

**THE CONCEPT OF GREENWASHING- THE EFFECTS OF GREEN  
ADVERTISING AND CORPORATE RESPONSABILITY ON CONSUMER  
PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIOR**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The aim of this study is to analyze the consumer's perception of ecological washing mechanisms, to identify the reasons that lead companies to practice greenwashing and to identify the sectors in which ecological washing is common, from the consumer's perspective and last but not least, to assess consumer awareness of the existence of the greenwashing phenomenon and its negative, social and environmental consequences. By researching the extent to which consumers have lived the experiences associated with the greenwashing phenomenon, as well as their beliefs and actions, the results of the study may be helpful in describing how consumers can eliminate companies' greenwashing practices.*

**INTRODUCTION**

The environment and the protection thereof is a highly discussed topic. As the standard of living is gradually increasing there is an increasing awareness for the need to maintain and improve the environment people live in. Many companies use this growing awareness and the importance that is attached to the environment to their advantage; they create a false picture and image of their company and its products (Krizanova et al. 2013, Rypakova & Rebetak 2015).

Such a divergence between practices and socially responsible communication is commonly known as greenwashing and is considered to be a direct result of the development of the concept of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility, phenomenon defined as "the intersection of two firm behaviors: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance" (Delmas & Burbano 2011). Three decades after the concept of the term "greenwashing", the practice has grown enormously (Walker & Wan 2012), is more sophisticated, and corporations "are preserved and extended to markets through the position of environmental friends and leaders in the fight to eradicate poverty" (Vieira et al. 2020).

Lately, the number of products and services labeled as green has increased enormously. Changing consumer lifestyles, raising awareness of harmful chemicals, increasing revenue, proven effectiveness of natural products and growing concern for environmental issues have led all companies to try to benefit from this change in consumer attitudes. As a result, greenwashing has become refined, as this practice

overlaps with real business practices and what is communicated to consumers (Khandelwal et al. 2019).

Buyers often do not have enough information about such products, but nevertheless make purchases based on advertising and market positioning.

Over the past decade, consumers' appetite for organic products has increased, stakeholders have become more concerned about the state of the environment, and more and more investors, consumers, governments and corporate customers have increased pressure on companies to disclose information about their environmental performance and characteristics, ecological aspects of marketed products (Kim & Lyon 2015, Marquis et al. 2016), with energy companies facing increasing pressure to produce sustainable products and clean energy (Vollero et al. 2016).

The reason why companies increasingly use greenwashing is that they can knowingly mislead consumers with impunity. In order to prevent this practice and to protect consumers, it would therefore be appropriate to legislate against it by incorporating it into law. This could be done by extending current Consumer Protection Law. Companies that are subsequently found guilty of greenwashing would be punishable with a fine (Nadányiová 2016).

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

A questionnaire containing a set of 15 questions was used for the present study. There were 201 respondents and they included people from different age groups and professions, being chosen at random, without the existence of a specific sampling method. The questionnaire developed by Manvi Khandelwal et. al 2019, contains questions on various aspects related to the predilection for organic products and the motivation of their choices, the areas in which they identified greenwashing, the forms encountered and other aspects of organic marketing and advertising. The online survey was chosen as a research tool for collecting primary data. A google form was created containing a set of 15 closed type questions, all 201 respondents having the possibility to choose a single answer (10 questions) or several answers (5 questions). These were mandatory, except for questions no. 7 and no. 8 which were optional, being related to the personal preferences of the respondents. ([https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfgRjGGySCcvsWKkvE2w5ETIJLmp6A-pFxpBj\\_iP6O-NctCtg/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfgRjGGySCcvsWKkvE2w5ETIJLmp6A-pFxpBj_iP6O-NctCtg/viewform?usp=sf_link)).

