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Defining Greenwash

green*wash: (n) Disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image. Derivatives greenwashing (n). Origin from green on the pattern of whitewash. *The Tenth Edition of the Concise Oxford English Dictionary*

green*wash: (gr~ēn-wôsh) -washers, -washing, -washed 1.) The phenomenon of socially and environmentally destructive corporations attempting to preserve and expand their markets by posing as friends of the environment and leaders in the struggle to eradicate poverty. 2) Environmental **whitewash**. 3) Any attempt to **brain-wash** consumers or policy makers into believing polluting mega-corporations are the key to environmentally sound sustainable development 4) **Hogwash**. *CorpWatch Definition*

Greenwash History

The 1960s and 1970s

- As the contemporary environmental movement built momentum in the mid-to-late 1960s, newly greened corporate images flooded the airwaves, newspapers and magazines. This initial wave of greenwash was labeled by former Madison Avenue advertising executive Jerry Mander as “ecopornography.”
- In the year 1969 alone, public utilities spent more than \$300 million on advertising—more than eight times what they spent on the anti-pollution research they were touting in their ads.

The 1980s and 1990s

- Greenwash advertisements became even more numerous and more sophisticated in the 1970s and 1980s, reaching new heights in 1990 on the 20th anniversary of Earth Day.
- One-fourth of all new household products that came on to the market in the US around the time of “Earth Day 20” advertised themselves as “recyclable,” “biodegradable,” “ozone friendly,” or “compostable.”
- In the early 1990s, one poll found that seventy-seven percent of Americans said that a corporation’s environmental reputation affected what they bought.
- In 1985 Chevron launched its “People Do” advertisements aimed at a “hostile audience” of “societally conscious” people.
- Still going strong more than fifteen years later, the “People Do” series is a textbook case of successful greenwashing. Polls Chevron conducted in California two years after the campaign showed that it had become the oil corporation people trusted most to protect the environment.
- Chevron’s greenwash also paid off at the gas pump. Among those who saw the commercials, Chevron sales increased by 10 percent, while among a target audience of the potentially antagonistic socially concerned types, sales jumped by 22 percent.

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- Greenwash goes global at the 1992 UN Conference in Rio when Secretary General Maurice Strong created an Eco-Fund to finance the event. The Eco-Fund franchised rights to the Earth Summit logo to the likes of ARCO, ICI, and Mitsubishi group member Asahi Glass.

21st Century Greenwash

- BP, the world's second largest oil company and one of the world's largest corporations, advertised its new identity as a leader in moving the world "Beyond Petroleum." It touted its \$45 million purchase of the largest Solarex solar energy corporation. But BP will spend \$5 billion over five years for oil exploration in Alaska alone.
- Shell, the world's third largest oil company, continues its clever but misleading ad series "Profits or Principles" which touts Shell's commitment to renewable energy sources and features photos of lush green forests. But Shell spends a miniscule 0.6% of its annual investments on renewables. In true greenwash fashion, Shell's actions do not match its words.
- For Earth Day 2000, Ford Motor Company announced that all corporate brand advertising will have an environmental theme. It expects to spend as much on this greenwashing as it does to roll out a new line of cars, such as the global warming gas guzzler Ford Excursion.
- Monsanto, Dow, Dupont, Novartis, Zeneca, BASF and Aventis launched the "Council for Biotechnology Information," in April 2000. The Council will spend up to \$250 million over 3–5 years to win public approval for genetically engineered foods under the slogan "Good Ideas Are Growing."

Other Forms of Greenwash

Bluewash

"Bluewash" refers to corporations that wrap themselves in the blue flag of the United Nations in order to associate themselves with UN themes of human rights, labor rights and environmental protection. Even companies with practices antithetical to UN values, such as Nike, Nestle, and Shell, have attempted to bluewash their image. Bluewash is typically associated with attempts by "corporate humanitarians" to weaken UN agreements, in favor of voluntary, toothless codes of conduct regarding social and environmental issues.

Sweatwash

With child labor and sweatshop abuses at the fore of social issues, it is natural that companies notorious for use of sweatshop labor try to divert attention from their factories' practices. Examples include Nike's school curriculum about downcycling of sneakers, and Reebok's Human Rights Awards.

Deep Greenwash

Behind the green PR is a deeper corporate political strategy: to get the world's governments to allow corporations to police themselves through voluntary codes of conduct, win-win partnerships and best practices learning models, rather than binding legislation and regulation. We call the corporate strategy of weakening national and international environmental agreements while promoting voluntary measures *Deep Greenwash*. Deep Greenwash may occur behind the scenes or in coordination with public forms of greenwash such as environmental image advertising.