# Fashion brands face rising backlash over misleading greenwashing claims



As sustainability increasingly becomes paramount within the fashion and retail sectors, brands face heightened scrutiny regarding their environmental claims, particularly amidst the growing threat of greenwashing. This practice, whereby companies deceptively portray themselves as environmentally responsible, has proliferated alongside consumers' desire for ethical products, resulting in significant challenges not only for brands but also for conscientious consumers.

At the heart of the issue lies the stark reality of fashion's environmental impact. The industry is notoriously responsible for vast pollution, excessive water consumption, and soaring carbon emissions—factors contributing to a growing awareness among consumers. With the global fashion industry valued at approximately $2.4 trillion and employing around 300 million people, the pressing need for accountability has never been clearer. Many consumers are now willing to pay a premium for products that align with their ethical values, yet this surge in demand has been met with a wave of misleading claims, particularly from fast-fashion retailers attempting to cultivate an environmentally friendly image.

Greenwashing occurs when companies inflate or fabricate their green credentials, employing tactics ranging from vague language to selective reporting on sustainability initiatives. Reports indicate that a staggering 60% of sustainability claims made by fashion brands may be misleading. This not only confuses consumers—who often struggle to discern which brands are genuinely committed to sustainability—but also undermines authentic efforts by those brands genuinely dedicated to sustainable practices.

There are various greenwashing tactics prevalent in the industry, each with its own implications. For instance, greenlighting showcases one eco-friendly initiative while ignoring broader unsustainable practices. Greenhushing involves minimal communication about sustainability efforts, suggesting that brands may be wary of scrutiny. Greenrinsing, on the other hand, involves hastily modifying sustainability targets to avoid accountability. These tactics, among others, create a façade that can deceive consumers and impair trust in the overall marketplace.

The ramifications of greenwashing extend beyond consumer trust. Brands engaging in these practices not only risk legal repercussions but also damage their reputation. The fashion industry has seen cases such as ASOS and Boohoo facing legal action over dubious green claims. Furthermore, a recent study found that consumer scepticism regarding green initiatives can lead to decreased purchasing intent, highlighting that greenwashing has evolved from a mere marketing strategy to a considerable liability.

To combat these challenges, fashion retailers must establish genuine, transparent policies to avoid greenwashing. Third-party certifications from reputable organizations, such as the Global Organic Textile Standard, can lend credibility to claims and guide consumers through marketing hype. However, brands must not only obtain these certifications but also transparently communicate their significance and ensure they resonate throughout their operations.

Another critical aspect is fostering transparency and accountability within the supply chain. Establishing clear benchmarks for emissions and being forthright about production processes can enhance consumer trust. This approach aligns with findings from the World Economic Forum, which emphasizes the importance of detailed emissions quantification, particularly among high-impact suppliers.

Utilising technology presents another avenue for mitigating greenwashing. Innovative tools and systems, including sustainability software and data platforms like Provenance, enable brands to monitor emissions and track their supply chains effectively. This technological integration helps brands align their operational practices with their sustainability messaging, creating a more authentic narrative.

Additionally, the focus on reducing overall production rather than generating new “green” lines is paramount. Brands can explore business models that extend product life—like clothing rental or resale initiatives—which not only diminish waste but also promote a circular economy.

Finally, honest communication remains vital. Today’s consumers are savvy and prefer brands that acknowledge their sustainability challenges candidly. Transparent dialogue helps build an authentic brand image that resonates with ethical consumers. Collaborating with credible fashion influencers can further amplify this message, making sustainability narratives more relatable and trustworthy.

In conclusion, while the issue of greenwashing poses a significant challenge to the fashion industry, it also presents an opportunity for brands to adopt genuine sustainability practices. By avoiding superficial gestures and embracing transparency alongside measurable sustainability initiatives, retailers can not only enhance consumer trust but also contribute to meaningful environmental stewardship. The path forward lies in integrity, where true commitment to sustainability can foster both customer loyalty and the health of our planet.

