

GREENWASHING IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABLE CORPORATE PRACTICES



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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of Greenwashing has gained prominence in recent decades due to the growing awareness of sustainability and the pressure on companies to adopt more environmentally responsible practices, using the phenomenon as a strategy to promote an image of sustainability without implementing real changes in production processes. On this premise, the study aims to map and analyze the academic contributions on the subject in the last five years, highlighting its conceptual and methodological advances. For this purpose, the methodology applied consists of a qualitative approach as its research nature, with bibliographic procedures using a systematic review of the literature published between 2020 and 2024, analyzing origins, classifications, impacts on consumer behavior and the regulatory challenges faced in combating this phenomenon. Thus, when analyzing the studies addressed by the authors, the research reveals that, while in developed markets awareness of the phenomenon is more pronounced, in emerging markets the phenomenon highlights the lack of strict regulation and environmental education, also exploring the emotional and behavioral impact of Greenwashing on consumers, highlighting the increase in green skepticism and the loss of trust in brands involved in misleading practices. Finally, the importance of more effective public policies, clear regulations and the promotion of greater business transparency is discussed as key measures in combating Greenwashing and promoting genuine sustainable practices.

Keywords: Greenwashing, Corporate sustainability, Sustainable practices, Consumer behavior, Environmental regulation.

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INTRODUCTION

The growing concern about the environmental and social impacts of the current economic development model has driven organizations, governments, and consumers to seek more sustainable alternatives. In the corporate scenario, sustainability has ceased to be a competitive differential to become an essential requirement, reflecting the pressure of investors, consumers and regulatory bodies. However, in the midst of these demands, the phenomenon of Greenwashing emerges – a practice in which companies communicate supposed sustainable initiatives, but which, in reality, are not supported by genuine actions (SEELE; GATTI, 2017). This practice not only undermines consumer confidence, but also slows down advances in global sustainability, creating significant ethical and regulatory challenges (SZABO; WEBSTER, 2020).

Greenwashing was first described by Jay Westerveld in the 1980s, when he observed superficial corporate practices masquerading as environmental concerns. Since then, the concept has evolved, encompassing deceptive marketing strategies, unsubstantiated eco-labels, and advertising campaigns that exploit the public's environmental sensitivity without promoting real changes in production processes (DE JONG; HARKINK; BARTH, 2018). The phenomenon also reflects the tensions between the search for economic competitiveness and the adoption of environmentally responsible practices, especially in emerging markets, where regulation can be weaker (WU; ZHANG; XIE, 2020).

Given this reality, it is essential to investigate Greenwashing in a comprehensive way, exploring not only its conceptual aspects, but also its impacts on consumers, organizations, and public policies. This article, by conducting a systematic review of the scientific literature published between 2020 and 2024, seeks to identify emerging trends, research gaps, and practical implications of Greenwashing. The methodology adopted allows for an effective and integrative analysis, making it possible to understand how the phenomenon has been studied and how it affects different economic and cultural contexts.

The central problem that guides this study can be summarized in the following question: **How has Greenwashing been addressed by recent scientific literature, and what are its impacts on corporate practices and consumer perception?** To answer this question, the general objective was to map and analyze the academic contributions on the subject in the last five years, highlighting their conceptual and methodological advances. Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Identify the main definitions and classifications of Greenwashing present in the literature;
2. Explore the impacts of Greenwashing on consumer trust and corporate reputation;
3. Analyze regulatory practices and governance initiatives aimed at combating the phenomenon;
4. Provide subsidies for the development of public policies and organizational strategies that promote genuine sustainable practices.

The relevance of this study lies in the need to deepen the theoretical and practical understanding of Greenwashing, since it represents a significant barrier to the advancement of sustainability. By exposing the nuances of the phenomenon and its implications, this article contributes to the awareness of consumers, managers and policymakers, promoting actions that align economic competitiveness and environmental responsibility.

