) has conceptualised CSR as a form of regulation incorporating public and private norms seeking to mitigate social harms and promote public good (Gatti et al., 2019). Sheehy's conceptualisation positions CSR as a form of regulation that does not negate the voluntary dimension; instead, it broadens the scope of regulation beyond a collection of mandatory rules imposed by public authorities to encompass self-regulation, private regulation, and public regulation, reflecting a comprehensive view of the regulatory landscape.

This new understanding of CSR has several implications at the green marketing and greenwashing level. First and foremost, a new role of political authorities in shaping green practices and green communication has been established. In the contemporary landscape, political actors and governments can not only punish deceptive green communication under advertising and corporate communication laws, but also affect when and how companies communicate their green initiatives. This trend towards heightened governmental involvement in green communication is on the rise.

An illustrative example is the EU regulations that, since 2014, mandate large and publicly listed companies to regularly disclose reports detailing the social and environmental risks they face, along with the impacts of their operations on both people and the environment. However, a significant development occurred in January 2023 with the implementation of the new Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). The newly enacted directive updates and fortifies the regulations concerning the social and environmental information that companies must disclose. The new green reporting rules will apply to reports published in 2025 and related to the 2024 financial year. Companies falling under the purview of the CSRD will have to conform to the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) formulated by the European Financial Reporting Advisory Group (EFRAG), an independent entity that collaborates with different stakeholders. The ESRS comply with EU policies while contributing to international standardisation initiatives.

The provided example clarifies the new regulations and standards with which corporate green communication must comply. The rules of the game are changing. Green communication is increasingly becoming a legal issue, dealing with accounting and law, and not just management and marketing.

However, in this changing environment, a contradiction emerges: the expanded regulatory framework is intended to protect society from greenwashers, yet greenwashing appears to be as pervasive as ever, and the practices associated with it are increasingly sophisticated. Why does this paradox persist?

The answer to this question is complex. It would entail addressing the fundamental issue of the necessity of laws and, especially, whether humans are essentially good or bad (if we were perfectly good, the law might not be necessary). In economic terms, scholars in strategy and management studies have posed for decades the questions: "Is the self-interest rational conception the only principle guiding managers' decisions?" and "Should we take other human motivations into account?" The different answers provided in the literature have affected management theories and approaches (from agency theory to the humanistic management perspective), and they all relate to how human nature is perceived. Therefore, our assumptions about human nature (which often remain unconscious) not only influence the explanation we give to

investigated phenomena, as in this case greenwashing, but they may also affect our theories and practices, as suggested by Ghoshal (2005) in his *Academy of Management Learning & Education* paper "Bad Management Theories are Destroying Good Management Practices".

We suggest that ethics and philosophy must not be excluded from business and management debates, given their importance in shaping human nature assumptions. This is why, in this book, we originally approached the topic of greenwashing by combining a business and a philosophical perspective to enrich the comprehension of the phenomenon and unravel its roots.

REMEDIES: HOW TO PREVENT GREENWASHING

In the following subchapters, we explore various suggestions for managers, policymakers, and NGOs to diminish the occurrence and intensity of greenwashing.

As already mentioned, the most direct approach to reducing greenwashing involves implementing more rigorous and enforced regulations. Nevertheless, while establishing government regulatory schemes seems to have a positive inhibitory effect on greenwashing practices, regulations alone cannot eradicate the "temptation of greenwashing", that is, the tendency of managers to look at greenwashing as a profit-making strategy.

A complementary avenue to mitigate greenwashing and, more in general, fraudulent, green-related behaviours involves engaging companies in deliberative democracy, which means, in simple terms, collaborating with civil society in an ongoing process of observing and participating in public discourses.

However, a necessary condition to make deliberative democracy effective is the good intent or predisposition of managers towards it. A crucial aspect affecting this predisposition that may change the managers' attitude towards greenwashing involves placing ethics at the forefront of business studies. This entails a fundamental reconsideration of the company's purpose, where profit is viewed as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Regulations and Laws

According to Delmas and Burbano (2011), the regulatory context is an external, non-market driver of greenwashing that may favour or discourage greenwashing practices. The absence of legislation, variations in regulations among countries, and the limited punitive measures for greenwashing contribute to an uncertain regulatory environment. As discussed in the previous chapter, the issue is garnering attention in Switzerland. Lawmakers are urging the Swiss Federal Council to establish a legal framework, which currently does not exist. Like many other countries, Switzerland lacks a legal framework for

green advertising and communication. Lawmakers emphasise the urgent need for guidelines and norms to prevent corporate abuses. They argue that, without regulations, consumer trust in environmentally friendly products may erode, challenging the progress of the ecological transition. In line with this view, several scholars suggest that a strict greenwashing regulatory framework must be established to prevent greenwashing practices.

France is going in this direction. French regulators have already pursued legal action against companies making deceptive environmental claims, resulting in million-dollar lawsuits. Now, France has taken an additional initiative to strengthen legislation aimed at preventing greenwashing: the 2023 French Climate and Resilience Law. Articles 4, 10, and 11 of the law categorise greenwashing as "une pratique commerciale trompeuse" (viz., a misleading commercial practice), which is "interdite et sanctionnée" (viz., unlawful and sanctioned). The law aims to bolster the legal framework against greenwashing, introducing innovative provisions into the French Environment Code. For example, the law forbids the promotion of fossil fuels. Moreover, any statements regarding carbon neutrality or similar affirmations must be supported by the company's evaluation of the carbon footprint across the entire life cycle of the advertised products. The specific criteria for conducting such evaluations took effect on 1 January 2023. The corporate assessments must be easily and readily available to the public, together with information outlining the measures adopted to diminish or compensate for greenhouse gas emissions. The penalty for greenwashing can amount to 80% of the promotional campaign's cost. The imposition of the penalty must be publicly disclosed, with the risk of incurring serious reputational damages (Bernoville, 2023).

The United States authorities respond to greenwashing through various regulatory bodies, including the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), state-specific regulators, and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). The FTC introduced the Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims (Green Guides) in 1992 to help businesses avoid misleading environmental claims and to detect fraudulent communications. The Green Guides were revised in 1996, 1998, and 2012, with a current revision underway. Moreover, given the increased investor interest in climate and ESG-related disclosures, in March 2021, the SEC launched the Climate and ESG Task Force to identify ESG disclosure-related misconduct.

In the United Kingdom, the fight against greenwashing is addressed through a comprehensive strategy involving general consumer protection laws, prohibitions on misleading marketing, and a system of self-regulation. The Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) oversees the legislative framework. In addition to general laws applying to all companies, legal authorities have developed sector- or product-specific laws, such as the energy-labelling regulation for energy-related products, which ensure that consumers receive

clear and consistent information about energy usage. Complementary to these legal measures, self-regulatory codes, monitored by the CMA and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), play a pivotal role. Advertisers found in violation of self-regulatory standards may be subject to legal prosecution. The U.K. approach is, therefore, designed to combat greenwashing by integrating legal measures and self-regulation.

As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the European Commission addresses greenwashing through two proposals: the "Proposal for a Directive on empowering consumers for the green transition and annex" (called the Green Transition Proposal) and the "Proposal for a Directive on substantiation and communication of explicit environmental claims" (called the Green Claims Directive).

The Green Transition Proposal, introduced in March 2022, aims to modify the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (UCPD) in conjunction with the Consumer Rights Directive, focusing on tightening restrictions on environmental claims. The proposal adds additional categories and examples to the list of misleading commercial practices. The proposed additions cover diverse aspects, including:

- Presenting an environmental assertion about future environmental performance, lacking clear, objective, and verifiable commitments and targets, coupled with an independent monitoring system.
- Exhibiting a sustainability label without a foundation in a certification scheme or not established by a government body.
- Promoting green advantages or characteristics deemed ordinary in the relevant market.
- Issuing an environmental declaration about the entire product when, in reality, it pertains only to a specific aspect of the product.
- Issuing a broad or vague environmental statement without the company being able to give substantiated proof relevant to the claim.

