

Environment

Green is the New Black

RecyCOOL Lessons

Disclaimer

These lessons have been created for and tested with young people in Slovakia, the Czech republic, Germany, Hungary and Croatia. They are open-source and available for adaptation for different groups globally.

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Green is the New Black

Description:of the lesson

Firstly, in the lesson it will be explained what greenwashing means and why the brands use this tactic in their PR, then we will cover the history of greenwashing and look at how greenwashing is used by fashion brands and how it can be recognised.

Objective:

Objective of this lesson is to verify if green fashion campaigns are trustworthy. And find out which brands are really sustainable and which ones are using "greenwashing".

After this lesson you will be able to:

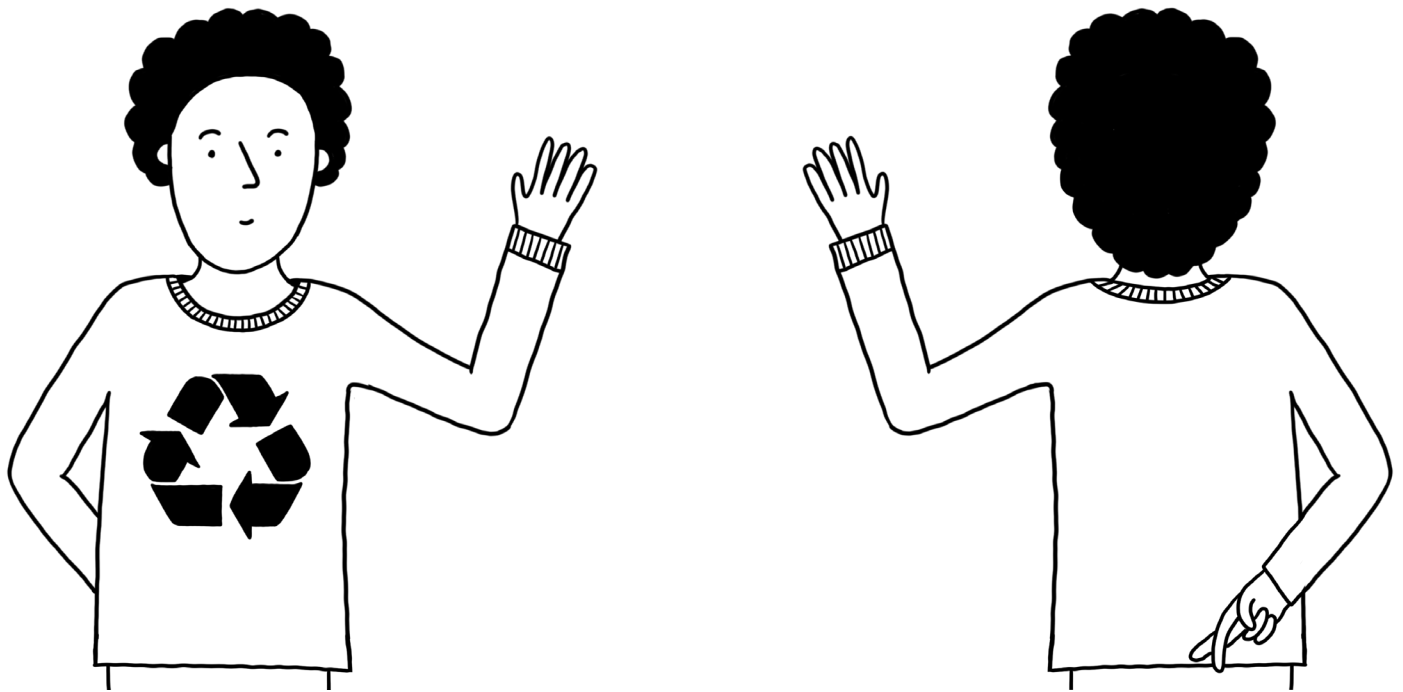
- recognize and spot the greenwashing by brands and campaigns
- explain the definition of greenwashing and know its history and origins of the term
- be aware enough to try to avoid being influenced by greenwashing, by fashion brands and businesses

Tools and materials:

google

GREENWASHING:

Usage of deceptive labelling, deliberately vague sustainability policies and the usage of buzzwords including 'eco-friendly', 'clean' and 'green' with little or no justification. "Greenwashing" comes originally from the word brainwashing.



Have you ever thought about why unsustainable fast fashion brands have sustainability campaigns?

Have you ever heard of the term greenwashing?

Can you recognise it?

Greenwashing is a term used to describe situations where companies mislead consumers by claiming to be eco-friendly or sustainable as a marketing scheme rather than as a core principle of their business model.

Often, these industries spend more money making themselves appear sustainable than they do implementing actual sustainable measures into their company.

More recently, some of the world's biggest carbon emitters, such as conventional energy companies, have attempted to rebrand themselves as champions of the environment. Products are greenwashed through a process of renaming, rebranding, or repackaging them. Greenwashed products might convey the idea that they're more natural, wholesome, or free of chemicals than competing brands.