In addition, by adopting a systematic and integrative approach, the present work fills gaps in the literature, expanding the debate on sustainability and responsible business practices. It is hoped that the findings can serve as a basis for future academic studies and practical initiatives that address the ethical and strategic challenges posed by Greenwashing in the 21st century.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

ORIGINS AND CLASSIFICATION OF GREENWASHING

The concept of Greenwashing emerged in the 1980s, coined by environmentalist Jay Westerveld, who observed deceptive corporate practices in hotel chains. These companies encouraged guests to reuse towels under the guise of preserving the environment, while neglecting fundamental sustainability practices such as waste disposal and the use of renewable energy. This practice illustrated a strategic effort by companies to project an environmentally responsible image without implementing effective changes in their processes (SEELE; GATTI, 2017).

Since then, the term has evolved to describe a more complex phenomenon, in which advertising and communication strategies exploit the growing demand for sustainable practices and products. The popularization of Greenwashing in the 2000s occurred in parallel with the strengthening of the global environmental agenda, marked by events such

as the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015), which pressured companies to adopt environmentally responsible attitudes (BERRONE; FOSFURI; GELABERT, 2017).

Currently, Greenwashing is widely recognized as a multifaceted phenomenon, involving practices ranging from misleading advertising messages to more elaborate organizational strategies. Seele and Gatti (2017) proposed a taxonomy that classifies Greenwashing into three levels: individual, organizational, and sectoral. These dimensions range from vague statements on labels and packaging to institutional actions that mask environmentally harmful operations.

The TerraChoice report (2009) classified this phenomenon into seven categories, known as "the seven sins of greenwashing": irrelevant benefit, lack of evidence, omissions, exaggerated or inaccurate statements, false certifications, misleading comparisons and outright lies, according to the authors, these types help to understand how greenwashing practices vary from simple negligence to intentional manipulations and thus, It also emerges as an inadequate and often malicious response to growing demands for more sustainable practices.

Classifications and Types of Greenwashing

Greenwashing manifests itself in a variety of ways, often exploiting regulatory gaps and consumers' lack of knowledge. One of the most common strategies is the use of visual elements, such as eco-labels and green packaging, which suggest sustainable practices without providing concrete evidence. Vague terms such as "natural" and "organic" are widely used to confuse consumers, exploiting their environmental sensitivity without effective support (SZABO; WEBSTER, 2020).

Siano et al. (2017) identified the practice of green branding, in which companies use advertising campaigns to create positive perceptions of sustainability, often disconnected from real changes in their production processes. This approach is especially prevalent in sectors such as fashion and cosmetics, where sustainability has become a competitive factor but often lacks transparency and authenticity (DE JONG; HARKINK; BARTH, 2018).

Another important form is "partial greening," which occurs when companies promote isolated initiatives, such as reforestation projects, while maintaining unsustainable practices in their core operations. This strategy has been widely criticized for diverting the focus from the real needs for structural change (BERRONE; FOSFURI; GELABERT, 2017).

With the growth of social networks, Greenwashing has found new fertile ground. Digital platforms amplify misleading messages, making it difficult for consumers to verify information. This dynamic highlights the need for digital governance and more effective mechanisms to combat environmental disinformation (WU; ZHANG; XIE, 2020).

Impacts of Greenwashing Expansion

This phenomenon is not only an ethical problem, but also a significant obstacle to advancing sustainability. It undermines consumer confidence and compromises the competitiveness of genuinely sustainable companies, creating an environment of distrust in the market. In addition, by masking harmful practices, it limits the impact of public policies and regulatory initiatives, hindering the transition to green economies (DE FREITAS NETTO et al., 2020).

The phenomenon of Greenwashing, when analyzed from the perspective of a more conscious and assertive consumer, highlights the importance of a more balanced relationship between companies and consumers in the search for genuine environmental practices (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). This scenario suggests the need for a deeper and more critical understanding by consumers (Parguel, Benoît-Moreau & Larceneux, 2011) in relation to business strategies, allowing them to identify deceptive practices and demand greater transparency, while reinforcing the responsibility of companies to adopt true sustainable actions, contributing to the construction of a more ethical market aligned with the principles of sustainability. Thus, the interaction between companies and consumers becomes a central element to understand and address Greenwashing more effectively (Parguel, Benoît-Moreau & Larceneux, 2011).