It is interesting to note that this categorisation of misleading practices is in line with some forms of greenwashing discussed in the literature, particularly the seven sins of greenwashing. What is remarkable is that these forms of greenwashing are becoming a legal matter. As CSR is becoming mandatory, greenwashing is entering the legal sphere.

The Green Claims Directive, presented in March 2023, is another relevant proposal from the European Commission to combat greenwashing within the EU. It places a responsibility on companies operating in the EU to provide credible and verifiable evidence for any voluntary, explicit environmental claims or labels they use, such as terms like "green", "ecological", "eco-friendly",

or "carbon neutral". The directive designates one or more authorities in each Member State to supervise the enforcement of specific requirements. To ensure compliance, the directive suggests imposing sanctions, including fines, on those not respecting the rules. In some cases, these fines could even reach up to 4% of the business's total annual revenue.

EU Member States also implement regulations specific to their jurisdictions. In Germany, for instance, the Act against Unfair Competition is in place to prohibit false or deceptive green statements. NGOs or competitors have the option to file claims in civil court.

The Netherlands has established five fundamental principles to regulate corporate green communications:

- Transparently stating the sustainability advantage offered by the product.
- Supporting sustainability claims with factual evidence that also confirms their actuality.
- Ensuring fairness in comparison with other products, services, or companies.
- Providing honest and detailed information about the company's sustainability efforts.
- Ensuring that visuals and labels serve consumers' understanding without causing confusion.

In Australia, the Law Council of Australia, representing the legal profession at the national level, has recently (18 August 2023) executed a document entitled "Greenwashing" (Law Council of Australia, 2023). The report explores the existing legal framework and enforcement initiatives relevant to greenwashing in Australia. It also considers international advancements and other nations' initiatives in greenwashing-related legislation. The objective of the Law Council is to advise the Australian government and federal agencies on ways in which the laws can be improved.

In the context of marketing, the Law Council 2023 report recognises the role of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) in the identification of the following types of greenwashing:

- Ambiguous and unqualified claims, exemplified by terms like "sustainable", "responsible", or "green".
- Statements lacking supporting information.
- Utilisation of absolute claims.
- Implementation of comparisons that may mislead consumers by hindering accurate assessments of product merits.
- Exaggeration of benefits or omission of relevant information.

- Set of aspirational claims without adequate details on goal achievement, particularly concerning packaging reduction, renewable energy use, waste reduction, and supply-chain traceability.
- Incorporation of third-party certifications in ways that could potentially mislead consumers.
- Utilisation of images resembling trust marks, which results in not being associated with a certification scheme.

The enforcement activity undertaken by the ACCC has resulted in different sanctions, which encompass injunctions, customer communication, corrective advertising, compliance programmes, and the payment of fines. For example, in 2018, the ACCC brought a greenwashing proceeding against Pental for deceptive claims on the packaging and website of its White King Power Clean Flushable Toilet Wipes. The Court confirmed Pental's violations and imposed restraining orders preventing Pental from making similar declarations for a six-year period. Additionally, Pental was mandated to implement a compliance program and pay $700,000.

As the discussed cases suggest, two main objectives exist beyond greenwashing-related legal initiatives. On the one hand, they aim to increase transparency and accountability of corporate communication to discourage greenwashing. Requiring the disclosure of environmental practices and subjecting such information to legal rules or third-party auditing would enhance accountability and transparency of green corporate communication. Therefore, the existence of disclosure guidelines and norms may discourage greenwashing, as consumers, investors, and NGOs would be able to compare a firm's communications with trustworthy information regarding the firm's actual environmental or social practices. On the other hand, legal provisions aim to sanction greenwashing practices when companies commit them. The role of sanctions is primarily to make those who have committed greenwashing pay, partially compensating the victims of fraudulent conduct or society at large. However, they are also crucial in their deterrent function. Research suggests that the government's punishment mechanism effectively deters greenwashing practices by creating an excellent inhibitory effect (Sun & Zhang, 2019).

While scholars usually agree that strengthening greenwashing regulation is beneficial for society because it discourages companies from engaging in greenwashing, some academics doubt the positive effect of regulating greenwashing. In this regard, Lee et al. (2018) examine how market dynamics and competitiveness influence firms' incentives to implement green practices when greenwashing is permitted or restricted. Their research suggests that regulating greenwashing may have both positive and negative consequences. While regulations may discourage false claims, they do not necessarily guarantee an

increase in genuine environmentally friendly products. On the contrary, sometimes, in non-regulated competitive contexts, greenwashing can produce more eco-friendly products. According to the authors, regulating greenwashing may not always be the most effective approach to incentivise green standards in a given market. Instead, the government could incentivise companies to adopt green practices by lowering the associated costs through subsidies or partnerships. The point is to create a cost advantage for green companies instead of focusing on establishing disadvantages and penalties for greenwashers.

Engaging with Civil Society and Deliberative Democracy

Drawing on Habermas' theoretical foundation of deliberative democracy and discourse ethics (Habermas, 2007), Scherer and Palazzo advocate for corporations to engage stakeholders in ethical discourse and decision processes (Scherer et al., 2013; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). Habermas' conception of discourse ethics contends that the universal legitimacy of a moral standard can only be claimed through communicative action. In this process, a diverse group of individuals, all of whom are impacted, endeavour to rationally motivate one another through speech acts (Goodman & Arenas, 2015). In establishing communicative action, Habermas outlines principles for discourse that define the ideal speech situation. Goodman and Arenas (2015) provide a concise overview of some of the basic rules of communicative action, which are briefly discussed below:

- *Argumentation and open discourse*: Habermas' discourse ethics emphasise the transformation of preferences through argumentation rather than mere aggregation. Essential to achieving intersubjective understanding is the requirement that all participants express their arguments and interests with the freedom to introduce any assertion into the discourse. This ensures that arguments remain free from distortion by others, fostering an environment where participants are open to criticism.
- *Plural participation*: In an ideal speech situation, pluralism is essential in testing the validity of a moral standard. All those affected with the competence to speak are allowed to participate in the discussion.
- *Non-coercion*: Discourse ethics is based on the idea that no one should face internal or external coercion hindering the exercise of the speaker's rights, which include participation, expressing interests and needs, and questioning assertions. The result of communicative action should be a rationally motivated agreement based on the strength of arguments rather than on power-related influences.

- *Transparency*: Particularly interesting in the context of greenwashing is the principle of transparency. Transparency requires truthful arguments aligned with the normative context. Transparency also involves no intention to mislead. In relation to transparency, Habermas expresses four validity claims of communicative action: truth; sincerity; understandability; and appropriateness.

While the legal approach to CSR previously discussed may ensure compliance, deliberative democracy places a stronger emphasis on transparency and accountability in CSR communication, fostering dialogue between businesses and civil society. This perspective, known as the political approach to CSR, recognises the role of corporations as political entities with responsibilities beyond profit generation. This form of political corporate involvement in communicative processes must not be confused with corporate political activities associated with lobbying.

The political CSR framework clarifies the importance of deliberative democracy in reducing greenwashing in light of the analysis of the literature on corporate legitimacy. We revise the main arguments here. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Academic accounts of greenwashing), academic research on legitimacy and CSR suggests that corporate green communication acts as a means to attain pragmatic legitimacy, irrespective of the presence of greenwashing. In fact, even deliberative misleading green communication can significantly shape stakeholders' perceptions, improve corporate reputation, and ultimately increase corporate legitimacy. The beneficial impact of greenwashing on corporate legitimacy is challenged only when an accusation of greenwashing arises. As a result, undiscovered greenwashing is often perceived by managers as a way to gain legitimacy.

