Greenwashing — The Danger of Generalised False Claims and How the Portuguese Media Represent This Practice

Lauralice Ribeiro
Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal
Conceptualisation, data curation, formal analysis, methodology, writing – original draft

Paula Campos Ribeiro
Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal
Supervision, validation, writing – review & editing

Abstract

The United Nations launched the "Race to Zero" campaign, which private companies have voluntarily joined in the quest to reduce carbon emissions by 2030. The results of this action can be found in the Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor, developed by the NewClimate Institute and Carbon Market Watch. This study aims to understand how the two largest Portuguese newspapers — *Expresso* and *Público* — report on the results of the "Race to Zero" campaign and how much the media focuses on greenwashing in the period before and after the release of the Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor, in 2022 and 2023. In search of answers to the following questions: how do Portugal's two largest online newspapers approach greenwashing? And how visible is the report on the results of the "Race to Zero" campaign? Methodologically, the study follows two approaches: firstly, a non-systematic review of the latest literature on the concept of "greenwashing"; and, secondly, an empirical survey of qualitative/quantitative content analysis based on the online publications of the two largest newspapers in Portugal (*Expresso* and *Público*) during the period of publication of the Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor.

Keywords

greenwashing, sustainability, "Race to Zero", Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor

Greenwashing — O Perigo de Alegações Falsas Generalizadas e Como os Média Portugueses Representam Essa Prática

Resumo

As Nações Unidas lançaram a campanha "Race to Zero", à qual empresas privadas aderiram voluntariamente na busca pela redução das emissões de carbono até 2030. Os resultados desta ação estão presentes no Monitor de Responsabilidade Climática Corporativa, desenvolvido pelo NewClimate Institute e pelo Carbon Market Watch. Ora, o presente estudo visa perceber como é que os maiores jornais portugueses — *Expresso* e *Público* — noticiaram os resultados da campanha "Race to Zero" e qual o foco dos média sobre o *greenwashing* nos períodos anterior e posterior à divulgação do Monitor de Responsabilidade Climática Corporativa, em 2022 e 2023. Assim, procuram-se respostas para as perguntas: como é que os dois maiores jornais online de Portugal abordam o *greenwashing*? E qual a visibilidade dada ao relatório dos resultados da

campanha "Race to Zero"? Metodologicamente, o estudo segue duas abordagens: em primeiro lugar, uma revisão de literatura não sistemática sobre o estado da arte do conceito de "greenwashing"; e, em segundo lugar, uma pesquisa empírica de análise de conteúdo qualitativa/quantitativa realizada a partir das publicações online dos dois maiores jornais de Portugal (*Expresso* e *Público*) no período de divulgação do Monitor de Responsabilidade Climática Corporativa.

Palavras-chave

greenwashing, sustentabilidade, "Race to Zero", Monitor de Responsabilidade Climática Corporativa

---

1. Introduction

Faced with a scenario of growing environmental degradation, increasing concern about global warming and an increasingly demanding and informed society, organisations cannot be expected to take any other stance than that of becoming "green" (de Jong et al., 2020). We are faced with a society that appreciates environmental practices (Torelli et al., 2020), which has become a strong pressure for organisations to adapt to the expectations of this more informed and demanding public (Nassar & Farias, 2017).

Investing in environmental causes, fulfilling the objectives to which they are committed and acting for sustainable development are aspects that organisations can benefit from, strengthening their reputation in the eyes of society, which is now monitoring and judging these actors (Srour, 2008). Studies show that consumers evaluate communication about the environment by comparing it with previous experiences they have had with the organisation (Mason & Mason, 2012), in which the trust they place in the organisation will only be shaken by credible third parties reporting on the false environmental claims. More specifically, regulators and non-governmental organisations (NGO) that work for the environment have a fundamental role to play in denouncing false claims made by organisations. They are tasked with publicising the results of companies' commitment to combating climate change.

However, organisations have not acted as expected with regard to environmental consciousness, but in a widespread and articulated pattern (de Jong et al., 2018; Lyon & Montgomery, 2015) with the intention of misleading the public about what organisations should and should not do, even though they publicise otherwise.

Organisations must not lose sight of the fact that sincerity and credibility play a central role in environmental communication (de Jong & van der Meer, 2017) and that the only way to benefit from their ecological actions is to be truthful and transparent (de Jong et al., 2020). However, recognising that their reputation and image may be at risk, organisations end up giving in to the temptation to use their communication to overestimate or mislead the public about their environmental commitments (Kim et al., 2016), which will irremediably lead to greenwashing practices.