Companies have engaged in greenwashing via press releases and commercials touting their clean energy or pollution reduction efforts. In reality, the company may not be making a meaningful commitment to green initiatives.

In short, companies that make unsubstantiated claims that their products are environmentally safe or provide some "green" benefit, are involved in greenwashing.



GREENWASHING

[terminology]

When brands, corporations, organisations or governments co-opt sustainability narratives to portray an environmentally responsible image without sufficiently responsible action.

@fash_rev
@lilearthgirl

**entry
level
activist**

example:

“Sometimes a fashion brand can use a single ‘sustainable’ project or moment to manipulate customers into believing the brand’s entire value chain and ethos is ethical. This is often evident in consumer-facing initiatives like a communication campaign, a fashion collection or brand packaging, leaving other irresponsible supply chain details and decisions hidden.”

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Photo credit: [Fashion Revolution](#)

Coined by environmentalist Jay Westervelt back in 1986 this term refers to companies posturing as environmentally friendly in the name of good PR.

In practice, this can involve the use of deceptive labelling, deliberately vague sustainability policies and the usage of buzzwords including “eco-friendly”, “clean” and “green” with little to no justification.

The recent explosion in mainstream discussions of sustainability has placed “greenwashing” front and centre; 2017 saw the UK’s Advertising Standards Agency crack down on various companies for releasing misleading ads (we can also look to the recent launch of the CMA report made in 2022 focused on fashion in the UK).

Since then the situation hasn’t changed and the problem is nuanced. Companies often avoid specificity when describing environmental policies, leading conversations with promises of “organic” beauty products, “fuel-efficient” cars and “clean coal”. **This same lack of clear and accurate descriptions, often influences journalistic coverage of products, too.**

And don’t forget the literal greenwashing of logos – McDonalds famously came under fire for painting its yellow arches green in 2009 without actually bothering to reduce its carbon footprint.

In fashion there are dubious labelling practices and greenwashing. **Too many stores offer “organic” T-shirts that actually only contain 5% organic cotton and 95% conventional cotton.** Greenwashing as a tactic even seems to have become a huge trend in business.

Many businesses, spanning anything from automobile services, to beauty companies, to DIY stores – have responded to it, and believe they can be perceived as more 'green' or 'ethical' through simple changes such as stylish recycled paper packaging or adding plants and floral designs to their branding.

Consumers are suffering from eco-marketing fatigue. They do not believe it any more: for them it just means that a company is producing products that are not quite as environmentally damaging as before.

The number of complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority questioning claims made by companies has quadrupled. If companies want to make a convincing claim, they need to pick on a specific message of sustainability and be able to back it up with statistics and independently audited facts.

While the greatest environmental impacts of the industry come from energy-intensive raw material production, preparation and processing, there is a lack of data on the actual environmental impacts of each material, which also varies depending on how and where these materials are made. 46% of brands publish a target on sustainable materials, yet only 37% disclose what constitutes a sustainable material.

Currently, brands make a wide range of claims on the fibres they use without providing proof on their environmental credentials. Brands may also claim their fibres are 'sustainable' via on-product labelling despite only focusing on one environmental aspect, meaning the claim made is actually only applicable to one component part of an end product.

Recent data from the European Commission shows that many fashion brands and retailers are guilty of greenwashing and exaggerating their sustainability credentials without having supporting evidence. Legislative proposals to address greenwashing and ensure the reliability of sustainability claims are at various stages of development in the EU as well in the UK, the Netherlands and the United States.

Transparency on sustainable materials is particularly important given the lack of standardisation in tools to assess environmental claims and the pervasiveness of false marketing claims on 'sustainable fibres'. **We hope these new policy developments, along with the EU Textile Strategy will provide an adequate basis to combat greenwashing and false claims.**



How to spot greenwashing by fashion brands?

- If a brand releases 'conscious collections' but doesn't use reliable data to support its claims.
- When a brand produces just a tiny range of its product line sustainably but promotes itself as conscious, they're greenwashing. If your company is still profiting from largely unsustainably made goods, then one surely cancels out the other.
- When a label makes sweeping marketing statements for commercial gain like 'shop and save the planet' or 'look cute and protect the environment.' These are gross overstatements and highly misleading.
- If a brand overstates its ethical or environmental efforts. For example, they could create collections from organic cotton but not prioritise living wages of garment workers.

How can you avoid greenwashing in fashion?

- don't let marketing fool you, always look for evidence
- when in doubt, look for facts and figures
- look for certifications
- natural isn't always 100% eco-friendly, and vegan doesn't always equate to cruelty-free
- look beyond the overhyped and irrelevant
- focus on brands with a holistic approach to sustainability

Task

Choose one of the examples of a fashion campaign and try to find out on the internet if the brand is really doing what it promises.