Scherer et al. (2013) further analyse the process of attaining legitimacy through CSR. They suggest that companies can follow three different strategies to obtain legitimacy: the isomorphic adaptation strategy, the strategic manipulation strategy (to which greenwashing belongs), and the moral reasoning strategy.

According to isomorphic adaptation, companies adjust their practices to align with both formally legalised norms, as well as societal expectations that are implicitly accepted within the system. As previously claimed, improving the legislative system regulating green communication creates new standards to which companies must conform to obtain legitimacy. Moreover, public and private actors may create or change stakeholders' expectations concerning green marketing, for instance, through promoting sustainable and ethical consumption, through Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), or through establishing and recognising ESG indicators in financial investments.

The strategic manipulation strategy involves corporations actively influencing, or even manipulating, the perception of key stakeholders or policymakers to attain legitimacy. This approach recognises the ability of companies to shape stakeholders' perceptions through advertising campaigns, the dissemination of misleading communication (e.g., greenwashing), and other strategic public relations and impression management tactics. While in isomorphic adaptation, the company adapts to external expectations, in the strategic manipulation case, companies engage in manipulating stakeholders' impressions.

At a societal level, a problem arises when the manipulated perceptions created by companies establish new societal expectations to which people are expected to conform. The new expectations are based on perceptions that do not correspond to reality. An example may help to clarify the issue. Artificial (fake) Christmas trees have become increasingly popular today in Europe. One of the main reasons behind this trend, as claimed by customers purchasing artificial Christmas trees, is that they are more sustainable and do not affect deforestation like real trees do. However, temperate forests are not currently affected by deforestation. On the contrary, in temperate climate regions like North America and Europe (where most Christmas trees are cultivated and sold), forests are expanding. In Europe, for example, the forest area increased from 1990 to 2020 by about 10% (14 million hectares), equal to the total land area of Hungary and Slovakia combined (Mauser, 2022). Contrary to customers' perceptions, the shift from natural to artificial Christmas trees has no impact on the problem of deforestation around the world, which mainly affecting tropical areas. In addition, the Nature Conservancy, an environmental organisation operating in 79 countries and across every state in the U.S., has analysed the environmental impact of real versus fake Christmas trees, concluding that real Christmas trees are better for the environment, even when they are thrown away after their "consumption" (Real vs. Fake—Which Christmas Tree Is Better for the Environment?, n.d.). Their analysis discusses the environmental drawbacks of artificial trees, noting that approximately 10 million fake trees are purchased in the U.S. each season, with nearly 90% of them being imported from China. The distribution process contributes to increased carbon emissions and resource consumption. Furthermore, most artificial trees are non-recyclable, ending up in local landfills. The Nature Conservancy study also discusses the environmental advantages of real trees. It explains that real trees require fewer carbon emissions during production and transportation compared to artificial ones. It also challenges the notion of avoiding cutting down trees altogether, asserting that sustainable forest management is crucial. Well-maintained forests, including those used for Christmas tree production, can store carbon effectively, contributing to the fight against climate change. In essence, the study highlights the positive impact of choosing a real Christmas tree, which may support local tree farmers and sustain healthy forests.

However, one can argue that buying an artificial tree is sustainable in the long run because "a fake tree lasts forever" (another argument claimed by customers who believe they contribute to the fight against climate change through this choice). Again, this perception seems too simplistic. The artificial Christmas tree market is expanding, with a constant positive sales trend over the last two decades. Therefore, to conclude, we may suppose that customers' expectations in the Christmas tree market, currently affecting companies' choices and behaviours, have been influenced by unrealistic perceptions created by artificial tree producers to increase their market shares.

The third approach, moral reasoning, is grounded in a deliberative democracy process. The company commits itself to an open dialogue with critical stakeholders or social actors, advocating for the acceptability of its current state and conduct. Both sides carefully evaluate their respective positions to find a shared resolution that prioritises societal well-being over self-serving motives or narrow interests. Moral reasoning entails a mutual learning process, fostering adaptive adjustments to the initial positions. The objective is to achieve consensus (or at least an informed compromise) and ultimately establish congruence between organisational practices and societal expectations (Scherer et al., 2013). The outcome is moral legitimacy.

While the manipulative strategy proposes that a company can shape how key stakeholders perceive the role of the company in society (to attain pragmatic legitimacy), the adaptive approach assumes that an organisation is subject to the influence of surrounding institutional pressures and routines to which it must conform to attain cognitive legitimacy. Differently, the moral reasoning strategy aims at obtaining moral legitimacy, that is, legitimacy based on a consensus coming from an ongoing dialogue and collaboration with multiple actors (Scherer et al., 2013).

An interesting attempt to apply the political CSR approach based on the Habermasian deliberative democracy to CSR communication comes from the work of Schultz and Seele (2019). The authors focus on CSR or sustainability reporting. The starting point of their analysis is the observation that adopting CSR or sustainability reporting does not always result in public trust and confidence in business performance. This deficiency in reliability, which threatens corporate legitimacy, is labelled as a "credibility gap". According to the literature, credibility gaps emerge when sustainability reports are used as one-way communication tools that merely provide unilateral information instead of fostering stakeholder interaction or engagement (Seele & Lock, 2015).

In the context of deliberative democracy, sustainability reporting based on discourse ethics may overcome the credibility gap of one-way communication-based reports. In this framework, a company's moral legitimacy is built on credibility achieved through discourse ethics aligned with the basic principles of communicative action (argumentation/open discourse, participation,

non-coercion, and transparency) and the four specific validity claims previously mentioned (truth, sincerity, understandability, and appropriateness). In practical terms, sustainability reporting based on political CSR involves various platforms such as weblogs, wikis, and in particular social media, as well as stakeholder roundtables, and formal and informal dialogues with NGOs, employees, consumers, and advocacy groups. To enhance reporting credibility and, consequently, legitimacy, scholars in the field (Lock & Seele, 2016) recommend that companies emphasise the comprehensive, truthful, sincere, and stakeholder-specific aspects of their CSR reports.

Schultz and Seele (2019) also discuss the limitations of Habermas' deliberative democracy, claiming that ethical discourse is an idealised philosophy based on normative reasoning. Consequently, political CSR is also characterised by a normative and aspirational nature. Political CSR involves public dialogue and participatory processes grounded in democratic mechanisms. Democratic stakeholder engagement assumes that corporations are entities with a political mandate. Therefore, political CSR suggests that, especially when national governments falter in their regulatory duties, corporations assume governmental tasks. However, corporate political engagement is questioned by a legitimacy deficit due to the absence of a democratic foundation. Current corporate governance models feature leadership selection rather than democratic election, resulting in corporations lacking an operational political licence. Using the well-known words of Milton Friedman from his *New York Times Magazine* article back in 1970, when engaging in CSR (and we can add today in Brand Activism – considered by Sarkar and Kotler (2020) the new frontier of sustainability marketing),

> the corporate executive becomes in effect a public employee, a civil servant, even though he remains in name an employee of a private enterprise. On grounds of political principles, it is intolerable that such civil servants – insofar as their actions in the name of social responsibility are real and not just window-dressing – should be selected as they are now. If they are to be civil servants, then they must be elected through a political process. (Friedman, 2007)

Interestingly, Friedman seems to legitimise CSR only when it is mere window-dressing, that is, greenwashing.