IMPACTS ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Greenwashing has a significant impact on consumer behavior, affecting their trust, purchasing choices, and perception of brands. Studies indicate that distrust of sustainability practices increases when consumers perceive that a company may be using greenwashing strategies. This distrust not only compromises the organization's image, but also reduces the consumption of environmentally sustainable products, making it difficult to expand green markets (DE JONG; HARKINK; BARTH, 2018).

Consumers exposed to false green messages tend to develop skepticism towards sustainable initiatives in general and this skepticism reduces trust and negatively influences

purchase intentions, even for products or companies that actually adopt genuine environmental practices (Schmuck et al., 2018).

Greenwashing's ability to negatively influence consumers is linked to two main factors: the lack of transparency in the information presented and the use of vague or unsupported messages. According to Schmuck et al. (2018), the authors also highlight that ads that explore environmental attributes with visual resources or generic terms, such as "natural" or "ecological", They can create expectations in consumers that are not met, generating dissatisfaction and skepticism towards brands.

In addition, Greenwashing directly affects the purchase decision by generating uncertainties about the authenticity of companies' sustainable actions, according to Freitas Netto et al. (2020) who also identified that consumers exposed to Greenwashing practices tend to avoid products from brands involved, even when they offer products that meet ecological criteria. This behavior is related to the so-called "green skepticism", a critical stance towards corporate environmental claims, amplified by previous negative experiences (SZABO; WEBSTER, 2020).

Another relevant aspect is the emotional impact of Greenwashing on consumers, as deceptive practices can generate feelings of betrayal and indignation, especially in consumers who prioritize sustainability in their choices and this effect is particularly problematic, as it discourages conscious consumption and hinders the evolution of sustainable markets (GUO et al., 2018).

In emerging markets, the impact of Greenwashing is amplified by a lack of regulation and less access to reliable information, as these factors make consumers more vulnerable to misleading campaigns and make it difficult to identify genuine sustainable practices (NGUYEN et al., 2019). On the other hand, in developed markets, where consumers are more critical and informed, Greenwashing tends to result in greater rejection of the brands involved, significantly damaging their reputation and competitiveness (WU; ZHANG; XIE, 2020).

Thus, the impact of Greenwashing transcends the relationship between consumer and company, affecting the market as a whole, when genuinely sustainable companies face challenges to stand out in an environment where consumer trust is compromised, while deceptive practices devalue legitimate initiatives and compromise the advancement of public policies and environmental regulations (BERRONE; FOSFURI; GELABERT, 2017).

Research indicates that the level of consumer attention to greenwashing plays a crucial role: when conscious attention occurs, consumers activate defense mechanisms, such as resistance and counter-argumentation, challenging the messages received, however, on the other hand, unconsciously perceived stimuli (pre-attention) can create positive associations with misleading messages, favoring familiarity and, eventually, future choices based on distorted perceptions (WU; ZHANG; XIE, 2020).

GREENWASHING IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

The practice of Greenwashing manifests itself in different ways in varied economic, social and cultural contexts, reflecting the differences in access to information, environmental regulation and maturity of markets, where in developed countries, consumers tend to be more critical and informed, Greenwashing it is often identified and widely criticized, however, in emerging markets, the combination of less stringent regulations and less environmental awareness creates a more conducive environment for its spread (NGUYEN et al., 2019).

In developed countries, such as the United States and European Union nations, Greenwashing is amplified by the increased demand for sustainable products and greater access to digital media, although environmental awareness in these markets is high, consumers face difficulties in verifying the veracity of claims made by companies (SZABO; WEBSTER, 2020). In this scenario, organizations that adopt deceptive practices often face severe consequences, such as boycotts and lawsuits, where studies show that consumers in these countries tend to reject brands involved in greenwashing scandals, significantly reducing their sales and reputation (SZABO; WEBSTER, 2020).

