

## In-Depth Analysis of Advertising Mistakes

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### Abstract

*The study aimed to describe the types of errors in the subject matter as well as describe advertisements that contain elements of greenwashing and hopes to provide a basis for further research in this area. Qualitative descriptive research methods were used to analyze data through psychological approach, including reading, note-taking and analysis techniques. Data collection techniques were carried out using triangulation. The data were analyzed in qualitative descriptive in which the research results emphasized meaning rather than generalization. The object of research in this study was advertising that contains elements of greenwashing of fast fashion brands. The data were analyzed by using semiotic approach. The research results show that the fast fashion brand H&M is involved in greenwashing practices that violate international legal principles such as the precautionary principle and the precautionary principle. It can be seen from excessive claims, hidden information, and the creation of an exaggerated brand image. Their website is not completely accurate, as some fabrics cannot be recycled. The solution used, a mixture of cotton and polyester that makes up 90% of clothing, is difficult to recycle because the fibers are so dense. This program produces chemical waste that needs to be treated.*

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, Movie Script, Anxiety, Defense Mechanisms



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This conceptual article aims to understand the significant impact of advertising in our lives today. Advertising, especially on social media, plays a crucial role in shaping our views on various products. According to Changizi, visual exposure effects can be reinforced even without conscious recognition (Mishra, 2019). Social media is now an integral part of our interconnected social landscape, influencing various aspects of personal and public life.

Products claiming that tree planting will improve the environment must be critically evaluated. While reforestation can increase carbon emissions due to human activities, it is important to maintain balanced tree canopy cover (Gramling, 2021). Business campaigns often attract people from different social classes, necessitating carbon-producing transportation.

The growing business sector encourages organizations to address consumer concerns and attract customers, leading to negative environmental impacts, such as water and land pollution, due to increased demand (Setiawan & Yosephani, 2022). Environmental sustainability has become a major global issue (Huang et al. 2014). Many brands use eco-friendly or cruelty-free claims as marketing strategies to boost sales, though these claims can sometimes be misleading.

Greenwashing, a term recognized since the mid-1980s, refers to making exaggerated or unsubstantiated claims about a product's environmental benefits to attract market share (Setiawan et al. 2022). It involves conveying false impressions about a company's products being environmentally friendly or masking their involvement in environmentally harmful practices.

An example of greenwashing is seen in a multinational fast fashion company that launched a 'green' clothing line in 2019, claiming to use organic cotton and recyclable polyester. However, the company did not provide clear details about the recycling process or carbon footprint of the production. The fast fashion industry, which produces about 1 billion products annually and contributes 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, often uses recycling services to encourage further purchases, contributing to environmental damage.

This research highlights the need for improvement in advertising, particularly regarding products claiming to be environmentally friendly, based on advertising reviews and relevant theories.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter, the writer would explain previous studies which have supported this research. There is also an explanation of the theoretical descriptions. In conducting this research. Several previous studies discussed Advertising mistakes.

### **2.1 Previous Studies**

Previous research is the researcher's attempt to find comparisons and then to find new inspiration for further research. In addition, previous studies help research in positioning the research and showing the originality of the research. Some previous research sources used in this research include:

First, research with the title “Concepts and forms of greenwashing: A systematic review” made by Netto et al. (2020). The aggravation of environmental problems has led companies to seek the development and commercialization of green products. Some companies mislead their stakeholders through a phenomenon called greenwashing. This paper aims to explore the phenomenon of greenwashing through a systematic literature review in search of its main concepts and typologies in the past 10 years. This research has followed the proceedings of a systematic review of the literature, based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). We identified a major classification of greenwashing: firm level executional, firm-level claim, product- level executional, and product level claim. It was possible to highlight and catalog the types of the phenomenon. A structure based on such type has been observed in the literature.

Second, research with the title “Greenwashing and sustainable fashion industry” (Adamkiewicz et al., 2022). The fashion industry is now in the eye of the storm for what concerns sustainability because of the enormous impact that such a business area has on the environment. To exploit the full potential for circular economy implementation, the fashion industry requires urgent changes adapting much more conscientious business practices, driving consumers to change their perceptions and behaviors toward circular products and services. The renunciation of greenwashing practices and the use of strategy focused on regaining consumer's trust will increase the positive sentiment toward the fashion brands. This work demonstrates to what extent greenwashing may jeopardize the fashion industry in addressing challenges related to the implementation of more sustainable circular economy in the context of designing with intention of recycle, reduction of by-products, lower energy consumption, and wise purchase habits.

