



BOOK REVIEW

Book

Greenwashing: Foundations and Emerging Research on Corporate Sustainability and Deceptive Communication

Vollero, Agostino

2022 Emerald. ISBN: 9781801179669

Reviewer

Mirela Panait , Petroleum-Gas University, Romania

mirela.matei@upg-ploiesti.ro

(c) Copyrights with the reviewer. This Open Access article is distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) 

.....

The launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the intensification of the efforts of international organizations to establish sustainable development principles such as the Global Compact principles launched by the United Nations have generated an increasing involvement of companies in promoting corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs and disclosure of the non-financial performance (social and environmental) as detailed as possible. The efforts of companies to get involved in CSR activities and to communicate the outcome in terms of promoting sustainable development are also generated by the pressures exerted by stakeholders, the need for social legitimacy, and the potential benefits that can be realized financially by improving economic performance. .

Given these considerations, Agostin Vollero's book, *Greenwashing: Foundations and emerging research on corporate sustainability and deceptive communication* stands out for its critical attitude towards the involvement of companies in CSR actions and communication campaigns. A careful observation of the phenomenon has noticed the intensification of companies' communication efforts regarding their activities to promote sustainable development efforts that are not always authentic.

Disclosure of specific information on non-financial performance is often voluntary, but experts are concerned about how companies make this presentation of non-financial data, given the implications for reliability of main sustainability indices available on capital markets and specific rankings. The implementation of legal regulations such as Directive 95/2014 in the European Union whereby companies have the obligation to publish certain non-financial information further complicates this situation.

The book has a five-chapter structure, the author presenting the preoccupations of the companies regarding the realization of the business and communication of the results obtained. In the crazy race to maximize profits, companies do not always behave ethically, large corporations being involved in various financial scandals fueled by corruption, being accused of exploiting the local workforce, but promoting cosmetic advertising campaigns, in which social and environmental concerns are used, exclusively for commercial purposes. The author explains that initially greenwashing has been associated with corporate environmentalism, but in the last period, an analysis of this phenomenon is observed in a wider context generated by the actions of CSR and corporate sustainability.

The author presents in detail the main facets of the greenwashing phenomenon identified through the systematic analysis of the literature (from different fields such as corporate communication, marketing, accounting, business ethics, management) from 1990-2021. The author noted the increase in the number of articles on greenwashing in the analyzed period, especially in the last five years, the most active

researchers being those from the USA, UK and Europe, and the main methods used being quantitative and content analysis. This analysis allowed the author to identify the main approaches (legitimacy theory, attribution theory, institutional theory, signaling theory, impression management theory and communicative constitution of organizations theory) and five distinct types of greenwashing: disclosure, attention deflection, decoupling, deceptive labeling, and deceptive manipulation. The theoretical approaches used in the study of greenwashing are presented in detail.

The author also presents some Case Studies, the purpose being to learn lessons to avoid the greenwashing trap. The author makes an in-depth analysis of the greenwashing situations found at Volkswagen and Nestle. The situation of Golden Agri-Resources (GAR) Ltd., a multinational company in the agrifood field, is presented in detail, considering the selection of this company in the basket of the Dow Jones Sustainability Index and the greenwashing accusations that targeted both the issuing company and RobecoSAM as a score provider of DJS index. Based on the analyses performed, the author proposes at the end of the chapter certain activities for limiting greenwashing risks and operational communication decisions. The use of non-corporate sources in communication can be a solution for greenwashing trap.

The last chapter focuses on the future of the greenwashing phenomenon, given the growing importance of stakeholders but also the management of communication for corporate sustainability. The author also presents the greenwashing strategy used by certain companies, which for fear of greenwashing accusations prefer to minimize information on sustainable initiatives. Finally, the author argues for the need to insert principles of sustainability in corporate strategies in an authentic and balanced way, communication having an essential role for establishing and maintaining a balanced relationship with stakeholders. Therefore, the relationship between companies, media, and consumers should be based on the most detailed information and knowledge, trust and continuous communication.

The critical attitude of Agostin Vollero towards the phenomenon of greenwashing and the solutions offered to avoid the phenomena are the main strengths of this book. The readers are presented with many facets of the phenomena which are identified in different countries and companies in various fields. The book calls into question the real involvement of companies in promoting SDGs.

Reviewer



Dr Mirela Panait (OrcID 0000-0002-5158-753X) is Professor at Faculty of Economic Sciences, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti, Romania. She has significant experience in teaching courses, conducting seminars and research activities, and participating at scientific conferences. She has published seven books and over 100 scientific papers in the areas of foreign investment, capital market, corporate social responsibility and sustainable development. Dr Panait can be contacted at mirela.matei@upg-ploiesti.ro