On the other hand, in emerging markets, such as Brazil, India, and South Africa, environmental regulation still has significant gaps, as in these economies, Greenwashing often exploits the lower level of consumer awareness and the absence of strict enforcement mechanisms (BERRONE; FOSFURI; GELABERT, 2017). In Brazil, for example, research reveals that most consumers do not have access to reliable information about sustainable business practices, which makes it more difficult to identify and avoid brands that use Greenwashing (BERRONE; FOSFURI; GELABERT, 2017).

According to GUO et al. (2018), cultural influence also plays a crucial role in the perception of Greenwashing, as in collectivist societies, such as those in Asia, purchasing decisions often reflect community values, which can intensify the impact of deceptive

practices on trust in brands and the market as a whole. On the other hand, in individualistic societies, such as in the United States, consumers tend to be more influenced by individual perceptions and advertising, which reinforces the importance of clear regulations to protect the market (GUO et al., 2018).

Another important aspect is the role of digital media and social networks, since these platforms have a double impact: while they amplify the dissemination of misleading messages, they also allow consumers and non-governmental organizations to expose Greenwashing practices (WU; ZHANG; XIE, 2020). In developed markets, online campaigns often result in boycott movements and greater regulatory pressure, while in emerging markets, the impact tends to be more limited due to lower digital penetration and low level of engagement in environmental causes (WU; ZHANG; XIE, 2020).

Primary and secondary sectors such as petroleum, chemical manufacturing, and other highly polluting industries face unique challenges, such as the difficulty of reducing direct environmental impacts and this often results in a disconnect between discourse and substantial actions (WU; ZHANG; XIE, 2020). In tertiary sectors, such as services, companies tend to use greenwashing predominantly as a marketing strategy, investing in symbolic communication rather than real transformations (WU; ZHANG; XIE, 2020).

Understanding the contextual differences of Greenwashing is essential to develop effective strategies to combat it, while developed markets require stricter measures to ensure transparency and credibility, emerging markets need investments in environmental education and regulatory oversight, and global initiatives such as international certifications and multilateral agreements can play a critical role in standardizing sustainable practices (NGUYEN et al., 2019).

REGULATIONS AND GOVERNANCE

Regulation and governance play a crucial role in combating greenwashing and promoting truly sustainable business practices, although the phenomenon is widely recognized in several countries, the lack of universally accepted regulation and the disparity between levels of oversight make it difficult to create a globally transparent and accountable market (SZABO; WEBSTER, 2020). In developed markets, such as the United States and the European Union, environmental regulation has already advanced more robustly, but there are still challenges in the effective application of policies that combat Greenwashing practices (SZABO; WEBSTER, 2020).

In the European Union, for example, the European Commission adopted a series of guidelines aimed at ensuring that companies did not mislead consumers with false claims about the sustainability of their products, when in 2021, the European Green Deal Strategy was published, which proposes stricter regulations regarding environmental labeling and transparency of information provided by companies and these guidelines require that ecological and sustainable products be clearly identified, with evidence of the sustainable environmental practices adopted by the organizations, including the need for independent external audits (SZABO; WEBSTER, 2020).

In the United States, on the other hand, regulations to combat Greenwashing are less stringent and more fragmented, which makes it difficult to create a uniform standard for environmental labeling (SZABO; WEBSTER, 2020). Organizations such as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) have intensified their enforcement actions, especially with regard to the veracity of claims made by companies regarding sustainability, where the FTC, for example, has issued guidelines on green advertising, warning companies about deceptive practices and the need for scientific proof of their environmental claims (WU; ZHANG; XIE, 2020).

The lack of regulation and effective enforcement is more evident in emerging markets, where Greenwashing spreads more easily due to the absence of strict control mechanisms, such as Brazil, where the Consumer Protection Law requires companies to present clear and accurate information about their products, including their environmental qualities and characteristics (BERRONE; FOSFURI; GELABERT, 2017). However, enforcement of environmental claims is still limited, and many consumers do not have the resources or knowledge to verify that sustainability claims made by companies are legitimate, and the absence of robust regulation on environmental labeling makes it difficult to identify sustainable products, which favors the growth of Greenwashing (BERRONE; FOSFURI; GELABERT, 2017).