And Last, research with the title “Greenwashing: The darker side of CSR” (Aggarwal & Kadyan, 2014). Greenwashing is a practice followed by organisations in which unsubstantiated

or misleading claims are made of the environmental and social attributes of a product, service or the company as a brand. Greenwashing practise is adopted to make the company look more environment-friendly than it actually is, by spending more money, time and efforts on marketing its products as “green” rather than actually minimizing its adverse impact on the environment. This paper studies the green marketing practices of certain selected companies belonging to four sectors namely Automobile, Electronics, Food and beverages and personal care through analysis of their advertisements, company websites and sustainability reports. The main objective of the paper is to identify the extent of green washing done by the companies and to rate their environmental claims on the weighted scale of 1 to 5. Further this paper correlates the greenwashing score with the overall CSR score, along with cross sector analysis of their greenwashing scores. The paper finds that even the companies with a high overall CSR score are involved in some form of greenwashing practices. The authors also suggest ways and means for companies to avoid greenwashing and for consumers to spot it.

## 2.2 Related Theories

Semiotics, as studied by Charles Sanders Peirce, explores how human thought patterns and understanding develop through signs. It is a key aspect of communication theory that examines how signs represent objects, ideas, and feelings. According to Peirce, semiotics is rooted in logic, which deals with reasoning through signs. Signs, including linguistic ones, play a crucial role in communication by allowing individuals to think, relate to others, and interpret the world around them. Semiotics focuses on the systems, rules, and conventions that give meaning to signs and how cultural codes influence the interpretation of these signs (Littlejohn, 2009).

Advertising is a paid, non-personal form of communication aimed at promoting ideas, goods, or services by identified sponsors (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Voyer & Ranaweera, 2014; Belch & Belch, 2019). It plays a crucial role in driving sales by providing information, reminders, added value, and persuasion (Priansa, 2017). Advertising serves various purposes, including building a company's image, promoting specific brands, disseminating information about sales or events, and suggesting specific actions (Manullang & Hutabarat, 2016).

Greenwashing refers to deceptive practices by companies that portray themselves as environmentally friendly without genuinely engaging in sustainable practices. First coined by Westerveld in 1986, the term describes companies that invest in advertising to appear eco-friendly while not making substantive environmental improvements (Becker-Olsen & Potucek, 2013). Greenwashing can result from stakeholder pressures and has several negative impacts, including consumer skepticism and confusion (Nguyen et al. 2019; Chen & Chang, 2012a), as well as detrimental effects on a company's financial performance (Walker & Wan, 2012).

Terra Choice identifies seven “sins” of greenwashing: the hidden trade-off, no proof, vagueness, irrelevance, lesser of two evils, fibbing, and worshipping false labels (D'Alessandro, 2014). These sins involve misleading claims about environmental benefits, lack of clear proof, and the use of false or misleading labels. Studies show that nearly 95% of products have engaged in at least one form of greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Greenwashing often involves selective disclosure of positive information while omitting negative aspects, creating a misleadingly positive image of a company's environmental performance (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011; Rahman et al., 2015; Seele & Gatti, 2015).

### 3. METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach in which focuses on producing descriptive data through written or spoken words and observable behavior. The approach prioritizes the research process over outcomes, providing a detailed exploration of individuals, groups, or events (Sugiyono, 2016). This method allows for an in-depth description and interpretation of the subject matter.

The object of this research is advertisements from fast fashion brands that exhibit elements of greenwashing. Data collection involves two main techniques: primary data gathered from visual images with symbolic, indexical, and iconic elements, and secondary data obtained through library research. This secondary data helps support and refine the theoretical framework related to semiotics.

Data analysis through semiotic analysis techniques, which involve interpreting signs based on Saussure's framework of signifier and signified. This approach is instrumental in examining the over claimed environmental benefits in fast fashion advertisements.

### 4. RESULTS

Based on the objectives of this study, the writer divided the data into two part as follows:

#### 4.1 Types of Errors in H&M Advertisements

H&M's advertisements illustrate several misleading practices. The Conscious Choice line, while marketed as environmentally friendly, includes products made from 100% polyester, a material known for its environmental harm due to non- biodegradability and microplastic pollution. This misrepresentation highlights a significant disparity between H&M's marketing claims and the actual environmental impact of their products.



**Figure 1. Inappropriate Material Claims**

Source: <https://www.bigissue-com>

The “Loop Island” campaign, despite its innovative use of the Animal Crossing video game platform, is another example. While visually engaging, it falls short of addressing the broader environmental issues associated with H&M's business model. This campaign represents a marketing effort that, while creative, does not contribute meaningfully to solving the sustainability challenges faced by the fashion industry.