2. What is Greenwashing

"Greenwashing has emerged as CSR's [corporate social responsibility] evil twin" (de Jong et al., 2018, p.79) as organisations recognise the undeniable potential benefits of claiming to care about the environment. According to de Jong et al. (2020), studies have shown that the practice of greenwashing is a widespread phenomenon, gaining so much attention that it has become a prominent topic, with a significant growth in publications in the area, 69% of them in the last five years alone (Santos et al., 2023). This reflects the importance of the subject for society's interest in environmental issues and related organisational practices (Musgrove et al., 2018).

However, the important thing is to understand the various definitions that encompass the concept of "greenwashing", which, initially, emerging from a more pragmatic perspective, was seen as "intentional communications with the aim of deceiving stakeholders"(de Jong et al., 2020, p. 41). However, today the concept has reached a broader classification, with the definition that was accepted in the past limiting the understanding of the practice, which, according to some authors (Laufer, 2003; Ramus & Montiel, 2005), can also be understood as corporate misinformation, or according to Delmas and Burbano (2011), divided into deception at product level or deception at organisational level. According to de Jong et al. (2020), greenwashing

> involves more than just the disclosure of information, is often not deliberate, is not necessarily instigated by companies and does not necessarily benefit companies and harm society. These observations are in line with research into the determining factors, or drivers, of greenwashing, showing that deliberate deception is only part of the picture. (p. 42)

Thus, the authors agree that the phenomenon of greenwashing is broad and varied (Freitas Netto et al., 2020), with the practice of deceiving stakeholders being just one of its facets, which is demonstrated by the results of research by TerraChoice (2007, 2009, 2010), a Canadian green marketing agency, which assessed the environmental claims of thousands of products. According to TerraChoice (2007), the results of the survey showed seven different practices, which they called the "seven sins" of greenwashing. This research showed that the sins generally correspond to more ambiguous and less apparent situations (de Jong et al., 2020), including blatant lies, lack of evidence, inaccuracy and irrelevance, the worship of false labels, to name but a few (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Lyon and Montgomery (2015), in their study, went beyond the "seven sins" and listed 11 reasons that lead to greenwashing practices.

Going beyond the mapping of "sins", in order to better understand the dichotomy between doing and communicating environmental actions, it is possible to classify organisations into four different types in relation to their ecological claims (de Jong et al., 2018). These types include organisations that don't do anything (brown), but don't communicate anything either (silent brown); those that don't do anything and communicate (vocal brown — classic case of greenwashing organisations); those that do (green) and don't communicate (silent green — case of a complete loss of opportunity); and finally,

those that do and make their actions known (vocal green — the case of the most strategic and well-prepared organisations).

Between implementing the changes necessary for the organisation to become truly environmentally efficient and merely producing positive communication, it is obvious that it is much easier and quicker to direct communication towards environmental performance than it is to mobilise the company to make the necessary changes (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

But what drives organisations to do this? In the opinion of Delmas and Burbano (2011), greenwashing represents the "intersection of two company behaviours: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance" (p. 65). Thus, the authors suggest that there are some drivers that lead underperforming organisations ("brown" companies) to rely on overly positive communication. These drivers can originate internally, as obstacles to matching the actual environmental behaviour with its communication. These drivers can be identified as: ineffective internal communication; little understanding of the subject; optimism bias; a focus on short-term returns; a lack of firm incentives; and dubious ethical conduct. Similarly, external drivers can incentivise organisations to make mistakes, such as: pressure from society for a rapid environmental response and the inefficiency of NGOs and the regulatory market in monitoring and enforcement. In this respect, "the current regulatory environment is the main driver of greenwashing" (Delmas & Burbano, 2011, p. 65), since, for unknown reasons, some countries, contrary to global needs, adopt lighter standards for polluting activities and, in the absence of common legislation and regulation, many organisations, especially multinational, are able to engage in reprehensible environmental practices that will not be punished (Bem-David et al., 2021).

The lack of global standards and structures, the loose definition of legitimate sustainable practices and alignment with environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices, which classify organisations based on a reliability ranking, are the main facilitators of greenwashing (Schumacher, 2022). In the absence of these standards, "sustainability data, the main pillar of ESG ratings, remains largely self-assessed" (Schumacher, 2022, p. 6), that is, it is up to the organisation to self-report how sustainable it is. However, we agree that implementing stricter regulations is a huge challenge given the lack of clarity about what truly constitutes "green" behaviour, when we don't even agree on how to use the terms "biodegradable" or "all-natural" (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

3. The Impact on Stakeholders

Studies have shown that the number of green communications is increasing and becoming more popular, however, most of the "green" claims made are misleading (de Jong et al., 2020), which does not necessarily mean were not successful. This discrepancy between an action based on error and its eventual positive outcome, in the case of greenwashing, can be understood from some studies that try to explain the effects of greenwashing on the consumer's perception and on the way society interprets this

phenomenon, although these studies are still quite limited (de Jong et al., 2018). The field still needs more detailed and in-depth empirical research into the impacts of the phenomenon, although this "requires the ability to clearly identify greenwashing and measure its effects" (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015, p. 243).

