



The Trap of Greenwashing

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One of the biggest problems of the present day is the conflict between climate change and sustainability. It necessitates adaptation to practices that require long-term and permanent transformations to combat climate change. Although the effects of climate change are global, it cannot be said that sustainable transformation or transition to a green economy is happening at the same levels in every society or country globally.

The greenwashing problem has recently become a new issue, overtaking the climate change problem. Many businesses and global brands that want to follow circular practices or sustainable policies have begun to get lost in the greenwashing trap. Greenwashing is considered as businesses deceiving consumers and the public with fake and unsustainable products or activities under the name of sustainable practices (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). In this respect, since greenwashing is a fraud and deception, businesses must face some penalties and sanctions (Lopes, Gomes and Trancoso, 2023; He et al., 2022; Du, 2015; Delmas and Burbano, 2011). Accordingly, higher practices of greenwashing influence achievement of SDG-12 and SDG-13 negatively.

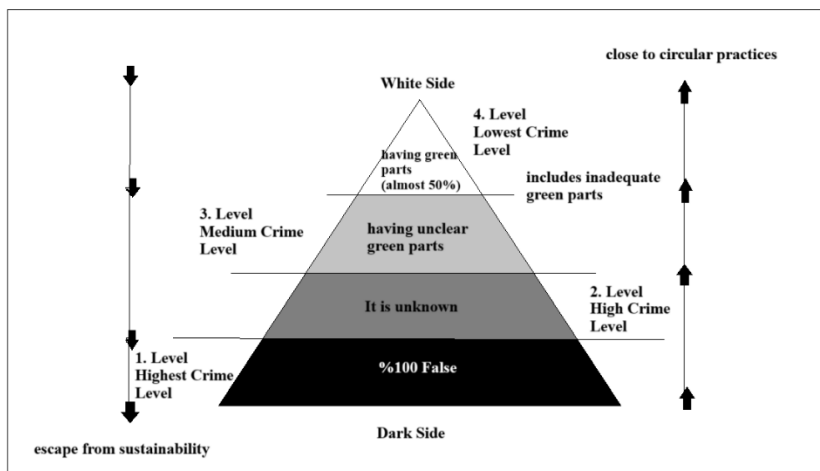
Some circular practices that businesses follow with good intentions turn into a greenwashing illusion when they are announced to the public or during the promotion phase. At this point, I suggest that businesses be subject to a greenwashing rating to both support the slow progress of businesses in their green development and prevent the dark side of greenwashing from growing in the future. It may be more beneficial to conduct a rating with crime-punishment and other practices to continue the sustainable transformation intentions of brands that are drawn into the greenwashing trap. For example, if some businesses have truly sustainable or cyclical practices and policies, but these sustainable practices do not represent 100 percent of their commercial business, indicating this with a degree will protect both the consumer and the producer (Yildirim, 2023).

Figure 1 shows the trap of Greenwashing based on its degree. In the greenwashing rating, it can be thought that there are two main sides: the white and the dark side. Businesses on the dark side mislead and deceive the public and consumers with some vague and fake practices that they design under the name of sustainable practices. Businesses on the white side, on the other hand, have sustainable



practices, but they experience problems with the ecological features of these practices being low or insufficient in percentage.

Figure 1: Greenwashing ranking



Source: created by the author

When businesses are accused of greenwashing, their good practices are put on the back burner, consumer confidence in green transformation is shaken, and the fact that greenwashing is not a crime in some countries allows these brands to do greenwashing freely there (Yildirim, 2024). Giving green ratings to businesses because of greenwashing rating/scaling will eliminate the dark side of greenwashing. The conflict between businesses, consumers and environmentalists can be eliminated with greenwashing rating/scaling. Businesses can continue their green transition by adopting more accurate circular practices. It was not a realistic goal to expect the traditional economy to transform globally very quickly.

A brand or business has adopted some circular practices in line with the slow sustainable transition and produces products with one or more sustainable features. However, emphasizing and presenting these sustainability features too much in the promotion level leads to some uncertainties. On the other hand, it is seen that some brands or businesses engage in dark side greenwashing practices. For example, when a brand or business promotes a feature or situation that it has as circular practices without directly aiming for sustainability, it is a very dark and serious greenwashing. It is thought greenwashing rating system be established to support businesses in their transition from a traditional economy to a green economy and to encourage consumers to have more conscious purchasing behavior. In this way, businesses can be positively motivated by making a distinction between those on the dark side and those on the white side, and businesses aiming for a green transition can be positively motivated. Consumers can also make better choices by realizing how sustainable the products they



purchase are. In the long term, businesses continue their green transformation enthusiasm and maintain social, economic and environmental balance. Sustainability rating and different crime and penalty practices that are categorized as greenwashing can create a more globally applicable legal system. Because there is still no specific charge and penalty for greenwashing in many countries. A rating and penalty system for greenwashing will be more useful for reducing the inequality between societies and countries.

When greenwashing is considered as a crime and punishment, distinguishing those on the dark side from those on the white side can have a more positive effect on businesses that are in the slow transition process to sustainability. For brands and businesses that have fallen to the dark side and are using their sustainability image maliciously, facing a concrete penalty system within a global framework could yield beneficial results in the fight against greenwashing. As a result,

- The fight against greenwashing can ensure that sustainable practices of businesses and brands are also implemented globally in a standardized manner.
- Greenwashing practices can be graded according to certain criteria and brands and businesses can face different penalties according to the white and dark sides, which can yield more positive results,
- Penalties that brands and businesses found to be on the dark side will face due to greenwashing should be global,
- Different practices can be applied to seek good faith in accusing brands and businesses found to be on the white side of greenwashing.
- Giving ecological ratings to businesses according to the percentages of sustainable practices to support brands and businesses serving the mass market during the slow transition to the green economy,
- Expressing green or sustainability rates and percentages more clearly on the labels and packaging of businesses or brands, it can keep consumers and the public away from false perceptions and attitudes about sustainability and support the sustainable transition more positively.

Giving solutions to avoid or end greenwashing will support achieving SDG-12 and SDG-13 positively in the medium term as the purpose of MOST Programme, 2022-2029.

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