In addition to the aforementioned legitimacy deficit of political CSR, the limitations of Habermasian-based theories lie in the transformation of ideal principles into practical activities that can uphold normative demands in day-to-day business settings. Implementing these ideas in real-world scenarios is challenging and demands substantial effort. Democratic stakeholder engagement based on multi-stakeholder meetings must be translated into an understandable and feasible business routine. Practical limitations still need to be overcome (Schultz & Seele, 2019). In this regard, an interesting application

of deliberative democracy in a business context is related to the idea of digital democracy (Helbing & Pournaras, 2015). Helbing and Pournaras (2015) suggest that the open sharing of corporate data, combined with the potential of big data analysis, could lead to digital democracy and moral legitimacy. In particular, data-sharing practices can contribute to enriching societal discussions and support governmental analysis.

Putting Ethics at the Core of Business and Management Studies

Ethics in management and business studies

The discussion on deliberative democracy and discourse ethics leads us to understand the importance of including ethics in today's management practices and theories. Ethics and morality have been excluded from economic and management studies for too long, perhaps in an attempt by business scholars to make management a science, as suggested by von Hayek (1989) in his Nobel Memorial Lecture "The Pretence of Knowledge". Von Hayek suggests that "the pretence of knowledge", related to the danger of scientific pretensions in the analysis of social phenomena, has contributed to the establishment of economic and management theories based on applying scientific methods and mathematical models to management issues. He argues that these applications "are often the most unscientific, and, beyond this, in these fields, there are definite limits to what we can expect science to achieve" (von Hayek, 1989). Management is a *social* science focusing on understanding human behaviour in organisational settings to guide and improve decision-making, strategy development, and business operations. In the field of management, exploring mental phenomena such as human intentions, intuitions, ethics, and morality is crucial for a wide array of relevant topics. However, given the complexity of including mental states in theories and models, unrealistic assumptions have been created to measure and understand business and market contexts. This exclusion is both a prerequisite for and a consequence of the notion that business studies are a deterministic science. Therefore, mainstream management theories tend to overlook ethics and morality, considering them subjective mental constructs. This omission has led to the neglect of ethical considerations in the formulation of management theories. Consequently, current management studies are predominantly based on causal or functional explanations and models which require several assumptions to be validated (e.g., overlooking unselfish human intentions in decision-making processes).

The Nobel laureate Milton Friedman (1953) argues in his book *Essays in Positive Economics* that we should not be overly concerned if our theoretical assumptions do not align perfectly with reality. According to Friedman, it should not be a problem if our management theories are developed starting from unrealistic expectations. Like other traditional economic scholars, he

argues that the true test of a theory lies in its ability to predict outcomes effectively. These theories hold value because they can both explain and forecast, regardless of whether the assumptions might be illogical when viewed through the lens of everyday reasoning and common sense.

In his posthumously published article "Bad Management Theories are Destroying Good Management Practices", Ghoshal (2005) discusses an interesting example of how the pretense of science can negatively affect management theories and the corresponding managerial practices they influence. He questions Friedman's well-known principle that a manager's job is to maximise shareholder value. Shareholders do not possess the enterprise in the way they might own personal property. Their stake grants them merely a claim for future profits, not to the firm's tangible assets, which are legally attributed to the corporation as its own entity. This crucial distinction between shareholding and actual asset ownership sets public companies apart from private business forms. The company's intrinsic value arises from the synergistic and combined contributions of various parties (named stakeholders): for example, employees offer their human capital while investors provide the financial capital. Thus, even though common sense suggests the opposite, mainstream management theories consistently advocate for the interests of shareholders over other stakeholders, such as, in this example, employees. These theories consider shareholders as "principals" similar to owners, and managers as "agents" with self-interest motives: a simplification that serves to apply simple mathematical solutions to the intricate issues of corporate governance and management. Probably, as Ghoshal (2005) suggests, this bias towards shareholders is so diffuse and persists because it simplifies the complexity of economic dynamics. However, the mainstream classical perspective requires further assumptions such as a perfectly efficient labour market, which in practice are unattainable, suggesting that shareholders endure greater risk, thereby entitling them to prioritise returns. On the contrary, as empirical evidence suggests, employees often assume more substantial risks and contribute more significantly through their expertise than the exchangeable investment of shareholders. Grossman and Hart's (1986) work on contract incompleteness reveals that control should reside with those whose investments are most crucial for value creation. The recognition of the unrealistic nature of Friedman's assumptions puts into question the justification for the shareholders' value maximisation doctrine still predominant today.

Nobel Prize winner Oliver Hart, in his article with Zingales (2017), "Companies Should Maximise Shareholder Welfare Not Market Value", has also challenged Friedman's position as over-simplistic and reductive of the ethical dimension. Let's consider his arguments. In his influential 1970 article, Friedman proposes that the objectives of corporations should be separated from those of individuals and governments, with companies focusing

exclusively on profit-making and leaving ethical concerns to others. Hart and Zingales' (2017) paper challenges this view, arguing that Friedman's perspective is valid only under specific conditions: either when a company's profit-driven activities do not cause harm or when governments effectively regulate to mitigate such harm. However, as previously mentioned, these assumptions are not typically met in real circumstances. The paper also questions Friedman's view that all externalities should be left to government intervention, claiming that political processes are often inefficient or insufficient to address environmental and social issues, which today require collaboration among actors from both the public and private sectors. In addition, while agreeing with the idea that prioritising shareholder welfare is crucial for public companies, the article argues that associating shareholder welfare solely with market value is too restrictive. Shareholders, who are often regular individuals, have not only financial interests but also ethical and social concerns, which Friedman briefly mentions but does not fully explore. These shareholders often make personal choices reflecting their ethical beliefs, such as buying eco-friendly products or supporting fair trade.

The authors argue that if individuals and private company owners consider social factors and internalise externalities in their personal choices, they would likely expect the companies they invest in to do the same. For instance, a consumer willing to spend extra to reduce pollution would also want their investment in a company to reflect similar values. However, Friedman's assumption of separability between ethical and profit-making activities suggests that if shareholders have social concerns, they could decide individually if they want to give their money to sustain the cause of a charity, but only after they have collected their dividends. It is not a corporate responsibility to address social concerns in the first place. A company, rather than giving money to charity, should simply give that money to shareholders who later are free to use their own money as they want. This idea is questioned by instances where the separation between pro-social and profit-making activities is not feasible, or it is unreasonable because it is inefficient. Consider the case of Walmart selling high-capacity magazines of the sort used in mass killings. If shareholders are concerned about mass killings, changing corporate practices by banning the sale of guns in Walmart supermarkets in the first place might be more effective than relying on shareholders to use their profits on gun control initiatives.

In an interview conducted by *Business Insider* in 2018 (Hart, 2018), Oliver Hart discusses another example demonstrating the inefficiency of separating corporate strategic choices from pro-social concerns. He considers the scenario of a corporation contaminating a lake to increase profits. Such an action could not be illegal due to soft regulations. According to Friedman's logic, the company should pursue profit, even if it means polluting the lake, and then distribute dividends to shareholders who can, if they choose, undertake the

lake's clean-up. However, this approach overlooks the fact that remediation efforts post-pollution can be significantly more expensive than avoiding pollution in the first place. Given that such situations are likely, it is crucial to recognise that shareholders often have pro-social inclinations. In their personal lives, these individuals are not solely driven by financial gains; therefore, it stands to reason that they would desire the companies in which they invest to reflect these broader values rather than focusing exclusively on profit maximisation. As such, according to Hart, the notion of corporations existing solely to generate profit and the belief that company executives, such as CEOs, have a fiduciary duty to their shareholders to prioritise profit above all is flawed and potentially detrimental. In line with their fiduciary duty, true loyalty to shareholders would involve company managers actively engaging with shareholders to understand their preferences (through letting shareholders vote on corporate policy issues, as suggested by Hart; or through deliberative democracy, according to discourse ethics literature). This would be more aligned with the concept of loyalty than the assumption that maximising profit – irrespective of other considerations – is the sole objective.