Despite these challenges, there are some important initiatives at the global level, such as the development of certifications and eco-labels, which seek to establish clear standards for companies (BERRONE; FOSFURI; GELABERT, 2017). Certifications such as the Fair Trade Seal, the European Union's EcoLabel and the Green Seal in the United States have helped to increase transparency and combat deceptive practices, however, there is still criticism about the effectiveness of these seals, especially in markets with less strict regulation, where consumers do not always have access to reliable information to

distinguish genuine sustainable practices from Greenwashing (DE FREITAS NETTO et al., 2020).

Reports such as TerraChoice (2009) highlight the need to strengthen public and private governance, as the adoption of reliable certifications and rigorous audits can help reduce the prevalence of greenwashing. In addition, the development of public policies that establish clear guidelines for genuine sustainable practices is essential to protect consumers and promote structural changes in markets (TerraChoice, 2009)

Therefore, the implementation of stricter public policies, the creation of independent regulatory bodies, and consumer education are essential to mitigate the impact of Greenwashing, as effective regulation not only helps to protect consumers but also encourages companies to adopt more transparent and sustainable practices, creating a fairer and more responsible market for all (GUO et al., 2018).

METHODOLOGY

In this section, the methodological procedures adopted to achieve the objectives of the study are described. The approach seeks to ensure academic robustness and theoretical consistency, promoting a detailed and contextualized analysis of the greenwashing phenomenon in the last five years.

RESEARCH METHODS

The present research is characterized as qualitative, exploratory and descriptive. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a deep understanding of the nuances and complexities of greenwashing, including its manifestations, impacts, and related strategies. This method makes it possible to capture the contextual and cultural dynamics that influence practice, especially in emerging and developed markets.

To conduct the study, the systematic literature review (RSL) was used, which is a rigorous and replicable method to identify, evaluate, and synthesize available evidence on the subject. The RSL was structured based on international protocols, such as PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), in order to ensure the transparency and reliability of the results.

The selection of articles was conducted in recognized academic databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect, covering the period from 2020 to 2024. Strategic descriptors such as greenwashing, corporate sustainability, deceptive practices,

consumer behavior, and environmental regulation were used, combined with Boolean operators. The analysis included studies published in English, Portuguese, and Spanish to ensure diversity and representativeness.

Inclusion criteria were defined to select only articles with theoretical and methodological relevance, which addressed greenwashing in an empirical or conceptual way. The exclusion criteria eliminated duplicate works, abstracts without full text, and studies outside the thematic scope.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

The data were collected from published scientific articles, considering their bibliographical, theoretical and methodological characteristics. The collection was carried out through an analytical matrix, previously prepared to facilitate the systematization and categorization of the selected articles. This matrix included information such as:

- **Complete reference:** To ensure traceability and fidelity to original sources.
- **Objective of the study:** To identify the main contributions of each article.
- **Applied methodology:** Record the methods and approaches used in the reviewed studies.
- **Main results:** To highlight relevant findings for the understanding of greenwashing.
- **Context analyzed:** Differentiate between studies in emerging and developed markets.
- **Identified gaps:** Flag points for future research.

The matrix allowed the consolidation of data in a structured manner, ensuring comparability between studies and alignment with the objectives of the systematic review.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis followed an integrative approach, using the content analysis technique, as proposed by Bardin (2011). This technique was chosen for its ability to interpret, categorize, and synthesize information in a systematic and contextualized manner. The analytical process included the following steps:

1. **Floating reading:** Initial reading of the articles for general comprehension and identification of emerging themes.

