

Areas and ways of greenwashing in Bangladesh: the remedial measures

Md. Mizanur Rahman

Information and Communication Technology Division, Bangladesh

E-mail: rahmanboku@gmail.com

Abstract

In Bangladesh, greenwashing, eye washing and green lies go hand in hand. The study strived to identify the areas and ways where greenwashing occurs very frequently in Bangladesh. Empirical data was used in this study. Based on the respondents' perceptions greenwashing occurs in food, beverage, cosmetics, medicine, brickfield, tourism and transportation sectors very often. The respondents provided policy interventions to control greenwashing. Enacting new laws, regulations and policies is warranted to monitor greenwashing and punish the companies that provide misleading environmental claims. Initiating green audits to evaluate the performances of the companies towards nature conservation is also advocated. Public awareness against misleading advertisements should be increased.

Keywords: Greenwashing, eye washing, green lies, eco-friendly, misleading claims, nature conservation

Introduction

In 1986 an American Environmentalist, Jay Westerveld introduced the term 'greenwashing' in an essay on the 'hotel industry's practice of placing placards in each room promoting reuse of towels ostensibly' to save the environment (Becker-Olsen & Potucek, 2013; Orange & Cohen, 2010). Greenwashing may be defined as the deceptive use of the word green in the business to mislead a perception that the products are eco-friendly. The term is generally used when more money or time is spent on the advertisement of green products rather than spending resources on eco-friendly products (Rahman 2021). This is an activity of changing the name or label of a product to evoke the natural environment or nature -- for example, putting an image of a green field on a bottle containing harmful chemicals. Eye washing, a very similar word is highly used in our media to describe the deceptive actions to mislead the mass people. The term "detoxification" is broadly used when the definition of toxicity for a certain substance or the name of that substance is changed, so that fewer things fall under a particular classification as toxic. Another example is the renaming of sewage sludge to organic fertilizer, despite the presence of many toxic elements like lead, cadmium, arsenic, etc. Auto vehicles cannot do anything good for the environment except less damage than others. But many automakers claim their vehicles as "green", "clean" or "eco-friendly".

The majority of customer perceptions of greenwashing are determined by the green efforts of hotel operators, through means such as green knowledge sharing, green marketing, the disclosure of green information, resource conservation claims and environmental certification. Additionally, customer perceptions of greenwashing determine a variety of customer green behaviours where customer green attitude plays an intervening role (Majeed and Kim, 2023, Rahman 2021a). In contrast, green lies can destroy a company (Berrone, 2016). In Bangladesh, green marketing and greenwashing are the two sides of one coin. Green marketing is the marketing of products that are presumed to be environmentally safe, whereas greenwashing is the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service (Tinne, 2013). Greenwashing is interrelated *with* regulatory guidelines and social responsibility (Khan et al. 2021). Greenwashing is spreading in Bangladesh drastically (Rahman,

2022). Hence, the study aimed to identify the areas and ways where greenwashing occurs very frequently in Bangladesh.

Methodology

Empirical data was used for this study. A focus group discussion was done incorporating the respondents from diverse stakeholders to identify the areas and ways of greenwashing in Bangladesh. A total number of 10 key respondents were interviewed to find out the solutions. Content analysis was done categorically.

Areas and ways of greenwashing in Bangladesh

There are many ways through which different companies or corporations perform greenwashing. Very often the manufacturers advertise eco-friendly products, while the products or core business are inherently polluting or unsustainable. Some companies target advertising and public relations campaigns to exaggerate an environmental achievement to divert attention away from environmental problems. Sometimes different companies advertise or speak about 'green commitment', while they lobby for pending or against the environmental laws.

Food, beverage, medicine and cosmetics

In our country, many companies spend huge money on advertisements of products in the name of 'organic foods', 'herbal medicine', 'herbal cosmetics', 'naturally extracted goods', 'pure foods' 'mineral water', 'eco-products' and so on. They do not hesitate to advertise it ever since as the public's environmental awareness is growing and for public relations strategies as well.