De Jong et al. (2020) state that until now, research evaluating the impacts of greenwashing has focused on cases of explicit lying, but aspects of this communication can often be misleading, making consumers unable to adequately criticise the messaging. However, what is known so far is that "the impacts of greenwashing on consumers and other stakeholders suggest that greenwashing has detrimental effects on a brand's image" (de Jong et al., 2020, p. 44).

Thus, when discovered, greenwashing has a negative impact on consumers' intentions and behaviour towards a brand or organisation (Atkinson & Kim, 2014; Chen & Chang, 2013; Nyilasy et al., 2014), and can even reach other organisations, via a spillover effect, which negatively affects the purchase of products or services from companies operating in the same sector, as stated by Wang et al. (2019). Such consumer behaviour can partly be explained by uncertainty and lack of awareness about environmental claims and when confronted with possible greenwashing, they become suspicious of products or brands that claim to be ecological (Lim et al., 2013).

However, as Turri and Turri (2015) state, in order for people to accept a lie as such, they must truly believe that it is an intentional mistake, so when faced with greenwashing situations in which people are not confident enough to make a judgement, consumers often seek facts to weigh the environmental claims against the conflicting information from third parties (de Jong et al., 2020). People may adopt various strategies to resolve this dissonance (Tanford & Montgomery, 2015), but the fact is that greenwashing represents a major threat to organisations, as well as offering no competitive advantage (Santos et al., 2023). The practice compromises financial performance (Testa et al., 2018) and the interest of investors, who are more tolerant of behavioural discrepancies that are not related to deceptive communication (Gatti et al., 2021).

Therefore, the important thing to note is that "only when a credible source makes an accusation of intentional, structural and substantial use of greenwashing practices are consumers likely to punish the organisation for its false claims" (de Jong et al., 2020, p. 48).

4. The Challenge of Monitoring and Reporting Greenwashing

The role of environmental regulators and NGOs is fundamental, not only to achieve the sustainable goals that need to be met, but also to protect society by clearly flagging misleading "green" claims. These organisations must be sufficiently credible to expose and denounce greenwashing. In this respect, it is worth highlighting the work of the NewClimate Institute, and the Carbon Market Watch, in drawing up the annual report on the results of the "Race to Zero" campaign.

In June 2020, the "United Nations Climate Change High-Level Champions" campaign was launched by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,

the United Nations's branch that deals with climate change. It is a global campaign that brings together different organisations with the aim of taking rigorous and immediate action to halve global carbon emissions by 2030. The "Race to Zero" campaign brings together leaders and the support of companies, cities, regions and investors for a healthy, resilient, zero carbon recovery that avoids future threats, creates decent jobs and unlocks sustainable and inclusive growth (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, n.d.). The scope of the campaign, in a global alliance mobilised by zero emissions initiatives, included more than 8,000 companies, 595 financial institutions, 1,136 cities, 52 states, 1,125 educational institutions and 65 health institutions, as of September 2022. The "Race to Zero" campaign aims to involve high-level leaders to engage in the Climate Ambition Alliance, which was launched in 2019 in Chile at the climate action summit. With this campaign, the United Nations hopes to unite the real actors of the economy in the biggest alliance ever to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 at the latest. This strategy aims to show governments that companies, cities, regions and investors are united in meeting the goals of the Paris agreement, in order to fulfil the objectives for sustainable development through a more inclusive and resilient economy (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, n.d.).

The campaign brings together 25 multinational companies, leaders in their sectors, who have joined the "Race to Zero" challenge on a voluntary basis. In 2020, these companies accounted for approximately €2,890,000,000, around 10% of the revenue of the 500 largest companies in the world whose greenhouse gas emissions accounted for around 5% of global emissions (NewClimate Institute, 2022). By taking part in this initiative, companies have earned themselves the title of "climate action champions". By joining the campaign, these 25 companies made a commitment and promise to implement best practice strategies that would enable them to achieve zero emissions, net zero emissions or carbon neutrality target by 2030. What they didn't realise, however, was that there would be organisations monitoring these promises.

5. Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor

In February 2021, the NGOS, NewClimate Institute and Carbon Market Watch, presented the Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor (CCRM) — a report on the transparency and integrity of the climate commitments of the 25 companies in the "Race To Zero" campaign. The NewClimate Institute for Climate Policy and Global Sustainability is an organisation that promotes action against climate change and sustainable development, by sharing knowledge, developing research and helping create public policies (see https://newclimate.org/). For its part, Carbon Market Watch is an independent research and monitoring organisation with experience in carbon pricing and participating in and influencing international climate policies, they work to make communication more accessible in order to empower people to take action on environmental issues (Otis, 2023). The perception these organisations have about these companies is reflected in the introductory text of their report:

companies around the world are increasingly aware of the climate emergency. They receive calls from a growing range of stakeholders to take responsibility for the impact of their activities. Companies now have public climate strategies and targets, many of which include promises that, at first glance, appear to significantly reduce, or even eliminate, their contributions to global warming. (NewClimate Institute, 2023, p. 4)

However, due to the fragmentation of approaches and the lack of international regulation (Delmas & Burbano, 2011), drawing up a report with the results of the actions that companies have taken makes it difficult to distinguish real climate leadership from unsubstantiated leadership, or greenwashing. The aim was to monitor the strategies used to fulfil the promises made and to assess the integrity of the climate commitments against the criteria of good practice. The report sought to identify examples that could be replicated in areas that still need improvement. However, the results were frustrating.

In the first survey, in 2022, the reduction metrics attained by 13 of the companies evaluated were, on average, 40%, while the suggested figure was 100%. Among these, five companies had only reduced their emissions by 15%. In addition, only three of the 25 companies assessed have actually committed to "deep decarbonisation of more than 90% of their emissions across the entire value chain by their respective declared deadlines" (NewClimate Institute, 2022). The other 12 companies didn't follow through with their commitments focussed on reducing emissions within the established period.

For the 2023 report, the NGOs used a different strategy to select the sample that would be evaluated. The three largest global companies were selected from the eight sectors with the highest greenhouse gas emissions that were also volunteer for the "Race to Zero", generating a sample of 24 companies (Otis, 2023). Among them, 10 companies were in the group analysed in 2022. The conclusion for 2023 was that 15 of the 24 companies assessed had their strategies classified between "low" and "very low" integrity. "Their combined emission reduction commitments are totally insufficient to align with decarbonisation trajectories compatible with the target" (NewClimate Institute, 2023, p. 5). Among the 10 companies that had been assessed the previous year, limited progress was identified in the integrity and transparency of climate strategies, while the biggest problems persisted.

To summarise, the 2023 CCRM found that the majority of the companies assessed do not have good practice climate leadership strategies and that, of all of them, not one received a "high" integrity score. Based on these results, Carbon Market Watch warns on its website that

regulators must act to protect people from these false claims and ensure that only true climate leaders can claim this mantle. If this isn't dealt with properly, people will continue to be fooled by false climate claims and effectively won't have the opportunity to decarbonise their consumption (…). It is therefore imperative that policymakers, both in the European Union and globally, act urgently to remedy this widespread problem of greenwashing. (Otis, 2023, para. 2)

In Portugal, this report is supported by Associação Zero – Associação Sistema Terrestre Sustentável, an independent non-profit organisation operating nationwide, created in 2015 and a member of the NewClimate Institute and Carbon Market Watch. The Associação Zero (2023) reinforces the dissemination of the report to local media and emphasises that "it is crucial to demand greater transparency from companies that have so far taken advantage of their own misleading promises of climate neutrality by continuing greenwashing campaigns, while keeping their operations unchanged" (Zero, 2023, para. 5).

6. Methodological Strategy of the Study

In pursuit of the objectives of this research, we intend to understand the repercussions and impact of these two annual reports for 2022 and 2023 in the media in Portugal, investigating their presence in the news and understanding the focus that the media gives to the phenomenon of greenwashing. The relevance of research into the approach taken by the media is based on the fact that we are impacted on a daily basis by the mediatisation of information processes, which can enhance certain aspects and perspectives on a topic (Santos, 2020). As Figueira (2014) states, "mediatisation is a factor in any process of institutionalisation" (p. 22) and the media plays a crucial role in shaping the meaning of a given topic, since "almost everything we know about the world today is largely due to the mass media" (Schmidt, 2003, p. 35). In this regard, how do Portugal's two largest online newspapers approach greenwashing? And how visible is the report on the results of the "Race to Zero" campaign?

To carry out the empirical research, we paid special attention to objectivity, the selection of the *corpus* and reliability in order to design this study. In order to define the sample to be analysed, we selected all the publications from the online version of the two Portuguese newspapers, *Expresso* and *Público*, considering that they represent the two largest print media outlets in Portugal. The choice of evaluating the online publications of the two newspapers is due to speed, their accessibility and the low cost of operation. It's important to note that both outlets offer the same content online as in print.