2. **Coding:** Segmentation of texts into thematic categories, such as definitions of greenwashing, impacts on consumer behavior, regulation, and governance.
3. **Categorical analysis:** Organization of themes into previously defined categories and subcategories based on the theoretical framework.
4. **Data interpretation:** Integration of categorized information into a coherent narrative, highlighting convergences, divergences, and theoretical gaps.

The analysis also considered the cultural, economic and regulatory context in which the studies were conducted, recognizing the particularities of developed and emerging markets. This approach allowed a holistic view of the phenomenon, evidencing its multiple dimensions and practical implications.

RESULTS

The results section presents the main findings obtained from the systematic review of the literature on Greenwashing between 2020 and 2024. The objective of this section is to synthesize and organize the data collected, highlighting emerging trends, definitions and typologies of the phenomenon, as well as exploring the impacts on consumer behavior and the differences between the contexts of developed and emerging markets. Based on the analyzed publications, it will be possible to identify the main factors influencing the spread of Greenwashing, consumer responses to misleading practices, and the implications of these practices for regulatory and governance policies. The main findings are presented below, organized in such a way as to facilitate the understanding of the patterns and variables observed in the reviewed studies.

DEFINITIONS AND TYPOLOGIES OF GREENWASHING

The evolution of the concept of Greenwashing was clearly observed in the reviewed publications. Initially, the term referred to deceptive marketing practices around environmental claims, but over time, the literature has broadened the understanding of the phenomenon (Siano et al., 2017). The typology proposed by Seele and Gatti (2017) highlights three levels of manifestation: **individual** (isolated misleading messages), **organizational** (corporate sustainability strategies) and **sectoral** (structural practices in value chains). More recent studies have expanded this definition, incorporating practices such as green branding and digital greenwashing, which involve marketing campaigns

designed to reinforce a green image with no basis in the reality of business operations (Siano et al., 2017; Szabo; Webster, 2020).

Impact of Greenwashing on Consumer Behavior

The impacts caused on consumers show a significant increase in skepticism towards environmental claims made by companies, according to the study by Guo et al. (2018), it also revealed that green skepticism has been intensifying, with consumers more inclined to avoid products from companies involved in Greenwashing. This is due to the growing perception that environmental claims are often unfounded, resulting in evasive behavior on the part of consumers, who prefer more transparent alternatives with sustainability guarantees (Guo et al., 2018).

Regional Differences: Developed vs. Developed Emerging

The reviewed literature also revealed marked differences in the way Greenwashing manifests itself in developed and emerging markets, as according to developed markets such as the United States and the European Union, awareness of this phenomenon is more pronounced, and there is increasing pressure for greater transparency and verification of environmental claims (Nguyen et al., 2019). In emerging markets, such as Brazil and China, the lack of stringent regulations and reduced level of environmental education make these markets more susceptible to greenwashing, with many companies exploiting the lack of enforcement to deceive consumers (Nguyen et al., 2019; Berrone et al., 2017).

Advancements in Regulation and Governance

There have been significant advances in regulation and governance, especially in the European Union, which, through its European Green Deal, has driven transparency initiatives and stricter business practices in relation to environmental claims, such as in the United States, where Federal Trade Commission (FTC) guidelines have also sought to combat Greenwashing by requiring substantial evidence for environmental claims (Szabo; Webster, 2020). However, in emerging markets, the lack of effective policies and enforcement remains a significant challenge (Szabo; Webster, 2020; Wu; Zhang; Xie, 2020).

The following comparative semiotic table summarizes the main differences and similarities observed in the literature on Greenwashing between the years 2020 and 2024,

considering the contexts of developed and emerging markets. Through this table, it is possible to visualize the variations in the definitions, manifestations of the phenomenon and the impacts generated on consumers, in addition to the differences in regulations and governance of sustainable business practices.

Each column of the chart offers a comparison between **developed and emerging markets**, highlighting how Greenwashing manifests itself differently in each context. The implications of this comparison are discussed in the last column, providing insights into the challenges faced in markets with greater or lesser regulation and environmental awareness.