In the last decades, management scholars have proposed new concepts and theories integrating ethics into management studies to address the limits of the profit maximisation logic. Without the pretence of being exhaustive, we briefly discuss below three theoretical frameworks which have largely contributed to placing ethics at the core of management: CSR; Stakeholder Theory; and Humanistic Management.

As we now understand the concept, the idea of CSR began to be expressed in the 1930s. In the mid-1920s, when the idea of a business "obligation to provide 'service' beyond profits" (Frederick, 1994) was advocated, the debate mainly concerned a growing, but not yet clear, belief that business and society were linked together (Frederick, 1994). Although during the 1930s and 1940s the discussion about CSR suffered ups and downs and was largely moved to the background by the more urgent worries of World War II, references to concern for CSR did appear in this period, including, for example, Barnard's 1938 book *The Functions of the Executive* (Barnard, 1971), Clark's 1939 *Social Control of Business* (Clark, 1969), and Kreps' 1940 "Measurement of the Social Performance of Business" (Kreps, 1940).

In the 1950s, the idea that businesses have an obligation to society resurfaced with new vigour, which has not subsequently weakened. Thus, the 1950s, and in particular Bowen's 1953 book *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* (Bowen, 2013), represent the beginning of the modern era of CSR literature (Carroll, 1999; Frederick, 1994). In his book, Bowen, considered the "Father of Corporate Social Responsibility" (Carroll, 1999), defines the social responsibilities of executives as "the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are

desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (Bowen, 2013). At that time, the discussion centred on the responsibilities and obligations to society of businessmen and executives. For this reason, the 1950s writing on CSR usually addressed the concept as a social responsibility (SR) rather than CSR.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the literature on CSR grew significantly, despite, as previously mentioned, some authors opposing the idea of a business obligation to society other than profit maximisation (e.g., Friedman, 2007), and others doubting the efficacy of corporations in translating this obligation into business practices (Chamberlain, 1973; Galbraith, 1967). The 1970s were also characterised by a conceptual shift that allowed for the diffusion of an operational definition of CSR. Before the 1970s, the concept was framed within a philosophical debate on the moral reasons for CSR, and the discussion focused primarily on finding, or criticising (e.g., Friedman, 2007) the moral principles justifying a business obligation to society. In the 1970s, the emergence of a new approach to the business and society relationship moved the debate from a philosophical discussion to a pragmatic understanding of CSR effects on business operations. Business research on CSR started to focus on the effects of CSR on a firm's competitive advantage (Jones, 1995), and the establishment of a link between CSR and financial performance initiated the "business case for CSR" (Pomering & Dolnicar, 2009).

Based on the instrumental approach to CSR established in the 1970s, the 1980s and 1990s literature was mainly characterised by an increased attempt to measure and conduct research on CSR. Moreover, in this period, new issues and themes entered the debate, such as, among others, an increasing concern for environmental-related issues and today's well-known Stakeholder Theory (which will be discussed later on) (Carroll, 1999).

Nowadays, although most CSR research maintains an instrumental focus, the phenomenon of globalisation, the consequent movement of businesses towards transnational corporations, the fact that companies have been accused of being key causes of climate change and environmental and social disasters, and, last but not least, the growing diffusion of greenwashing, have revived questions about the role of corporations in society. In this context, as previously discussed, new stakeholders (e.g., NGOs and civil society organisations) and national and international legislatures are creating new expectations regarding corporate behaviour and altering how economic, environmental, and social impacts should be balanced in decision-making (Dahlsrud, 2008). The political (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007) and integrative approach (Garriga & Melé, 2004) to CSR have emerged as new frameworks. Moreover, new concepts and notions, such as the ideas of the circular economy and sustainable development, have entered the scene, expanding the borders of CSR literature and opening space for interdisciplinary research. While the concept of

sustainable development has already been defined in previous chapters, we report here a definition of the circular economy. The European Parliament defines it as a system of production and consumption that emphasises the practices of sharing, reusing, repairing, and recycling materials and products to maximise their usage. This approach seeks to extend the life cycle of products as much as possible (Circular Economy, 2023). In practical terms, when products reach their life's end, their materials are recycled and retained within the economic cycle wherever feasible. This recycling process allows these materials to be reused repeatedly, thus generating additional value and minimising waste. The circular economy concept contrasts with the traditional linear economic model, which follows a pattern of acquiring, producing, consuming, and then throwing away. The linear approach assumes the unlimited availability of inexpensive raw materials and energy. Associated with a linear model of economy is the strategy of planned obsolescence, which involves the intentional design of products with a predetermined expiration to encourage consumers to buy new products or to acquire component replacements more frequently. Unlimited access and availability of resources are now called into question by those advocating for the need to take the resource threshold into account. The European Parliament is one of them. Since 2020, it has explicitly supported the circular economy approach through its circular economy action plan, which is constantly updated and revised (Circular Economy, 2023), and the Green Deal project.

Freeman's Stakeholder Theory, introduced in 1984 in his award-winning book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (Freeman, 2011), represents a fundamental change in management theory and practice. Freeman's contribution proposes a framework that expands the manager's role beyond an exclusive obligation towards shareholders to include the interests of all stakeholders. The concept of stakeholders originated in a 1963 internal memorandum at the Stanford Research Institute, where it was described as referring to "those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist" (cited in Freeman, 2011). Today, most management scholars use Freeman's canonical definition: stakeholders are "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives" (Freeman, 2011). They include internal and external stakeholders, such as employees, suppliers, customers, local communities, and even competitors, together with corporate shareholders. This paradigm shift challenged the traditional shareholder primacy approach, which argued that the sole responsibility of managers was to increase profits within the bounds of the law in order to benefit shareholders. Freeman's view, on the contrary, argues that an organisation's success depends on the management's ability to create value for all stakeholders, not just shareholders. Freeman's approach advocates for a more inclusive view of the business environment, suggesting that sustainable long-term value

creation is only achieved when the interests of all stakeholders are considered and balanced. This requires engaging with different stakeholders, understanding their expectations and needs, and integrating their interests into the company's strategic decision-making processes. Therefore, Stakeholder Theory provides a framework for identifying and resolving conflicts between groups of different stakeholders, promoting negotiation and compromise as opposed to adversarial approaches. This is in line with deliberative democracy and discourse ethics previously discussed and is the reason why Stakeholder Theory can be mentioned among those managerial theories and perspectives promoting the inclusion of ethics in management practices. The theory's diffusion across the academic and corporate fields is a sign of its enduring relevance in highlighting the importance of stakeholder relationships and stakeholder management. As the global business environment becomes increasingly interconnected and the demands of various stakeholder groups become explicit, this theory continues to offer an ethically grounded framework for addressing the challenges of modern management.

In management, another approach that strongly emphasises the importance of human values and ethics is humanistic management. Humanistic management adopts a people-first perspective, which assumes that management should pursue profits as a means to serve human objectives. It stands in contrast to traditional management models that primarily focus on profit maximisation, often at the expense of viewing people as mere means to an end. The roots of humanistic management can be traced back to various philosophical and ethical traditions that prioritise human dignity and personal development. The modern interpretation of humanistic management, however, began to take shape in the twentieth century, influenced by the human relations movement and the rise of social psychology in understanding workplace dynamics. An interesting analysis of the historical development of humanistic management is provided by Melé (2016) in his article "Understanding Humanistic Management". According to the author, the term "humanistic management" first appeared in Lilienthal's 1967 publication *Management: A Humanistic Art*, which posited management as an art rather than a science. This view countered the prevalent "mechanistic" approaches of the time, such as Taylor's scientific management (1919).