Respondents were structured by age, gender, occupation, education and monthly income to identify the profile of the green consumer and to determine if there is a specific pattern for this type of consumer. A brief review of specialized studies suggests a number of indicators appropriate to the consumer prone to engage in the support and consumption of organic products, including:

- gender: women are more likely to consider issues related to the ecological nature of the products, the most plausible explanation being the increased responsibility for the family and general health;
- income: high-income consumers, having covered their primary needs, tend to give more importance to achieving a healthier lifestyle;
- level of education: the higher it is with certificates, it favors the complex understanding of the phenomena related to the implications of ecology on all levels, including eco-consumption.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the graphic presentation of the answers registered in the period 05.05.2020-13.06.2020, the following data results:

Out of the total respondents, 57.2% were female and 42.8% male, 48.8% are in the age group 18-35 years, 39.8% are in the age group 36-49 years and 11.4% are over 50 years old (fig. 1.a, b). Most respondents work in the private sector, 40%, followed by students with 31%, 19% are employed in public institutions, 8% are self-employed and a very small percentage, only 2% is represented of people without occupation.

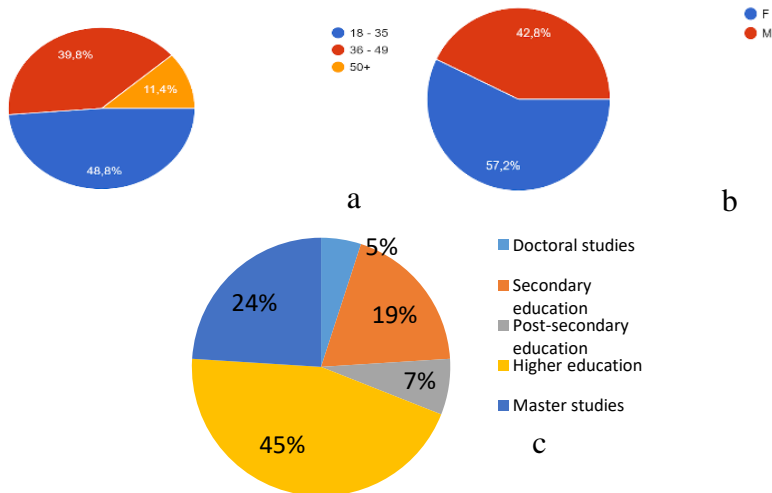


Figure 1. Profile of respondents: a-age, b- gender, c- studies

45% of the respondents have higher education, 24% have attended other postgraduate training and development courses, 19% have secondary education, 5% have doctoral studies and 7% of them have attended post-secondary courses. 43.3% of the respondents have a monthly income of 2500-5000 ron, 37.3% receive a salary below 2500 ron, 13.4% receive monthly amounts between 5000-10000 ron and 6% of them have monthly incomes exceeding 10,000 ron.

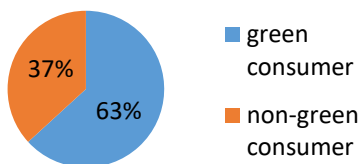


Figure 2. Types of consumers

From figure 2. it is observed that 63.2% of the respondents are green consumers, aware of the importance of environmental protection, opting for green products, which they consider, in many cases, more effective compared to other

products, in terms of the benefits offered. Beyond the simple finding of this aspect, a profound change in consumer habits implies, first of all, the fundamental transformation of values and lifestyle.

Changing the way consumers think and act cannot be imposed, but comes naturally, as a result of their education by the companies directly involved. In this sense, two concepts have become decisive in the process of education and management of the consumption-nature relationship, both being included among the strategic objectives by manufacturing companies: Sustainable Development and Corporate Social Responsibility.

These results are also confirmed by other specialized studies conducted in the European Union, which show that most consumers choose to buy organic products. Whether out of a desire to consume tasty and authentic food, or to help protect the environment, protect natural resources, animal welfare and rural communities, the statistics show an increase in the consumption of organic products. The rest of the respondents, representing a percentage of 36.8%, are not considered green consumers (fig. 2).

The question related to the motivation to purchase organic products was not mandatory, only 181 respondents selected one or more answer options, registering a total number of 207 answers. A number of 118 answers, representing a percentage of 65.2% of the total number, show that organic products are considered to be of superior quality, from 48 answers (26.5%.) It results that organic products are relevant for personal needs, 30 respondents (16.6%) trust the demands of organic products, 11 answers (6.1%) show that there is a wide range of organic products (fig. 3).