### Reference Map

1. Introduction to greenwashing and its impact on the fashion industry.
2. Overview of the history and implications of greenwashing.
3. Discussion of tactics and legal risks associated with greenwashing.
4. Importance of certifications and transparency in combating greenwashing.
5. The role of technology in promoting genuine sustainability.
6. Emphasis on production reduction and honest communication.
7. Conclusions on sustainability and ethical practices in fashion.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theretailbulletin.com/retail-commentary/greenwashing-in-fashion-how-to-avoid-it-19-05-2025/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.marieclaire.co.uk/life/sustainability/greenwashing-733963> - This article from Marie Claire provides a comprehensive guide on greenwashing, a deceptive practice where companies falsely present themselves as environmentally responsible. It defines greenwashing as misleading marketing strategies that create a false impression of eco-friendliness, with origins dating back to Jay Westerveld’s 1986 essay and popularized post-1992 Rio Earth Summit. The Volkswagen emissions scandal is cited as a major example. Greenwashing is harmful because it misleads consumers, diverting support from genuinely sustainable brands. Although regulations like the EU Green Claims Directive and the UK's Green Claims Code aim to limit such practices, legal accountability remains limited. Experts offer six key tips to identify greenwashing: scrutinize vague eco-claims, research brand history, use common sense, rely on trusted resources, check for third-party certifications, and accept that sustainable products may cost more. By educating consumers, the article encourages responsible choices that genuinely benefit the environment during Earth Month and beyond.
3. <https://carbontrail.net/blog/how-to-avoid-greenwashing/> - This article from Carbon Trail offers practical advice for fashion brands to avoid greenwashing. It emphasizes the importance of backing environmental claims with data, such as using certifications from recognized authorities like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or OEKO-TEX. The article also highlights the need for meaningful sustainability efforts, focusing on initiatives that make a real difference and align with the company's mission. Engaging stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, and customers, is also crucial to foster genuine sustainability efforts. The article provides examples of brands like IKEA and Adidas that have successfully implemented these strategies.
4. <https://www.eco-stylist.com/what-is-greenwashing-in-fashion> - Eco-Stylist's article delves into the issue of greenwashing in the fashion industry and offers five ways to avoid fast fashion claims. It discusses how greenwashing occurs when brands make false or misleading claims about their environmental practices. The article provides practical tips for consumers to identify and avoid greenwashing, such as using a fashion brand sustainability watchdog, finding out where clothes are made, looking for the use of environmentally-friendly materials, scanning company websites for sustainability pages, checking for third-party certifications, and asking questions or contacting the company directly.
5. <https://globalmeasure.org/greenwashing/> - Global Measure's article discusses how consumers can be more mindful in identifying greenwashing in the fashion industry. It advises looking beyond imagery and colors, being wary of buzzwords, and checking company policies and activities to ensure they align with sustainability claims. The article also suggests reading sustainability reports with a discerning lens and engaging with smaller fashion brands that are more transparent about their practices. By being vigilant and informed, consumers can make more sustainable choices and support brands that genuinely prioritize the environment.
6. <https://econosa.com/what-is-greenwashing-in-fashion/> - Econosa's article explains greenwashing in the fashion industry and outlines how to spot false sustainability claims by fashion brands. It highlights tactics such as empty promises, selective disclosure, false impressions, and tokenism used by brands to create a false image of sustainability. The article emphasizes the importance of consumers being aware of these tactics to make informed purchasing decisions and support brands that are genuinely committed to sustainable practices.
7. <https://www.nixonpeabody.com/insights/alerts/2023/03/08/greenwashing-litigation-101-a-brand-owners-guide-to-avoiding-the-fashion-police> - Nixon Peabody's article provides a guide for brand owners on avoiding greenwashing and the associated legal risks. It advises against using broad statements about products and practices without providing additional context or explicit disclosures. The article also highlights the importance of being aware of environmental claims in the aggregate, as regulators and consumers increasingly view corporate advertising campaigns as a whole. By exercising diligence and restraint in marketing, brands can minimize the risks associated with greenwashing and maintain consumer trust.