In the 1980s, humanistic management was mainly interpreted as a means to enhance productivity and, at the same time, develop human potential. Daley (1986), for example, investigated the relationship between humanistic management and organisational success, connecting together organisational effectiveness, job satisfaction, and public responsiveness.

More contemporary scholars, while not explicitly identifying with humanistic management, have continued to underscore the importance of the human element in organisations. For example, Plas (1996) advocated for person-centred

leadership, Ghoshal and Bartlett (2004) emphasised people-centric policies and corporate culture, and Pfeffer (1998) recommended prioritising people for organisational success, suggesting that a company may maximise profits by putting people first, which he referred to as "the human equation" (Pfeffer, 1998).

To summarise, as suggested by Melé (2016), humanistic management encompasses several different themes and approaches, such as the integration of human psychology into management practices and the recognition of the critical role of human centrality in successful enterprise leadership. Additionally, as claimed before, it challenges the prevailing economic-centric paradigm, advocating for human welfare and flourishing as the core focus of management. This last perspective forms the foundation of the Humanistic Management Movement that surfaced in the early 2000s, drawing growing attention from academics and business leaders since 2010 (Melé, 2016), with about 489 scholarly articles mentioning "humanistic management" in 2023.[1]

Promoting an ethical approach in management education

Alongside incorporating ethical considerations into management literature, the subject of ethics has progressively become a standard component of management education at universities. In the U.S., courses on business ethics and CSR began to emerge in universities significantly after the mid-1970s, with a notable expansion in the 1980s. By the mid-1980s, there were at least 500 courses across the U.S. with approximately 40,000 students enrolled. The field became institutionalised with societies, centres, and journals dedicated to business ethics. For instance, the Society for Business Ethics was established in 1980, and key journals in the field started publication in the early 1980s. The *Journal of Business Ethics* published its inaugural issue in February 1982, followed by the *Business Ethics Quarterly* in January 1991, and by *Business Ethics: A European Review*, which first appeared in January 1992. The development of the subject paralleled the growing international scope of business and the consequent broadening of topics covered by business ethics (De George, 2015).

However, according to some theorists, despite a proliferation of courses and resources, for several decades, there has been a gap between academic study and the ethical challenges managers faced. The gap is well explained in the article "What's the Matter With Business Ethics" published in the *Harvard Business Review* (Stark, 1993). The article discusses the paradoxical situation of business ethics in the context of management and business schools during that period. Stark (1993) notes the rise in business ethics courses and resources but points out that actual managers find these resources irrelevant or disconnected from real-world scenarios. The article critiques the approach of most business ethicists of the 1990s, arguing that they often occupy an idealistic moral high ground disconnected from practical managerial concerns. This

approach is compared with the more applied ethics in fields like medicine, law, and government. The need for business ethics to become more practical and relevant to managers, addressing real ethical dilemmas and offering feasible solutions was advocated. Scholars in the field suggested a re-evaluation of the field, emphasising the importance of aligning ethical theory in management education with business practice, and recognising the complex interplay of altruistic and self-interested motivations in business decisions (Stark, 1993).

After 2000, the academic field of business ethics witnessed a significant evolution, shaped by a complex mix of regulatory changes, corporate scandals (e.g., Enron), and a growing public demand for corporate accountability. There was a marked shift towards applied ethics, with research focusing on practical implications and the creation of tools and frameworks that businesses could implement. In parallel, academic institutions expanded their business ethics programmes, increasingly incorporating them into MBA curricula and executive education.

Coming back to our core topic, greenwashing, numerous academics and experts argue that this can be prevented through education. Given that greenwashing constitutes unethical conduct within business communication, embedding ethical principles within the curriculum of business and marketing education may act as a deterrent against such practices. In essence, ethics education should be a fundamental element of management studies to proactively inhibit greenwashing rather than cure its effects.

In line with this approach, Lau's (2010) study discussed in an article for the *Journal of Business Ethics* titled "A Step Forward: Ethics Education Matters!" provides empirical evidence that supports the effectiveness of business ethics education. Her research is based on a comparison between distinct undergraduate student groups receiving or not receiving business ethics education. The findings support the idea that ethics education is beneficial, with students who have undergone such training demonstrating stronger ethical standards and decision-making based on moral principles. This aligns with earlier findings that such education positively influences students' ethical awareness and reasoning, with those educated in ethics displaying heightened ethical behaviour. In particular, the study suggests that education in business ethics strengthens the capacity for moral evaluation in complex situations characterised by conflicts of interest, environmental concerns, authoritative overreach, and questions of personal integrity. The article also emphasises the need for continuous ethics training in the workplace to prevent managerial misconduct. However, the research also indicates that students' ethical positions might not be stable in real-world, morally ambiguous business settings, despite their education. Moreover, despite advancing their ethical understanding through business ethics education, students often maintain a sceptical attitude towards business

ethics. According to Lau, this scepticism reflects the ongoing ethical short-comings in the corporate sector, as highlighted by well-known scandals.

There are four primary pedagogical approaches to teaching ethics in business schools and universities: standalone courses; infusion of ethics across all courses; a hybrid of these methods; and the incorporation of extracurricular activities (Fort, 2016). Standalone ethics courses seem to be the most effective means of providing comprehensive ethics education because they allow for in-depth exploration of ethical theories, decision-making frameworks, and critical thinking about moral issues. However, this approach of offering standalone courses in ethics has faced criticism for potentially isolating ethics from other business disciplines. An alternative approach suggests integrating ethics into all business courses so that ethical thinking is seen as an essential and consistent part of a business education. The drawback of this approach is the variability in faculty members' expertise and comfort with teaching ethics, which may result in inconsistent coverage and depth. According to Fort (2016), the hybrid approach, which combines a dedicated ethics course with ethics content integrated into other courses, is seen as a way to balance the benefits of a standalone course with the advantages of integrating ethical thinking across the curriculum. Additionally, extracurricular activities like student organisations can also promote ethical awareness.

Some scholars in the field, however, remain sceptical about the role and effectiveness of business ethics education in enhancing ethical thinking among business students and prospective managers. For example, a study conducted in Poland calls into question the efficacy of business ethics and CSR courses, with results differing from previous studies that showed a positive effect of such courses across various educational settings and countries (Tormo-Carbó et al., 2016). The research, which engaged over 300 undergraduates and post-graduates at a Polish university, supports the view that students agree on the critical importance of ethical conduct and its integration into business education. However, contrary to established research, the study found no significant link between business ethics courses or CSR courses and students' awareness of ethics, suggesting the need for a re-evaluation of course effectiveness and established pedagogical approaches. Moreover, the findings revealed a paradox: students who had not participated in any ethics/CSR courses exhibited a greater intention to enrol in them and a stronger belief in their value for addressing moral dilemmas in their future professions. According to the authors, this unexpected outcome suggests a critical need to re-examine not only the role and impact of ethics education in business curricula but also the teaching methods and approaches prevailing in business ethics/CSR courses.

The need to challenge traditional unidirectional teaching approaches is also highlighted in the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) literature. In the previous chapters, we have introduced the concepts of sustainability and

sustainable development, which have been associated with the triple bottom line and the 3P model (people, planet, profit). The urgency of incorporating the principles of sustainable development into business education has been increasingly recognised by academics, political actors, and institutions. Scholars in the field have observed that ESD equips students with a critical understanding of the constraints of conventional business strategies that prioritise process efficiency and profit maximisation, and it also stimulates their capacity to innovatively contribute to a more sustainable future (Gatti et al., 2019). ESD thus fosters critical thinking and the capacity to conceptualise alternative perspectives (Sharma & Kelly, 2014). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) asserts that ESD necessitates interactive teaching methodologies that inspire learners to alter their behaviours and take steps towards sustainable development (UNESCO, 2012). Therefore, ESD has implications for not only the content but also the methods of education. Traditional didactic approaches in management education, which are often based on unidirectional education processes and the clear separation of disciplines, seem to be inadequate for equipping students with the skills needed to address complex sustainability challenges. Promoting a mindset of active engagement and critical analysis in students, as opposed to passive absorption of information, is crucial (Figueiró & Raufflet, 2015). According to the literature (Barth et al., 2007), achieving this shift necessitates a new educational paradigm centred on participatory methods and innovative teaching experience techniques, including those drawn from action-orientated and experiential learning models.