The period for collecting the material was defined taking into account the announcement of the CCRM, with the evaluation of the results of the "Race to Zero" campaign, covering around a month before and just over 45 days after this announcement. For the two years considered in the analysis (2022 and 2023), the fact that the later deadline for collection is longer than the earlier one is due to the expectation that the repercussions in the media could last longer, especially given the importance of the global companies involved in the campaign, the results of whose actions were cited in the CCRM report. On the other hand, the decision to collect the news a month earlier was intended to see if greenwashing was already a prominent issue even before the CCRM was announced. All publications from 10 January to 31 March 2022 and 2023 were selected using the keyword "greenwashing". After collecting the pieces, we selected a *corpus* of 23 publications, 13 from *Público* and 10 from *Expresso*. In mapping the material, we identified the dates, editorials, classification themes and type of approach to greenwashing.

The strategy for the qualitative/quantitative analysis carried out anchored the methodology to the matrix approach method described by Carlson et al. (1993) in their research

on the nature of environmental advertising, where categories were defined based on two different typologies, one that considered the subject of the publications, and the other, their veracity. For this study, the application of this classification seems useful and follows similar identification criteria, although we are aware that the *corpus* of analysis does not deal with advertising, but with news, articles or interviews, however, it is possible to code the contents of the sample using the same classification.

Following the classification typology that categorised the publications under four macro-themes (Carlson et al., 1993), to answer the first question of this study this coding was divided into: "product" — launches of new products, or their environmental characteristics and impacts; "processes" — new practices, technologies, innovations or new environmental rules; "cause" — direct link to some specific environmental cause; and "facts" — strictly factual reports, news or findings on the environmental theme. Similar to the study used as a reference (Carlson et al., 1993), a fifth category was included in order to identify cases that can fit in more than one theme, which we have named "combination". We believe that through this classification, it will be possible to carry out a thematic analysis, identifying the focus of the environmental issues publicised. However, in order to identify the approach taken to greenwashing specifically, a second typology needs to be applied, not to assess the veracity of what is published, but to understand the approach taken to this practice, which involves "reaping the benefits of a green positioning without behaving accordingly" (de Jong et al., 2020, p. 39).

For this second codification we used the following designations: "combat" — describes a direct action against the practice of greenwashing, condemning this practice; "alert" — highlights the danger and warns the reader about pitfalls; "explanation" — when the approach is intended to educate and teach about what greenwashing is; "denunciation" — brings to light a current action, putting the person responsible in check; and "only quoting" — when the word appears in the text without further implications or details. Similarly, for this coding we also accept "combination" in order to identify cases with more than one approach. From there, we started reading all the pieces in order to analyse them and then process the results.

7. Results Analysis

We began our observations by pointing out that among the selected publications there was only one interview, while the rest were news items and articles. All the pieces were collected from the newspapers researched by searching for the keyword "greenwashing" during the predefined collection periods. In 2022, in the *Público* newspaper, we only had four news items in this period, two of which were discarded because they didn't deal with greenwashing, despite mentioning the term, and only the other two were validated. In the same period, we collected five news items from *Expresso*. In 2023, this number grew, which from the point of view of environmental defence is a good indicator and is in line with what was stated by Santos et al. (2023), who emphasised the growth of this topic in publications. In *Público*, we collected 11 news items, while in *Expresso*, we had the same number as the previous year, five publications. In total, 23 valid articles were collected during the collection period.

Next, we evaluated how the articles were allocated between the different sections in the two newspapers. In the case of *Público*, news on environmental issues is concentrated in the "Azul" (Blue) section, a specific section focussing on sustainability and the environment. However, two of the 13 publications evaluated were in the "Ímpar" (Miscellaneous) section, which deals with lifestyle, which makes sense in a way, as the articles dealt with biodegradable personal care products made from environmentally friendly ingredients. In contrast, in the *Expresso* newspaper, the pieces were distributed in three different sections: "Economia" (Economy), "Sociedade" (Society) and "Ambiente" (Environment), as well as the fortnightly newsletter "Ser" (Be; focused on sustainability, ecology and social responsibility). The latter accounted for 30% of the pieces collected from the newspaper, while only 10% in the "Environment" section and the majority in "Society" with 40%. The newspaper's strategy is notable for the dispersion and lack of identity given to the environmental issue, which already suffers from a huge lack of clarity and where, according to some authors in the field of communication, there is still a lack of information (Batistella & Marchiori, 2013; Kunsch & Oliveira, 2009; Rossetti, 2009; Vieira & Gonçalves, 2014).

Moving on to the analyses the results (Table 1), according to the coding of publications into macro-themes, 43.5% dealt with facts related to environmental issues, 26.08% dealt with products, 26.08% processes and 17.39% environmental causes. Of all the publications, 21.74% contained a combination of two different macro-themes. This is in line with the media's intrinsic role of prioritising facts as news.