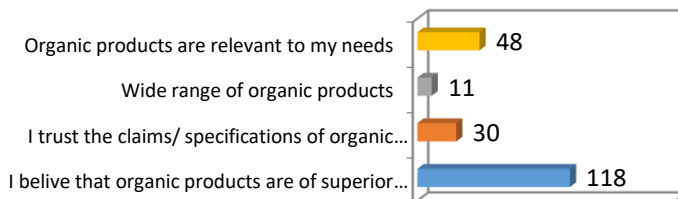


Figure 3. Reasons for purchasing organic products

A number of 148 people answered the question related to the reasons that determine them not to buy organic products, registering 162 answers. Respondents were free to choose whether or not to answer this question and to tick one or more answers. 85 of the registered answers, representing 57.4% of the total answers, show that respondents consider organic products as too expensive, 40 (27%) show that respondents do not trust the claims of organic products, another 27 answers (18.2%) show that they do not know the locations where they could buy organic products and 10 of them (6.8%) show that some respondents do not know organic products (Fig. 4).

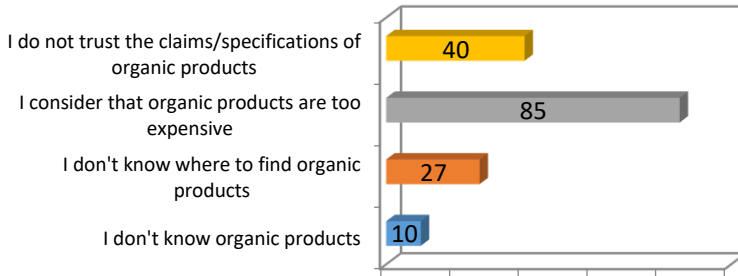


Figure 4. Reasons why respondents do not buy organic products

The price and characteristics of organic products are paramount to the decision to buy, and the "green" label can be considered as an additional argument in favor of these products. Consumers' purchases of organic products appear to be motivated not only by the products themselves, but also by the values they represent. Out of the total of 201 respondents, 66.2% (133 respondents) knew about the existence of greenwashing practices, the other 33.8% (68 respondents) did not know about the existence of these practices.

The practice of greenwashing is perceived by displaying suggestive images (flowers, mountain landscapes, etc.) by 104 respondents (51.7%), by using fluffy language, terms without a clear meaning, by 71 of them (35.3%), 70 respondents consider false information an obvious form of ecological washing (34.8%), 38 respondents (18.9%) consider irrelevant information to be forms of ecological washing, 37 (18.4%) include the greening of a dangerous product in this practice and only 36 of them, which represents a percentage of 17.9%, consider the involvement of companies in charities a form of greenwashing. To this question the respondents had the opportunity to choose several answer options, registering a total number of 356 answers (fig. 5).

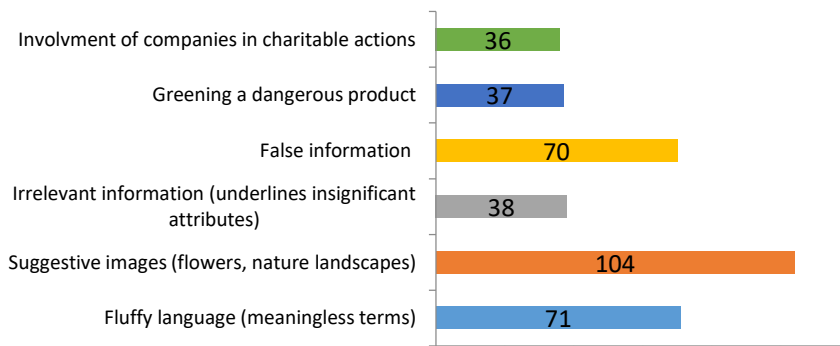


Figure 5. Forms of manifestation of the greenwashing phenomenon (How do you perceive that the greenwashing practices are manifested?)

Regarding the perception of respondents on the reasons that cause companies to resort to greenwashing, in the opinion of 120 respondents (59.7%), revenue growth ranks first, improving the company's image appears in 81 responses (40.3%), the competitive advantage in 68 (33.8%) and improving relations with stakeholders in 60 of the respondents (29.9%). Respondents had the opportunity to select several answer options, recording a total of 329 responses. (fig. 6).