Table 1: Comparative Semiotic Table: Greenwashing (2020-2024)

Aspect	Markets Developed	Markets Emerging	Implications	Authors
Definition of Greenwashing	Amplified: Involves deceptive marketing practices and corporate behaviors.	Emerging: Primarily associated with unsubstantiated sustainability claims.	Greater conceptual clarity in developed markets; need to expand the definition to include corporate practices.	Seele; Gatti (2017); Szabo; Webster (2020); Nguyen et al. (2019); Berrone; Fosfuri; Gelabert (2017); Abolhasani; Liu; Golrokhi (2022)
Impacts on Consumer Behavior	Green Skepticism: Increased distrust and rejection of brands involved in Greenwashing.	Misinformation: Low level of awareness increases vulnerability to Greenwashing.	Consumer behavior tends to be more critical in developed markets, while in emerging markets, the lack of information exacerbates the problem.	Guo et al. (2018); Szabo; Webster (2020); Guo et al. (2018); Butt et al. (2021); Hameed et al. (2021)
Examples of Greenwashing	Image Marketing: Use of eco-labels and branding without real sustainable practices.	Sensationalist Marketing: Use of appealing campaigns and little supervision.	The difference is in the strategies used; In developed markets, enforcement tends to be more effective.	Siano et al. (2017); Wu; Zhang; Xie (2020); Szabo; Webster (2020); De Jong; Harkink; Barth (2018); Aktun (2018); Hameed et al. (2021)
Regulation and Governance	Rigorous: Guidelines such as the European Green Deal and FTC guidelines to ensure transparency.	Fragmented: Less stringent regulations, with gaps in enforcement.	Regulatory policies are most effective in developed markets, but in emerging markets, greater enforcement and uniformity in policies is needed.	Szabo; Webster (2020); Nguyen et al. (2019); Berrone; Fosfuri; Gelabert (2017); Butt et al. (2021); Figge; Hahn (2021); Talbot; Raineri; Daou (2021)
Impact of Social Media	Increased Criticism: Social media amplifies	Low Impact: Social networks have less penetration, and	Social media pressure on companies is	Szabo; Webster (2020); Guo et al. (2018); Wu;

	greenwashing and encourages boycott campaigns.	information does not arrive with the same intensity.	strongest in developed markets, helping to raise awareness and accountability.	Zhang; Xie (2020); Nadig (2022); Dean (2020)
Sustainability in Marketing	Visible Advances: More transparent companies, with clear evidence of sustainability.	Lack of Evidence: Many companies use green marketing without verifiable evidence.	In developed markets, sustainability is more concrete, while in emerging markets, claims need greater oversight and authenticity.	Szabo; Webster (2020); Berrone et al. (2017); Nguyen et al. (2019); Guo et al. (2018); Junior et al. (2019); Hameed et al. (2021); Talbot; Raineri; Daou (2021)

Source: Authors, 2024

The above table seeks to provide a clear picture of the conditions and factors that influence Greenwashing, illustrating the complexity of the phenomenon and offering a basis for understanding the different consumer responses and the effectiveness of regulations in different parts of the world.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the review reveal a complex panorama of the phenomenon of Greenwashing, its manifestations, impacts and the strategies adopted by companies in different contexts. The main aspects of these findings are discussed below, with emphasis on the theoretical and practical implications.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF GREENWASHING

The expansion of definitions and typologies of Greenwashing reflects the growing complexity of the phenomenon, which is no longer limited to the use of misleading labels, but also encompasses green branding practices and the use of digital media to create an image of sustainability without real backing. This raises important questions about social responsibility and ethics in corporate marketing strategies. In highly competitive markets, where the pressure to be perceived as "green" is intense, companies may be tempted to adopt greenwashing strategies to improve their image without changing their operational practices, because the lack of a clear and widely accepted definition of what constitutes "sustainable" practices contributes to the proliferation of the phenomenon, making it difficult to differentiate between companies that are truly committed and those that only seek to capitalize on the environmental trend (Szabo; Webster, 2020).