Macro themes	Percentage
Facts related to environmental issues	43.5%
Products	26.08%
Processes	26.08%
Environmental causes	17.39%

Table 1. *Macro themes of greenwashing in the media*

In assessing how greenwashing is dealt with by the media, we saw that most publications take more than one approach to the issue. Classifying the 23 pieces researched, the corpus was divided into the following codes, which are not mutually exclusive: 34.78% combat greenwashing; 43.48% warn the reader; another 43.48% explain and detail greenwashing situations; 26.08% denounce it; and 13.04% only contain quotes. Of the 10 pieces that combined more than one approach, 40% had three different approaches and 70% focused on warning and explaining the issue. The classification is detailed in Table 2.

Codes	Percentage
Combat	34.78%
Alert	43.48%
Explain/educate	43.48%
Denounce	26.08%
Only quote	13.04%

Table 2. *Approaches to the subject of greenwashing in the media*

In view of these findings, we have seen that the approach to greenwashing is not set in stone, as we have seen from the literature review on the subject (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Freitas Netto et al., 2020); on the contrary, it shifts between categories pertinent to the subject, and the media's approach to it. It is important to note that the media still place importance on explaining and warning readers about the topic, even when the intention is to combat or denounce it. The point is that the alert, with the appropriate clarification about greenwashing, is reflected in the actions of the media. The intention to educate society so that it may protect itself from misleading arguments in organisations' environmental discourse still prevails and deserves recognition. It's worth noting that of all the articles explaining the subject, the one produced on 5 February 2023 by *Público* was the only one to explain greenwashing in depth, including its definition and different forms of presentation, and of all the articles researched, only one had the word "greenwashing" in the title (*Público*, 26 January 2023).

In order to answer the study's second starting question, under a quantitative analysis, we realised that, among the selected publications, only one story, published on 16 February 2023, in the *Público* newspaper, presented the results of the campaign "Race to Zero", although not referring to it, but highlighting the CCRM and naming the companies that failed to fulfil the sustainable objectives they had committed to. Considering that the Associação Zero is a Portuguese organisation that is part of NewClimate and Carbon Market Watch and is a major player in the environmental protection sector, mainly because it is a recurrent source of reference for the media on the subject, it seems to us that the repercussions of the report's results by the media surveyed were rather meagre. The report also explicitly exposed all the large multinationals companies that were assessed for greenwashing practices, which, for the media, would have had a strong news appeal and could have led to the issue unfolding, especially since *Público* cited some of them in particular. However, the coverage was reduced to a mere news item, in only one of the newspapers surveyed, during the two years in which the campaign's results were publicised. Meanwhile, the relevance of this campaign and its impact are crucial if we are to achieve the goals of controlling carbon emissions, as the statement by the Associação Zero in the Ambiente Online portal: "this report exposes serious procrastination on the part of multinationals that not only have a major impact on the planet, but also have the availability of means to reduce their carbon footprint" (Zero, 2023, para. 5).

8. Conclusion

The study in question showed that awareness of the harmful effects of greenwashing has increased, "which may help reduce the frequency of these acts" (Santos et al., 2023, p. 33), but there is still a long way to go to combat this practice. It is a fact that the European Union has adopted laws to regulate aspects covering financing for sustainability and investments that are in line with companies' environmental, social and good governance practices, with the aim of preventing misleading "green" communication on the one hand, and promoting fair and sustainable economic growth on the other (Schumacher, 2022).

However, some authors stress that more efficient regulatory mechanisms should be adopted in order to guarantee greater transparency of environmental commitments, more awareness about greenwashing and organisational alignment between structures, processes and incentives (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). NGOs are crucial in this effort to control organisations' "green" actions. Based on this understanding, we highlighted the work carried out by two large and recognised international climate organisations and concluded that, even with so little time left to change our behaviour in relation to the environment, we are still faced with reprehensible practices regarding commitments to the planet on the part of the world's largest companies.

Various studies have been carried out on greenwashing, from assessing consumer perception, trying to diagnose the reasons that motivate this practice, to identifying the various types of deceptive actions that can be involved in organisations' "green" claims. However, in this study we tried to investigate the media's relationship with the subject, and found that in 43.5% of the occurrences, the concept of "greenwashing" appears in relation to facts about environmental issues and in approaches to combat the practice (34.78%), to alert society (43.48%) and to explain and detail the subject (43.48%).

So, when the media bring up the subject, they try to do so with a critical eye. However, our perception is that the subject is still given little space on the agenda of Portugal's two largest newspapers. For future studies, we believe that a critical discourse analysis could clarify the underlying meaning, which cannot be perceived simply by counting (Ganapathy, 2022), or by identifying macro-themes, but will allow us to go deeper, or at least offer clues, to understanding the different greenwashing practices based on their motivation, in the identification of the four typologies that classify organisations ("browns", "vocal browns", "vocal greens" and "silent greens"), or from the perspective of the resources used, which can be limited to distancing themselves from the truth, or the deliberate use of techniques to deceive or confuse (de Jong et al., 2018).

