

# THE MIRAGE OF 'GREEN-SHEEN'

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Many of us are well aware of the the concept of mirage in optics. A mirage is a representation of something that appears to be true or real but is actually false or unreal. Green Sheen or Greenwashing is one such environmental jargon mirages.

This frequently overused marketing ploy works against genuine initiatives to develop sustainable products and methods. The UNDP Climate Dictionary defines Greenwashing as "a marketing exercise where a company makes misleading claims about their positive environmental impact or the sustainability of their products and services to persuade consumers that they are acting on climate change." Greenwashing may occasionally occur accidentally due to ignorance of environmental issues. It can also be done on purpose as a public relations and marketing strategy, capitalising on popular support for environmental regulations for financial gain. The major issue of GREEN-SHEEN is that it has the potential to reduce public support for sustainability and let harmful environmental effects persist unchecked.

Long before New York-based environmentalist Jay Westerveld first used the phrase "GREENWASHING" in the 1980s. With the launch of the Keep America Beautiful Campaign in 1953, beverage manufacturers focused on cultivating the "Green Image" of the sector through ads rather than "doing the actual job" by improving their brewery practices.



This was the very beginning of the unethical practice of "green sheening." Green sheen is ever-pervasive in almost all the sectors from fashion, food, tourism & hospitality to automobile and even political campaigns

In terms of numbers, there is evidence that greenwashing is a serious issue in India. In a poll conducted by the market research company YouGov, 69% of Indian customers stated they were concerned about greenwashing and 71% said they had heard of it. In addition, according to a research by the consulting firm Accenture, only 29% of Indian customers believe that businesses which make environmental promises are telling the truth. The other side of the picture is that 79% of the green promises made in advertising in India were false or inflated, according to a different study by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI).

## The Popularising culture of Green-Sheen

Green-sheening aids businesses in portraying a favourable brand image by claiming to support a deserving cause in the global era where governments and international organisations are attempting to achieve the SDGs through environmentally sensitive policies and programs.

Services that are greenwashed, not environmentally friendly, and not sustainable take use of a good cause to hide the deceit. Consumers in India are willing to buy things that are actually environmentally beneficial, according to survey by Bain & Company, at least 60% of Indian consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable products, and 52% of Indian urban consumers anticipate increasing their expenditure on environmentally friendly companies over the next three years. Additional research indicates that consumers are less likely to detect greenwashing when they perceive a company or brand to be trustworthy. Eventually, this is easily exploited by the already well established brands and businesses and further complexes the pressing problem. Greenwashing has negative effects on more than just customers. This ad gimmick undermine the reliability of the goods and services offered by businesses making the real efforts. They may be the sole cause of customers being unable to make ecologically responsible selections without worrying about being taken advantage of.

## The famous Food industry greenwash:

In almost all its restaurants in Europe, McDonald's switched from a red-yellow to a green-yellow logo in 2009. Later, a spokesperson for the company said the modification was made "to clarify their responsibility for the preservation of natural resources." McDonald's was charged with greenwashing in October 2021 for promising to achieve net-zero emissions by the year 2050 Starbucks released a lid with a built-in drinking straw in 2018 in response to growing calls to prohibit plastic straws. Despite the lid's branding as compostable, it actually contained more plastic by weight than the old straw and lid combined. It is crucial to remember that compostable straws and lids must be separated from other plastics by adequate waste collection systems and then sent to suitable industrial composting facilities.



Left: McDonald's red-yellow logo. Right: McDonald's green-yellow logo. Source: myshadeofgreen.com



Left: Starbucks old plastic cup with plastic lid and straw. Right: Starbucks new plastic Sippy cup with plastic lid. Source: Dailymail.co.uk

## How to spot the gimmick?

Although as more and more individuals become interested in adopting greener lifestyles, sustainable and environment-friendly products, they aren't routinely reviewing the bogus claims on products they might be utilizing on a daily basis. When it comes to greenwashing, unfortunately it can be pretty difficult to spot (and avoid) since sustainability is quite a complex topic. However there are few simple ways to ensure that you avoid getting trapped by exaggerating false claims.

## False Labels

It is relatively simple to utilise a fake green label and decorate things with a logo or image to give them a sustainable appearance.

Many businesses might use unjustified labels like "green," "natural," and "eco-friendly" Since mindful customers are more inclined to choose services with such labels, these labels are extremely beneficial to these businesses. Simply put, stay away from services with such ambiguous descriptions and scant supporting evidence. One of the most popular types of greenwashing is this because consumers readily believe such claims. So search for strong evidence and reliable certifications to support these claims.

## Buzzwords Over-usage

Green is the new black. Green buzzwords like "eco-friendly," "natural," "sustainable," "green," "local resources," and "recyclable" are used to imply that a company cares about the environment. But there is no need for support because these words are simple to utilise. For example, it's not necessary to interpret a plant or green colours in commercials. Occasionally, businesses will utilise images of individuals planting trees or the recycling logo but these actions never truly take place. The majority of people are susceptible to these kinds of visuals and will use the services in accordance with untrue assumptions. Make an effort on your end to check the company's website in order to find more support behind their claims.

## No Proof. Only Claims

Can the claims be proven through actual numbers, figures and data? Evidence of green practices and sustainability claims must be made available to customers via the company's website on a regular basis. With appropriate data, a legitimate firm will have no issue showing its authenticity. To distinguish between greenwashing and sustainability, we as consumers must carefully scrutinise marketing statements to see if there is enough data to back these claims. Transparency is essential for consumers to understand whether all products are environmentally ethical.

Data provides tangible evidence of progress toward sustainability claims. It will also give traceability and demonstrate genuine efforts undertaken to reduce environmental impacts.

## Conclusion

According to a study conducted by the international marketing firm TerraChoice, the market for environmentally friendly goods has grown by 73 percent over the past five to seven years. This opens the door for ESG governance, which can help the company to adhere to and have proof of reliable procedures so they can make correct public statements and claims about being "green" or "sustainable" in terms of their products and services. ESG credentials are scrutinised by authorities, investors, clients, and other stakeholders. In order to minimise complaints and enforcement action, notably regulatory investigation, lawsuits, and the negative publicity that follows it. Firms can take proactive measures to reduce the likelihood of accusations of greenwashing. India currently lacks specific laws that prohibit greenwashing. The Consumer Protection Act 2019 is the main piece of legislation that regulates false advertising. It defends customers against deceptive advertising and other unfair business practices. Additionally, the Advertising Standards Council of India, a self-regulatory organisation that serves as the de facto authority on advertising in India, has released a voluntary code that establishes standards for advertising in a variety of industries. Despite this, regulations specific to green-sheening are necessary to bring about significant changes when it comes to implementing sustainability in its actual sense.

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