A way to counteract greenwashing: ethical critical thinking in economics and management

An alternative way to foster ethics in management is not to provide technical solutions or models for application but to open inquiries. Indeed, the mere promotion of practical tools and frameworks designed to quantify and display the ethical profile of a company may result in the exclusion of true ethical considerations from managers' critical thinking. This approach, while useful, often treats ethics as a metric to be measured and reported rather than as a fundamental principle to be integrated into every aspect of decision-making. This leaves space for ethicswashing. To truly incorporate ethics into the core of management philosophy, it is therefore imperative to move beyond technical measurements, promoting a culture where ethical reflection is at the core of business strategy development. This implies a continuous commitment to ethical education, critical thinking, and a willingness to engage in complex moral dialogue (e.g., deliberative democracy) that challenges the status quo. Only through such a holistic approach can ethics become central to the corporate culture, influencing actions and decisions at all levels.

Thus, it is fundamental to encourage students and professionals in the field to question the consequences of their decisions, especially from a social and environmental perspective. It is the responsibility of academics in the field to stimulate such reflection. Students and businesspeople should be encouraged to use ethics and morality to evaluate business choices. Those managers involved in corporate decision-making processes should constantly engage themselves with the moral question, "Is it right or not?" A continuous ethical reflection is paramount, acting as a leitmotif that can guide business practitioners through the complexity of corporate governance and strategic thinking. The question "Is it right or not?", if not eluded, could help individuals integrate morality and ethics in business thinking. Only in this way could ethical thinking could truly affect the formation of responsible leadership and sustainable business practices.

Ethical critical thinking should be encouraged not only in courses dedicated to business ethics and CSR. It should also be integrated into other economic education disciplines and subjects, such as accounting, finance, and management. An education that integrates ethical questioning into the curriculum of multiple subjects can better prepare students to deal with the morally complex realities they will face in their professional lives. To summarise, we, therefore, suggest that it is crucial to cultivate ethical thinking among students, managers, and professionals in corporate communication to address the pervasive issue of greenwashing.

NOTE

1. Data was retrieved from the ABI/Inform database. English scholarly articles, published between 1 January 2023 and 21 December 2023.

Appendix: a short dictionary of *washing phenomena (alphabetic order, only primary definitions)

AI-washing: AI-washing defines the accusation of misleadingly claiming, through unfounded and hollow assertions, to be using or being powered by AI technology – while lacking or not fulfilling the necessary requirements to be defined as AI-powered – to, among others, promote a positive image, increase financial returns, and secure funding.

Artwashing: Artwashing consists of an accusation of a deliberate predatory strategy by which developers use art galleries and artists as an instrument to increase the value of an urban area.

Beewashing: Beewashing describes the accusation of communicative efforts, also when good-intentions inspired, aimed at ameliorating one's (corporate) image by promoting projects that allegedly help pollinators (and consequently the environment) but that, de facto, do nothing – or even worsen – their conditions and do not tackle the systemic threat that they face.

Biodiversitywashing: Biodiversitywashing is defined as accusation of the misalignment between the biodiversity talk and walk where deceptive practices, which range from token and superficial commitments to unsubstantiated claims, are strategically utilised to enhance one's corporate image by capitalising on the heightened public awareness of the biodiversity crisis.

Blockchainwashing: Blockchainwashing consists of an accusation of piggybacking on the blockchain popularity by misleadingly using the blockchain label to promote a product better or claiming to run one's product on a blockchain basis without having all the features to be defined blockchain-based.

Bluewashing: Bluewashing is an accusation of a symbolic, self-serving, monodirectional, communicative façade not backed by any substantiated nor verifiable humanitarian action – or any other deed in the field of social issues

– that aims to intentionally mislead consumers into believing that a corporation is socially responsible by piggybacking on the United Nations' reputation.

Brownwashing: Brownwashing (also known as or similar to: blackwashing, colourwashing) is the accusation of a marketing practice of capitalising on the public outcry against systemic racism, mainly directed at people of colour (hence, the use of the colour brown), to increase the brand image – while providing no concrete solutions to tackle the problem or just performative ones: talking without walking.

Carbonwashing: Carbonwashing is the accusation of a type of greenwashing that is specifically focused on carbon emissions. It involves the use of misleading public relations tactics related to climate change (such as using vague and difficult-to-verify terms such as "carbon-neutral" or "carbon-negative"), with no real action being taken to address the issue. The goal is to create a brand or corporate image that is seen as environmentally friendly, taking advantage of the loose or non-existent regulations around carbon emissions disclosure in order to mislead consumers and investors.

Cloudwashing: Cloudwashing is the accusation of a misleading marketing practice of piggybacking on the buzzword "cloud" and exploiting the sector's jargon ambiguities and technical complexities – to ameliorate one's image and increase financial profits – by selling non-cloud-native products or services as ones.

Colourwashing: Colourwashing represents the comprehensive phenomenon whereby companies are accused of employing a misleading, profit-driven, strategic co-optation of values, colours, ideals, symbols – and, more broadly, movements. This strategic manoeuvre aims to enhance or (re-)establish their corporate image by capitalising on today's consumers' heightened social and environmental awareness, projecting themselves as advocates and allies of social and environmental causes.

COP-washing: COP washing is the accusation of a specific type of greenwashing that takes place on a large, industrial scale. It involves manipulating the United Nations Conference of the Parties on climate change, a significant global platform, to one's advantage. The primary objective is to use this platform, in conjunction with other public relations strategies, to project a positive, eco-friendly, net-zero, climate advocacy image. This image is often misleading, serving to divert attention away from and obscure the entity's actual climate track record.

COVID-washing: COVID-washing is the accusation of using a misleading communication strategy that exploits the widespread fear of contracting the COVID-19 virus and capitalises on COVID-related themes in order to (i) deceive consumers into believing that a given product is safe and effective in preventing, mitigating, or even curing a COVID-19 infection, (ii) better market an unhealthy product to vulnerable consumers, and (iii) present a more positive brand image and secure customers.

Cripwashing: Cripwashing consists of an accusation of a company's symbolic lip service – not backed by any substantive and sustainable action – to ameliorate the corporate image by depicting it as caring and inclusive of disabled persons, ameliorate the ESG performance to have a competitive advantage over its competitors, and co-opt the discourse.

Cryptowashing: Cryptowashing is the accusation of using the term "crypto" in corporate communication irrespective of the fact if the company de facto is based on the technology of cryptocurrencies, based on the blockchain technology. The mere use of the term has led to skyrocketing stock prices in some cases.

CSR-washing: CSR-washing (also Corporate Social Responsibility washing) describes the accusation of a deceptive, instrumental, and inauthentic use (or communication of) CSR practices to achieve financial gain, promote a misleadingly positive corporate image to stakeholders, divert public scrutiny, and gain a competitive advantage, which results in a discrepancy between a CSR "talk" and "walk".