Translation: Linguaemundi

References

Atkinson, L., & Kim, Y. (2014). "I drink it anyway and I know I shouldn't": Understanding green consumers' positive evaluations of norm-violating non-green products and misleading green advertising. *Environmental Communication*, 9(1), 37–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2014.932817

Comunicação e Sociedade, vol. 45, 2024

Greenwashing — The Danger of Generalised False Claims and How the Portuguese Media Represent This Practice · Lauralice Ribeiro & Paula Campos Ribeiro

Batistella, M., & Marchiori, M. (2013). O processo comunicacional e as práticas sustentáveis nas organizações. *Organicom*, *10*(18), 110–122. https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2238-2593. organicom.2013.139173

Bem-David, I., Viehs, M., & Kleimier, S. (2021). Quando a legislação ambiental é mais rigorosa dentro do próprio país, as empresas poluem mais no estrangeiro. In *Alterações climáticas - Visões fundamentais* (pp. 47–52). Actual.

Carlson, L., Grove, S., & Kangun, N. (1993). A content analysis of environmental advertising claims: A matrix method approach. *Journal of Advertising*, *22*(3), 27–39.

Chen, Y.-S., & Chang, C.-H. (2013). Greenwash and green trust: The mediation effects of green consumer confusion and green perceived risk. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *114*(3), 489–500. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1360-0

de Jong, M., Harkink, K., & Barth, S. (2018). Making green stuff? Effects of corporategreenwashing on consumers. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *32*(1), 77–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651917729863

de Jong, M., Huluba, G., & Beldad, A. (2020). Different shades of greenwashing: Consumers' reactions to environmental lies, half-lies, and organizations taking credit for following legal obligations. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *34*(1), 38–76. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651919874105

de Jong, M., & van der Meer, M. (2017). How does it fit? Exploring the congruence between organizations and their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *143*, 71–83. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2782-2

Delmas, M., & Burbano, V. (2011). The drivers of greenwashing. *California Management Review*, *54*(1), 64–87. https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2011.54.1.64

Figueira, J. (2014). A vida é bela: Processos de institucionalização e construção de sentido através dos media. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, *26*, 22–46. https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.26(2014).2023

Freitas Netto, S., Sobral, M., Ribeiro, A. R., & Soares, G. (2020). Concepts and forms of greenwashing: A systematic review. *Environmental Sciences Europe*, *32*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12302-020-0300-3

Ganapathy, D. (2022). *Media and climate change*. Routledge.

Gatti, L., Pizzeti, M., & Seele, P. (2021). Green lies and their effect on intention to invest. *Journal of Business Research*, *127*, 228–240. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.01.028

Kim, J., Dibrell, C., & Fairclough, S. (2016). Attention, action, and greenwash in family-influenced firms? Evidence from polluting industries. *Organization & Environment*, *30*(4), 304–323. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026616673410

Kunsch, M., & Oliveira, I. (Eds.). (2009). *A comunicação na gestão da sustentabilidade das organizações*. Difusão.

Laufer, W. (2003). Social accountability and corporate greenwashing. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *43*, 253–261. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022962719299

Lim, W., Ting, D., Bonaventure, V., Sendiawan, A., & Tanusina, P. (2013). What happens when consumers realise about green washing? A qualitative investigation. *International Journal of Global Environmental Issues*, *13*(1), 14–24. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJGENVI.2013.057323

Lyon, T., & Montgomery, W. (2015). The means and end of greenwashing. *Organization & Environment*, *28*(2), 223–249. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026615575332

Mason, M., & Mason, R. (2012). Communicating a green corporate perspective: Ideological persuasion in the corporate environmental report. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 26(4), 479–506. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651912448872

Musgrove, C., Choi, P., & Cox, C. (2018). Consumer perceptions of green marketing claims: An examination of the relationships with type of claim and corporate credibility. *Services Marketing Quarterly*, 39(4), 277–292. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332969.2018.1514794

Nassar, P., & Farias, L. (2017). Ética e organizações: Narrativas e conflitos. *Organicom*, 14(27), 70–80. https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2238-2593.organicom.2017.144109

NewClimate Institute. (2022, February 7). *Q&A with the authors: Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor 2022*. https://newclimate.org/news/qa-with-the-authors-corporate-climate-responsibility-monitor-2022

NewClimate Institute. (2023, February 13). *Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor 2023*. https://newclimate.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/NewClimate_CorporateClimateResponsibilityMonitor2023_Feb23.pdf

