

Corporate greenwashing in the fashion industry

Imagine going shopping at your favourite store. You pick out a beautiful dress and fall in love with it instantly. As you're walking to the cash register to pay, a thought hits you. Where did this dress come from? Was it made ethically? Guilt takes over when you realize that your beautiful dress is a product of corporate greenwashing. As the human population, it is our job to protect the natural resources given to us by the environment. It is our duty to preserve nature for all the future generations, as well as defend all of the animals we share the land with. Big corporations who have control over our society, are financially able to help conserve these precious resources, yet choose not to. There has been a cultural shift to prioritize the environment, and big companies are slowly getting on board, but, some companies have tricked the public by participating in corporate greenwashing. Corporate greenwashing is when companies misled their consumers to believe that their products are sourced from sustainable materials when in reality they are not. In the fashion industry the three brands that fool the public and participate the most in corporate greenwashing are H&M, Zara and Uniqlo (Robinson). The effects of greenwashing by giant institutions can have negative consequences for both the environment and us, people.

H&M are one of these stores that contributes to corporate greenwashing. In 2019, they launched their green clothing called "Conscious." They said that they made their clothes using organic cotton and recycled polyester. Not once did H&M actually use sustainable materials but instead were proven to use marketing-friendly words such as sustainable, green, and environmentally-friendly. After this, the Norwegian environmental conservation company called "Norwegian Customer Authority" exposed H&M for misleading marketing for the Conscious Collection because their information provided regarding sustainability was insufficient, even though their Conscious Collection is advertised with environmental benefits (Igini).

Another store that leads in the use of corporate greenwashing is Zara. In December 2021, Zara introduced a new clothing collection made from carbon emissions. The thread that they used for the clothing contained 20% MEG

(Monoethylene Glycol) and 80% PTA (Purified Terephthalic Acid) but was still not made from 100% carbon emissions (EuroNews). Experts believe that even though this is helpful to the environment on a surface level, Zara, its parent company, Inditex and the company that extracted the CO₂ emissions are the only people benefitting. Due to this collection, Zara's net income increased to 3.2 billion euros by the end of 2021 (EuroNews). Zara is apart of the scam of overproducing. They make cheap clothes for very little money, in harsh conditions for workers. The clothes do not last long and will end up in a landfill. They are misconceiving their consumers into thinking that they have changed their ways, but have not done anything to actually help improve the root cause of their terrible environmental impacts, like providing better circumstances for labourers who make their clothing. (EuroNews)

The last and final store, Uniqlo, is also guilty of committing to the act of corporate greenwashing. Although they have contributed to more eco-friendly incentives like supporting the Setouchi Olive Foundation, they do not have the best reputation (Igini). Unfortunately, Uniqlo has had many labour rights violations and complaints. Uniqlo also does not report on the progress of their climate change target put in place to reduce emissions while making their clothes. They have not said anything about this target and in fact, has not had this target scientifically approved (Igini). This means that there is no transparency in the company's efforts to help the environment, which is really telling to the public. Their support of environmental organizations will not erase all the damage they have already caused.

In conclusion, all three of these fast fashion brands have misled the public and have negatively impacted the environment by following corporate greenwashing. Hopefully, after reading this essay, you will be more careful of where you buy your clothes.

Works Cited

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