Brickfield

Frequently it is observed that our brick field sector claims that they are manufacturing brick in an eco-friendly manner, albeit it is one of the major environmentally hazardous sectors. They do not follow any environmental guidelines; do not keep an environmental track record or use environmental or green codes (Rahman 2021b, c).

Tourism and travel industry

Tourism which is an innate right of people may be considered as a passport of peace and green. Recently in our country, the term 'ecotourism' has been so much popular. What is advertised as ecotourism is simply conventional tourism enwrapped with a thin veneer of green. Eco-tourism propelled by travel agencies, tour operators, hotels, motels and resorts are a quick and superficially "green" visit within a conventional package. Travel industries use this word for the expansion of tourism markets and lowering of trade barriers. Some run counter to the tenets of sound ecotourism. Many of them are not aware of energy and environmental conservation, water and air quality, recycling, safe management of waste and toxic materials, noise abatement and community involvement (Rahman 2021 d, e). They have no well-trained staff dedicated to strong principles of nature conservation.

Every travel agency should wear the "The Green Bangladesh" sign, which will mean that they are committed to environmental improvement and peaceful tourism. In recent times, there has been a gradual trend for many eco-tourists to be less intellectually curious, socially responsible, environmentally concerned and politically aware than in the past. An increasing number of rich travellers have begun opting for comfort over conservation. Unless and until we all are involved in nature conservation, beautiful destinations may not be here for future generations to enjoy. We should leave only footprints and take only snaps. We should not buy products made from endangered plants or animals, such as ivory, tortoiseshell, animal skins, and feathers.

How to control greenwashing in Bangladesh?

So far, most of the developed countries have made progress in stopping greenwash. There are many positive examples of industry groups cracking down on false environmental claims; especially in Europe. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) of the USA provided guidelines for environmental marketing claims (Luehr, 1991). The FTC has the right to prosecute false and misleading advertisement claims. Australia has modified the Trade Practices Act to punish companies that provide misleading environmental claims (Klintman, 2016). Any guilty organization may face up to 1.1 million dollars in fines. The Norwegian government has forbidden car manufacturers from claiming that their automobiles are environmentally friendly based on other cars manufactured by

other companies (Rong *et al.* 2017). The Canadian Competition Bureau and Standards Association are discouraging companies from making "vague claims" towards their products (Rahman *et al.* 2017). The advertising authority in the UK asked the Malaysian Palm Oil Council to pull misleading television ads that ran on the BBC (Berg, 2022). The ads claimed that palm oil was eco-friendly, and used green images and statements, such as "A gift from nature, a gift for life", "Helping the planet breathe" and "Sustainably produced since 1917."

Now it is the time for Bangladesh to frame new laws, policies and guidelines and to enforce them against environmental marketing claims.

- Making new laws and regulations to monitor greenwashing and punish the companies that provide misleading environmental claims
- Providing a guideline for environmental marketing claims
- Prohibiting the usage of environmentally friendly images on the product which has no environmental impacts
- Presenting an environmental marketing claim in a way that makes clear whether the environmental attribute or benefit being asserted refers to the product, the product's packaging, a service or a portion or component of the product, package or service
- Not presenting an environmental marketing claim in a manner that overstates the environmental attribute or benefit, expressly or by implication
- Avoiding implications of significant environmental benefits if the benefit is negligible
- Presenting a comparative statement of the environmental marketing claims in a manner that makes the basis for the comparison sufficiently clear to avoid consumer deception
- Stopping the frequent use of green colour in the logos of different companies
- Avoiding the use of the word like 'clean' or 'green' when coal is used in manufacturing
- Strictly controlling the claim of "Pure and Natural" diapers or water in packaging
- Creating a green hub for promoting sustainable products
- Initiating green audits to evaluate the performances of the companies towards nature conservation
- Charging money for the use of plastic bags
- Rating environmental claims and measuring greenwashing index

- Making real changes in policies and practices of the companies
- Looking beneath the green veneer and holding corporations accountable, by the media
- Raising voices by the consumers against greenwashing
- Reforming ad standards and corporate codes of conduct

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