Look at the official web of the brand and look for evidence
Do you see any reliable data to support that claim?
Is that “conscious collection” just a tiny range of its products?
Is that brand certificated?
Do you see the holistic approach? Does the brand use organic materials and care about human rights in the same way?

You can also help with use by the Fashion Revolution Fashion Transparency Index (FTI) or [goodonyou](#) app. Look at the FTI if you find your brand has scored low on the list, the brand is definitely not sustainable and the add is just greenwashing. Check the brand also at the [goodonyou.app](#).

Be aware that being ranked highly in the [Fashion Transparency Index](#) doesn't mean the brand is sustainable. For example, a score of 100% would signal that a brand is transparent across all the indicators we include in our methodology.

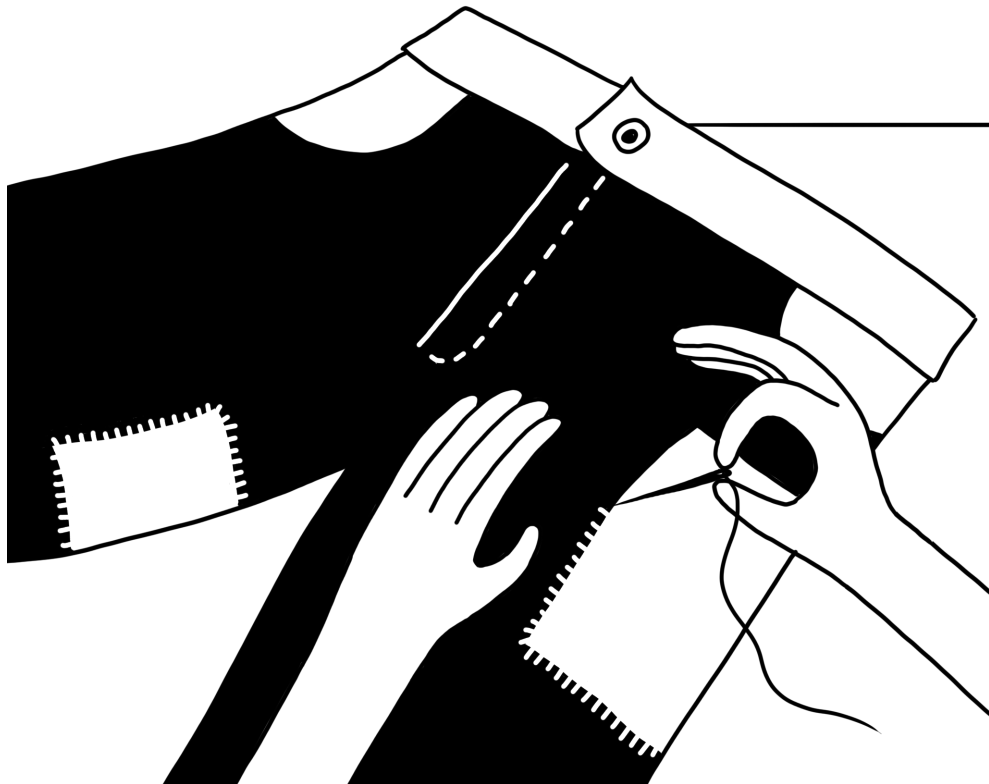
The Index is a tool to push and incentivise the world's largest fashion brands to be more transparent about their social and environmental policies, practices, outcomes and impacts.



Fashion Revolution believes that transparency is foundational to achieving systemic change in the global fashion industry, which is why we have been campaigning for it since 2014, and why we created this Index. Transparency is not to be confused with sustainability.

However, without transparency, achieving a sustainable, accountable and fair fashion industry will be impossible. Transparency enables scrutiny. Without transparency, claims made by brands cannot be scrutinised. Without scrutiny, greenwashing thrives. Transparency is the anecdote to greenwashing.

Which fast fashion brands seem serious about sustainability?



Reflection

It is important to check brands and see if what they claim is really true. Now you know more about greenwashing. **Have you ever witnessed greenwashing?**

To be sure, check the brand director at goodonyou.com which aligns with the [Fashion Transparency Index](#) methodology or look at Fashion Transparency Index directly.

To know more about the CMA report focused on fashion, read the article [Greenwashing UK fashion firms to be named and shamed by a consumer watchdog.](#)

Be curious! Find out. Do something!

We encourage you to feel empowered to use the findings of the Fashion Transparency Index to leverage your activism and ask questions. **Use your voice and ask the brands #WhoMadeMyClothes and #WhatsInMyClothes. Your voice can change everything.**

Post a picture or video holding one of [our posters](#) on Instagram, Twitter, TikTok or Facebook or whatever platform you use. Tag the brand you're wearing and ask them - [#WhatsInMyClothes?](#) [#WhoMadeMyClothes](#) and [#WhoMadeMyFabric?](#)



Resources

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