ESG-washing: ESG-washing is the accusation of the practice of capitalising on the trend of responsible and sustainable investment by misleadingly claiming or insinuating to be ESG-compliant or to be investing in ESG businesses to improve one's reputation or increase financial profits while not implementing the necessary systemic changes in one's activity to be, de facto, ESG-compliant or to really invest in ESG products.

Ethicswashing: Ethicswashing is the accusation of a form of image lip service that consists of publicly claiming to engage in ethical considerations while actually failing to enforce or adopt any meaningful or systemic change. As such, ethicswashing transforms genuine ethical reflection into instrumentalised ethical discussions set to divert attention from negative press, avoid regulation, or maintain a positive reputation.

Greenwashing: Greenwashing (also known as or similar to: climatewashing) is the accusation of a symbolic and deceptive strategy that fosters a misleading perception of environmental responsibility. This is achieved by amplifying a corporation's commitment to environmental protection, environmental performance, sustainability, or a product's eco-friendliness through the dissemination of ambiguous, exaggerated, or unsubstantiated claims.

Healthwashing: Healthwashing is the accusation of a multi-levelled, deceptive communication that, by co-opting and instrumentalising the health discourse, exploiting the lack of scientific and medical evidence, or omitting health-related risks, aims to mislead consumers with symbolic and deceptive information or associations about the healthfulness of legal unhealthy products and habits or the company's health-related values. This practice is carried out to better one's brand image, increase profits, or divert attention from controversial behaviour and practices and the health risks created by these.

Humanwashing of machines: Humanwashing of machines refers to the accusation of intentional or unintentional misleading corporate communication strategy that uses anthropomorphic robots with human-like gestures or features to provide a deceptive sense of amicability, friendliness, and harmlessness or to mislead stakeholders on a machine's true capabilities and to conceal its real configurations. Such a strategy is implemented to divert attention from the harmful characteristics of robots or negative perceptions associated with them and to provide a positive corporate image.

Labwashing: Labwashing consists of the accusation of misleadingly displaying scientific equipment, such as white lab coats, pipettes, or ampules with liquids, in advertisements to evoke a sense of scientific endeavour, clinical accuracy, and overall trustworthiness – qualities that may not actually be present in the advertised product.

Machinewashing: Machinewashing is the accusation of a strategic effort that utilises misleading practices and instrumentalises the ethical – through various channels and mediums, communicative strategies, and symbolic actions – to appease the public, gain a competitive advantage, present one's public image or AI products and policies as ethically compliant, and forestall further regulations in the tech sector.

Orangewashing: Orangewashing is the accusation of a misleading communication that promotes lower-quality cryptocurrencies by piggybacking on the values of Bitcoin (in many cases visually represented in an orange-golden colour).

Peacewashing: Peacewashing is the accusation of the use of language to display a specific dynamic in wars and other conflicts that omits alleged war crimes and abuses.

Pinkwashing: Pinkwashing is the accusation of a misleading practice that legitimises products and promotes a positive corporate image by (i) establishing partnerships with specific organisations engaged in the fight against breast cancer or (ii) by making use of breast cancer symbols such as the pink ribbon, with the alleged goal of raising awareness or money for curing the disease, while actively piloting the discourse away from its practices that are known to contribute to its insurgence.

Poorwashing: Poorwashing is the accusation of a misleading promotion of humanitarian aid policies with messages that stress how beneficial it is for the poor while, *de facto*, they only benefit the promoter's political agenda or economic interests.

Purplewashing: Purplewashing amounts to an accusation of a marketing, political, and communicative strategy aimed at misleadingly ameliorating the corporate image (to gain an audience, voters, or customers) by supporting feminist values and female empowerment or embracing gender equality – without backing such statements with any real or transformative actions.

Rainbowwashing: Rainbowwashing is defined as the accusation of a mismatch between an entity's professed commitment to the LGBTQIA+ community and its actual action. It involves the appropriation of the LGBTQIA+ community symbols, colours, values, and popularity to increase financial profits, retain customers and employees, ameliorate (or create) a progressive corporate image that embraces diversity and acceptance, and improve or (re-) establish public reputation and credibility. Such misleading communication is achieved through selective disclosures of information, performative actions (such as public endorsing and supporting of the LGBTQIA+ community), and vague, exaggerated, or deceptive statements, which are not backed by any substantive changes in the company's conduct, investment, or actions – and, in some instances, outright contradict them.

Redwashing: Redwashing amounts to an accusation of a misleading communication – not backed by any substantive action, or in contrast with the perpetrator's core activities or investment strategies – that aims at favourably portraying the perpetrator or diverting the public's attention from its detrimental activities through the sponsoring and financing of pro-Indigenous educational, artistic, and cultural projects.

Sciencewashing: Sciencewashing is the accusation of misleadingly co-opting science and creating instrumental, symbolic, overstated, but scientific-looking claims aimed at improving one's brand image by evoking a sense of trustworthiness, scientific endeavour, quality, and accuracy, and at differentiating one's products from similar ones by competitors, or to cast doubt onto commercially harming research.

Sharewashing: Sharewashing is the accusation of a corporation's misleading communication, driven by opportunistic legal, financial, or image-related reasons, consisting of using terminology that creates a communicative façade that depicts the corporation as being part of the sharing economy while lacking substantive involvement in authentic sharing initiatives.

Snowwashing: Snowwashing consists of of the accusation of setting up tax planning structures (in Canada) to leverage the country's globally recognised legitimacy and positive democratic image aiming to evade taxes and launder money – while maintaining a positive façade distanced from the questionable reputation associated with traditional offshore tax havens.

Socialwashing: Socialwashing refers to the accusation of a practice of companies portraying themselves as supporters and upholders of human rights and social values – while failing to take any meaningful action to back up these claims or blatantly disregarding them. It is essentially a form of misleading corporate image lip service meant to create a false and deceptive impression of social responsibility for investors and the public and increase financial returns.

Sportswashing: Sportswashing consists of the accusation of an instrumental use of an athletic event or sport-related actions (such as purchases of clubs or sponsorships) by states (authoritarian or democratic) – targeted both at an international and domestic audience. Its goal is to increase legitimacy and promote a positive, democratic, mindful-of-minorities, human-rights-caring image – while simultaneously diverting attention from chronic controversial behaviour such as human, women's, workers', or Indigenous people rights violations.

Sugarwashing: Sugarwashing refers to the accusation of a strategic corporate sponsorship tactic wherein a company engages in deceptively altruistic practices by associating itself with a reputable charity to enhance its image for financial profit or political advantage either by misleadingly suggesting to consumers that by purchasing the company's products they would be doing good, or by financing their operations through conspicuous donations.

Veganwashing: Veganwashing amounts to the accusation of an ethical-compliance façade that misleadingly portrays, with the mere goal of increasing all products' sales, a company's commitments, actions, and products as aligned with vegan tenets while they are not or there is no substantive or transformative action to contrast the business's core anti-vegan activities.

Warwashing: Warwashing (also known as or similar to: Ukraine-washing, Westwashing) is the accusation of the exploitation of a conflict and leveraging its visibility to obtain financial and/or political benefits – oftentimes through unsubstantiated, performative promises and statements.

Whitewashing: Whitewashing is the accusation of the practice of casting a white actor in roles intended for non-white characters – thus, oftentimes, requiring the use of prosthetics, wigs, makeup, and skin-darkening techniques that might lead to caricatured portrayals. It is typically done to cater to public expectations, maximise profits, or comply with industry norms and might exacerbate racism, cause minority underrepresentation or ethnic misrepresentation, and engender an unfairness of opportunities.

Wokewashing: Wokewashing is the accusation of a marketing strategy involving the co-optation of idealism, social activism, or social justice issues by using progressive imagery, language, and values as an image lip service for increasing sales, which contrast with the company's internal track records or are not backed by any meaningful, substantive, transformative action.

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