**Greenwashing: The Eco-Friendly Lie We Keep Buying**

In an era where environmental awareness is at an all-time high, claims of sustainability are becoming a common marketing tactic. Whether it’s plastic bottles or cleaning supplies, companies seem eager to boast about their sustainability efforts. But just *how* true are these claims and how often do they mask the reality of their unsustainable practices? In society, we as consumers are presented with a contradiction: products promoted as environmentally friendly, yet their real-word impact tells a different narrative. This horror is known as [greenwashing](https://enveurope.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s12302-020-0300-3), a misleading marketing tactic that makes products appear more eco-conscious than they truly are.

Plastic waste, especially in landfills or oceans, can remain intact for hundreds of years and as a result, today’s environmentalists are constantly calling for increased sustainability. In response to this, many companies have made efforts to ensure their products are more eco-friendly. Take [Bio-D](https://biod.co.uk/about-us/), a prominent player in the UK’s ethical cleaning industry, renowned for its dedication to creating products safe for both people and the planet. With their packaging being made from recycled materials and being fully recyclable, this company is committed to doing their part to protect our planet. However, albeit some brands leading by example, others abuse consumer’s trust and fall into the trap of greenwashing. You’d think companies would avoid such deception, but unfortunately this is far from the reality.

**Nestlé: A Case Study in Greenwashing**

Nestlé is a prime example of Greenwashing at work. In response to growing concerns about environmental impact of plastic waste, Nestlé launched a full-page advertisement in the Globe and Mail, labelling its bottled water as a ‘eco-friendly choice’, claiming it to be “the most environmentally responsible consumer product in the world” (O’Handley,M., 2019). Yes, you read that right- Nestlé said *bottled water* was the most eco-friendly thing on the planet. Naturally, these bold claims sparked a [coalition of environmental groups](https://www.watercanada.net/groups-challenge-nestles-bottled-water-greenwashing/#:~:text=The%20complaint%20relates%20to%20a,and%2C%20%E2%80%9CNestl%C3%A9%20Pure%20Life%20is) (Food and Water Watch, 2009), including Friends of the Earth Canada and Ecojustice, who argued that Nestlé’s portrayal of bottled water as eco-friendly lacked substantial evidence and was misleading, constituting towards greenwashing .

Fast forward to 2020, and Nestlé vowed to make [100% of their packaging reusable or recyclable by 2025](https://www.nestle.com/media/pressreleases/allpressreleases/nestle-sustainable-packaging-transformation-journey), stating It’s part of their “path towards zero environmental impact”. While this seemed like a nearing end to plastic waste, it was in fact the opposite. Sure, a “path” sparks thoughts of progress and commitment, but they forgot their omission of the fact they simply burn plastic, releasing harmful toxins into the air and risking both environmental and human health. So, yes, they are on a “path”, but it’s not a sustainable one. It’s more like a detour.

Iin 2023, Nestlé altered its language again, from making a pledge to use ‘recyclable’ plastic to using plastic that’s [“designed for” recycling](https://www.nestle.co.uk/en-gb/stories/progress-packaging-plastics#:~:text=As%20our%202022%20Creating%20Shared%20Value%20and%20Sustainability,our%20plastic%20packaging%20is%20now%20designed%20for%20recycling). Sounds similar right? Wrong. This slight alteration keeps the positive association of recyclability but adds a layer of ambiguity and, unlike their high-profile 2020 pledge, was kept pretty quiet, further illustrating how corporations can easily mask their harmful practices as progress.

**Coca-Cola: Their part in Greenwashing**

To much disappointment, Nestlé isn’t alone in its greenwashing efforts. Unfortunately, Coca-Cola is another prime example of a company crafting their language in a tactful way to create a misleading impression of sustainability. Their ‘A Bottle Made to Be Remade” campaign suggests an ongoing, harmless loop of recyclability and reusability, diverting attention from the reality that plastic bottles remain in the environment for hundreds of years. As part of the campaign, they released the *PlantBottle,* marketed as being made fromplant-based materials which as a result, should technically be more sustainable due to it being recyclable.

But before you get too excited, I’ve got to burst that bubble for you.

In reality, only 30% is plant-based material meaning the majority is still *made* from the same plastic (PET) as regular bottles and therefore, *behaves* like traditional plastic and is still limited by the same challenges. A plastic bottle, even when made with plant-based components, can take hundreds of years to break down and what’s worse, is most of these don’t get recycled properly and end up in landfills or the ocean, where they contribute to pollution. Coca-Cola has created a false connection between the word “plant” and the idea of biodegradability to deceive consumers into thinking they’re purchasing a more sustainable product to aid the environmental crisis when, in fact, they are not.

Coca-Cola also promotes its “World Without Waste” initiative, a phrase that depicts a cleaner and plastic-free planet. But while they pledge to collect and recycle every bottle they sell by 2030, they continue to produce [over 3 million tonnes of plastic packaging annually.](https://www.forbes.com/sites/heatherfarmbrough/2019/03/15/coca-cola-reveals-it-produces-3m-tonnes-of-plastic-packaging-a-year-in-ground-breaking-report/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) This promise? All spin. The gap between their promises and their actions underscores the hollow nature of these claims- another greenwashing tactic designed to improve the company’s image while maintaining existing practices.

**Greenwashing: When “Eco-Friendly” Is Just a Filter**

Slapping on a leafy label on a plastic bottle doesn’t make it sustainable, it just makes it marketable. Brands know we care about the plant and hence, are cashing in with vague claims that don’t stand up to scrutiny. This isn’t eco-consciousness, it’s eco-theatre.

Greenwashing convinces us progress is happening, while the real environmental issues are brushed under a recycled rug. When the entire system needs rethinking, swapping one material or adding a buzzword doesn’t cut it.

**So, what can you do?**

Get curious and think beyond the buzzwords. If a company can’t definitively explain how its efforts are making a positive environmental impact, it probably isn’t. Real sustainability is more than a trend or vibe- it’s evidence, accountability and long- term change.

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