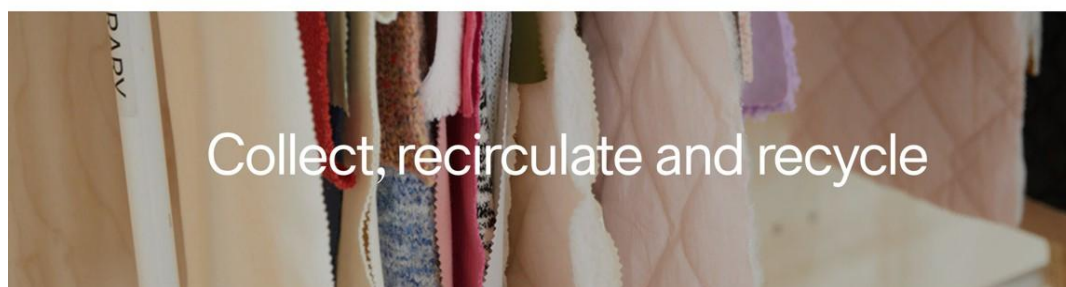
**Figure 2.** “Loop Island” Campaign

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNL4Zj8ZqZs>

H&M’s claim that all items can be recycled is another misleading statement. The reality is that only a small fraction of clothing is effectively recycled, with many items repurposed for resale rather than processed for actual recycling. This exaggeration of recycling capabilities serves to improve H&M’s public image without addressing the systemic issues in their production processes.

H&M Group

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**Figure 3.** H&M motto

Source: <https://hmgroupp.com>

The H&M Group’s motto claims to address fast fashion’s growth by focusing on recycling blended fabrics like cotton-polyester, which are notoriously difficult to process due to tightly wound fibers. Although H&M promotes the recycling of all products, in reality, only a small fraction is effectively recycled, and many items are either resold as second-hand or not accepted at all locations. The use of “recycle” in their messaging can be misleading, as it oversimplifies the challenges of recycling and the limitations of current technology. With the fashion industry contributing 8- 10% of global carbon emissions and significant wastewater, H&M’s recycling claims may serve more to enhance their image rather than address the deeper environmental issues caused by fast fashion.

## 4.2 Analyze Advertisements that Contain Elements of Greenwashing

The analysis of H&M’s advertisements reveals multiple greenwashing tactics: Sin of Hidden Trade-Off: H&M promotes specific sustainable attributes, such as the use of recycled materials, but does not address the broader environmental impact of their overall production. For instance, while some products may use recycled polyester, the company does not

adequately address the environmental impact of the large-scale production and disposal of their clothing.

**Sin of No Proof:** Many of H&M's environmental claims lack detailed, verifiable evidence. The marketing messages often tout sustainability but fail to provide transparent data or third-party certification that validates these claims. This lack of proof makes it challenging for consumers to verify the company's true environmental impact.

**Sin of Vagueness:** H&M frequently uses broad, undefined terms like "eco- friendly" or "sustainable" without providing specific details about what these terms mean. For example, labels claiming "all natural" may not specify whether the materials used are actually environmentally benign, leading to consumer confusion and misinformed decisions.

**Sin of Irrelevance:** The focus on minor improvements, such as eco-friendly packaging, diverts attention from more significant environmental issues associated with the company's products. While these initiatives are steps in the right direction, they do not address the fundamental problems of overproduction and the environmental impact of fast fashion.

**Sin of the Lesser of Two Evils:** H&M's advertisements may highlight certain products as being more sustainable compared to others, yet these products may still contribute to overall environmental damage. This tactic creates a misleading impression of progress while the company's broader practices remain unsustainable.

**Sin of Fibbing:** Some advertisements include claims that are outright false or misleading. For example, claiming that products are fully recyclable when in reality

only a small percentage is effectively recycled misleads consumers about the true environmental benefits of H&M's offerings.

**Sin of Worshiping False Labels:** The use of environmental certification imagery that lacks genuine third-party verification is a common tactic. By displaying symbols or labels that suggest independent validation, H&M creates a false impression of credibility and commitment to sustainability.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

The writer found 30 data of 2 problem in the Best Day Ever novel by Kaira Rouda contained. Data were discussed below:

### **5.1 Types of Errors in H&M Advertisements**

H&M, founded in 1947, is a major global fashion retailer operating in 62 countries, offering a wide range of affordable and trendy fashion products for all demographics. Known for its low-priced yet high-quality clothing, H&M capitalizes on fast fashion by frequently updating its product lines to reflect current trends. Despite its appeal, the company's business model is heavily criticized for contributing to environmental degradation due to the rapid production cycles and substantial waste generated.

The term "fast fashion" refers to the quick turnover of fashion trends and the production of inexpensive, mass-produced clothing, which demands significant energy and natural resources. This unsustainable model leads to considerable environmental impact, including increased waste and pollution. In response, some brands, including H&M, claim to be addressing these issues through environmentally friendly practices, but often these claims are criticized as greenwashing deceptive marketing strategies that exaggerate or obscure the true environmental impact of their products.