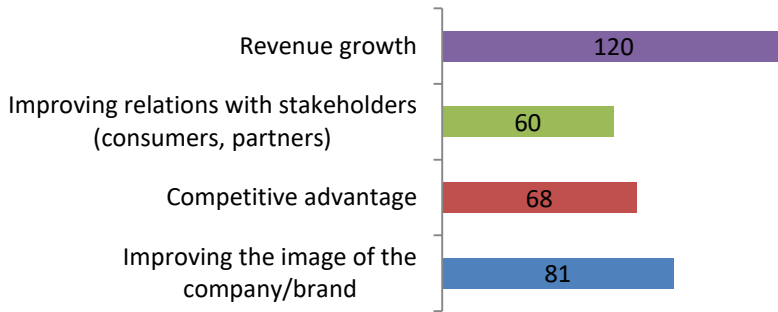


Figure 6. Reasons for the use of greenwashing practices by companies

The field most exposed to the greenwashing phenomenon, from the perspective of 145 respondents (72.1%) is food / beverages, 87 respondents (43.3%) consider that the practice is obvious in the field of cosmetics and personal care products, the agricultural field is mentioned by 62 respondents (30.8%), in 29 answers (14.4%) is mentioned the field of electronics / appliances, another 26 answers 12.9 (30.8%) includes industry and 20 (10%) the field of clothing. Being a question with multiple choice answers and options, a total of 369 answers were recorded (fig. 7).

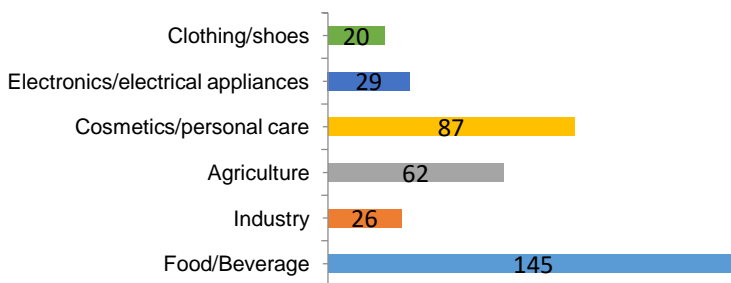


Figure 7. Areas in which the practice of greenwashing is used

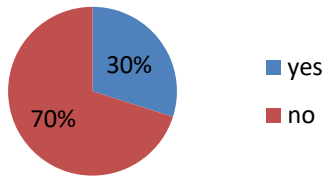


Figure 8. The relationship between consumer and companies that practice greenwashing

Out of the total of 201 respondents, 140 state that they will continue to purchase the products of greenwashing companies (70.1%) and only 61 state that they will not continue to purchase the products of these companies (29.9%).

152 respondents, representing a percentage of 75.6% do not consider themselves victims of greenwashing practices, the remaining 49 (24.4%) respondents consider themselves victims of these practices.

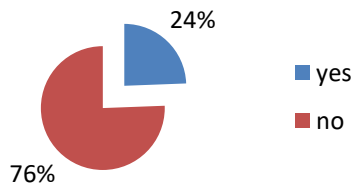


Figure 9. Consumers - victims of greenwashing procedures

To the last question, 83.1% (167 respondents) of the total respondents answered that they intend to remain consumers of organic products and 16.9% (34 respondents) answered that they do not intend to remain consumers of organic products.

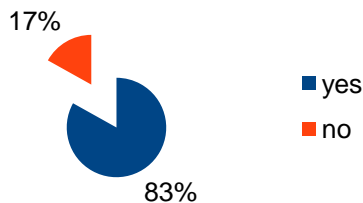


Figure 10. Consumers' trend of organic products

## CONCLUSIONS

The study found that some consumers have an understanding of the greenwashing tactics used by companies, such as the use of images, words and suggestive packaging that seem attractive to the consumer who is inclined to buy the product, but when it comes to their buying behavior, they often do not make

informed choices and continue to buy the products of greenwashing companies. These conclusions are in accordance with those of the study conducted by Khandelwal 2019.

By describing the essence of consumers' lived experiences with companies that practice greenwashing, we sought to discover new meanings related to the phenomenon. If through this study new meanings can be discovered by exploring consumers' experiences with the phenomenon, then the importance of the study can be attributed to how consumers could influence companies' marketing strategies.

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