THE IMPACT OF GREENWASHING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

According to the authors Guo et al. (2018), the impact caused on consumer behavior highlights the importance of creating a consumer environment based on trust and transparency and the growing distrust of consumers in relation to environmental claims can have adverse effects not only for brands that adopt Greenwashing, but also for the sustainable market as a whole. The rise of green skepticism implies that in addition to generating a loss of trust in companies, which can reduce consumer incentive to purchase environmentally responsible products, undermining efforts to encourage more sustainable practices, in addition, the lack of clear and reliable information about the authenticity of claims can undermine consumer engagement with sustainability in general (Guo et al., 2018).

REGIONAL INEQUALITY IN THE PERCEPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF GREENWASHING

Regional differences in combating Greenwashing reveal a significant disparity between developed and emerging markets, as according to countries such as the United States, regulation and environmental education have generated greater awareness of Greenwashing and encouraged the adoption of stricter business practices ((Guo et al., 2018). However, even in these contexts, enforcement is still insufficient to prevent misleading claims entirely, as in emerging markets, a lack of regulation, coupled with low awareness, creates a fertile environment for this phenomenon, which can be difficult to identify and combat without stronger public policies and educational initiatives ((Guo et al., 2018).

This suggests that creating more robust global governance, with clear standards for environmental claims and greater cooperation between governments and international organizations, would be an important step in addressing the phenomenon effectively (Berrone et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2019).

THE ROLE OF GOVERNANCE AND REGULATION

Although there are advances in regulations, especially in the European Union and the United States, policies to combat Greenwashing are still fragmented and insufficient, especially in emerging markets (Nguyen et al., 2019). The creation of strict regulations and the implementation of independent auditing systems are essential to ensure that

environmental claims made by companies are verifiable and authentic, in addition, green certifications, such as Fair Trade and EcoLabel, are important tools to increase transparency, but they must be reinforced with more effective enforcement mechanisms, especially in regions where greenwashing is more prevalent (Wu; Zhang; Xie, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of Greenwashing represents one of the main barriers to the consolidation of genuine sustainable practices in the global market, as evidenced throughout this systematic review, this phenomenon is not only a deceptive marketing strategy, but a reflection of a complex relationship between the competitiveness needs of companies, public pressure for sustainability and deficiencies in environmental regulations. The expansion of this phenomenon, especially in emerging markets, highlights the vulnerability of consumers to misinformation and the lack of effective enforcement, although the concept of Greenwashing has been consolidated over the years, its manifestations vary according to the economic, social and cultural context, reflecting the differences in access to information, awareness and governance.

In developed markets, regulations and consumer awareness have favored the identification and combat of this practice, however, in developing economies, where regulatory gaps and lack of environmental education are more evident, Greenwashing continues to thrive, negatively impacting consumer confidence and hindering the advancement of sustainable practices.

The study also highlighted the emotional and behavioral impact on consumers, with the loss of trust in brands and the consequent rejection of products that, even if they are ecological, cannot be proven to be sustainable.

More robust regulation and the implementation of more effective public policies are imperative to mitigate the impact of Greenwashing, however, the creation of global governance mechanisms, along with the promotion of greater transparency in business information, is essential to ensure that the market for sustainable products develops ethically and genuinely.

Certifications and eco-labels are an important step in ensuring the veracity of environmental claims, but their effectiveness will depend on stricter enforcement and greater engagement by consumers and civil society. The implications of this study are vast.

For consumers, awareness of Greenwashing practices and the search for more transparent information about products are fundamental.

For companies, the adoption of true environmental policies and clear communication about their sustainable practices will not only avoid reputational damage, but also contribute to a fairer and more responsible market, while for policymakers, the need to improve environmental regulations and encourage more effective governance becomes a priority to combat deceptive practices that undermine sustainability.

This study provides a solid basis for future research on Greenwashing, especially with regard to the impact of public policies, the evolution of corporate strategies and consumer behavior. The fight against Greenwashing is an ongoing challenge, but with increased awareness, regulation, and innovation in business practices, it is possible to create a more ethical and sustainable consumption environment for future generations.

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