Greenwashing practices are evident in H&M's marketing strategies. For example, their Conscious Collection, which is promoted as using sustainable materials like organic cotton and recycled polyester, was found to contain harmful synthetic ingredients. The company has also engaged in controversial promotions, such as using a sustainability-themed video game island and celebrity endorsements, which, while eye-catching, do little to address the fundamental environmental issues associated with their production practices.

H&M's recycling efforts also face scrutiny. Their motto promotes a commitment to recycling, but in reality, the company struggles with the challenge of recycling blended fabrics, such as cotton-polyester blends, which are difficult to process. The recycling program is limited in scope, and many stores do not accept used items from consumers, contradicting the company's claims of comprehensive recyclability. Additionally, the focus on recycling does not mitigate the extensive production of new clothing, which continues to drive environmental harm.

Overall, while H&M presents itself as a leader in sustainable fashion, its practices are seen as insufficient given the scale of its environmental impact. The fashion industry remains a major contributor to global carbon emissions and wastewater, and despite marketing claims, substantial changes to business models are necessary to address these critical issues effectively.

## **5.2 Analyze Advertisements that Contain Elements of Greenwashing**

Deceptive claims are prevalent in environmental advertising and can be broadly categorized into two types: false claims and unclear claims. False claims are those that are objectively inaccurate, such as advertisements that misrepresent the

environmental benefits of a product. Unclear claims, on the other hand, involve vague or ambiguous statements that mislead consumers by failing to provide clear or specific information about the product's environmental attributes. These deceptive practices are aligned with Kangun, Carlson, and Grove's (1991) typology, which identifies false claims as those that either fabricate or distort facts, and unclear claims as those that use overly broad or nonspecific language to obscure the truth.

Terra Choice identifies seven distinct forms of greenwashing, including the sin of hidden trade-offs, lack of proof, vagueness, irrelevance, lesser of two evils, fibbing, and worshipping false labels. The "sin of hidden trade-off" involves promoting a product's eco-friendly aspects while ignoring significant negative environmental impacts, such as energy use during production. The "sin of no proof" is characterized by making environmental claims without providing verifiable evidence, and the "sin of vagueness" involves using broad, undefined terms like "all natural" that can mislead consumers about the actual environmental benefits.

The issue of greenwashing is particularly acute in the fashion industry, where many brands make exaggerated claims about their sustainability efforts. For instance, companies often highlight minor eco-friendly initiatives, such as using recycled materials or energy-efficient lighting, without addressing more substantial issues like comprehensive supply chain sustainability or fair labor practices. Terra Choice's research reveals that nearly 95% of products exhibit at least one type of greenwashing, underscoring the pervasiveness of deceptive environmental marketing. Greenwashing tactics can include misleading visual and verbal claims that create a false impression of environmental responsibility. Research shows that while nature-themed imagery in advertisements can enhance consumer perceptions of a brand's ecological image, these visual elements often mask the lack of substantive environmental

improvements. As a result, consumers may develop more favorable attitudes toward brands that engage in greenwashing, even though these brands may not be genuinely committed to sustainable practices.

According to Thunberg, some companies engage in greenwashing by promoting superficial initiatives, such as eco-friendly packaging or energy-efficient office lighting, without making broader, more impactful changes to their business practices. These efforts, while potentially beneficial, are often insufficient to address the critical environmental and ethical issues associated with the fashion industry, such as reducing overall carbon emissions and ensuring fair wages for workers.

To effectively detect and address greenwashing, it is important to critically evaluate brands' environmental claims and practices. Brands that focus on minor improvements or set easily achievable goals may be attempting to divert attention from more significant issues. True sustainability requires comprehensive changes to business models and supply chains, rather than merely adopting superficial or misleading marketing strategies.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

The research show that the fast fashion brand H&M has carried out greenwashing practices which violate international legal principles such as the precautionary principle and the principle of preventive action. The evidenced by exaggerated claims, obscured information, and the creation of an exaggerated brand image. One of them is the motto Collect, recirculate and recycle on the website, which in reality means that some fabrics cannot be recycled so a solution was created, namely cotton mixed with polyester which makes up 90% of clothing but is notoriously difficult to recycle because the fibers are very tightly wound. It has a negative impact, namely that the program has a stream of chemical waste that must be handled as well. The H&M brand need to be more transparent and educate consumers regarding sustainability. The consumers are also expected to be more careful in choosing a product, for companies to be more honest and forward. The hope for next researcher to make deep research about the advertisement signs.

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