Nyilasy, G., Gangadharbatla, H., & Paladino, A. (2014). Perceived greenwashing: The interactive effects of green advertising and corporate environmental performance on consumer reactions. *Journal of Business Ethics, 125*, 693–707. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1944-3

Otis, L. (2023, February 13). *Combating corporate greenwashing through regulation*. Carbon Market Watch. https://carbonmarketwatch.org/publications/combating-corporate-greenwashing-through-regulation/

Ramus, C., & Montiel, I. (2005). When are corporate environmental policies a form of greenwashing? *Business & Society*, 44(4), 377–414. https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650305278120

Rossetti, G. (2009). A ação comunicativa na sustentabilidade organizacional. In M. Kunsch & I. Oliveira (Eds.), *A comunicação na gestão da sustentabilidade das organizações* (pp. 125–131). Difusão.

Santos, C., Coelho, A., & Marques, A. (2023). A systematic literature review on greenwashing and its relationship to stakeholders: State of art and future research agenda. *Management Review Quarterly*, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-023-00337-5

Santos, M. N. (2020). *Narrativas digitais nas redes sociais: A construção do imaginário religioso na visibilidade mediática* [Doctoral dissertation, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo]. REPOSITORIO PUCSP.

Schmidt, L. (2003). *Ambiente no ecrã*. Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.

Schumacher, K. (2022). *Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors and green productivity: The impacts of greenwashing and competence greenwashing on sustainable finance and ESG investing*. Asian Productivity Organization. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4303609

Srour, R. H. (2008). Por que empresas eticamente orientadas? *Organicom*, 5(8), 59–67. https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2238-2593.organicom.2008.138967

Tanford, S., & Montgomery, R. (2015). The effects of social influence and cognitive dissonance on travel purchase decisions. *Journal of Travel Research*, 54(5), 596–610. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287514528287

TerraChoice. (2007). *The six sins of greenwashing: A study of environmental claims in North American Consumer markets*. TerraChoice Environmental Marketing. https://sustainability.usask.ca/documents/Six_Sins_of_Greenwashing_nov2007.pdf

Comunicação e Sociedade, vol. 45, 2024

Greenwashing — The Danger of Generalised False Claims and How the Portuguese Media Represent This Practice · Lauralice Ribeiro & Paula Campos Ribeiro

TerraChoice. (2009). *The seven sins of greenwashing: Environmental claims in consumer markets. Summary report: North America*. TerraChoice Environmental Marketing. https://people.chem.ucsb.edu/feldwinn/darby/greenworks/Readings/7_Sins_of_Greenwashing.pdf

TerraChoice. (2010). *The sins of greenwashing home and family edition: A report on environmental claims made in the North American consumer market.* Underwriters Laboratories. https://www.twosides.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Terrachoice_The_Sins_of_Greenwashing_-_Home_and_Family_Edition_2010.pdf

Testa, F., Miroshnychenko, I., Barontini, R., & Frey, M. (2018). Does it pay to be a greenwasher or a brownwasher? *Business Strategy and the Environment*, *27*(7), 1104–1116. https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2058

Torelli, R., Balluchi, F., & Lazinni, A. (2020). Greenwashing and environmental communication: Effects on stakeholders' perceptions. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, *29*, 407–421. https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2373

Turri, A., & Turri, J. (2015). The truth about lying. *Cognition*, *138*, 161–168. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2015.01.007

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (n.d.). *Race to zero: The world's largest coalition of non-state actors taking immediate action to halve global emissions by 2030*. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from https://racetozero.unfccc.int/system/race-to-zero/

Vieira, J., & Gonçalves, P. R. (2014). Comunicação para a sustentabilidade das organizações. In T. Ruão, R. Freitas, P. C. Ribeiro, & P. Salgado (Eds.), *Comunicação organizacional e relações públicas - Horizontes e perspetivas* (pp. 116–129). CECS - Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade. https://hdl.handle.net/1822/65030

Wang, H., Ma, B., & Bai, R. (2019). The spillover effect of greenwashing behaviours: An experimental approach. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, *38*(3), 283–295. https://doi.org/10.1108/mip-01-2019-0006

Zero. (2023, February 14). *ZERO lamenta práticas perversas de greenwashing nos planos climáticos das grandes empresas globais*. https://zero.ong/noticias/zero-lamenta-praticas-perversas-de-greenwashing-nos-planos-climaticos-das-grandes-empresas-globais/

Biographical Notes

Lauralice de Moura Ribeiro is a PhD candidate in Communication Science at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Coimbra, holds a master's degree in Communication and Journalism from the same institution and a postgraduate degree in Organisational Communication from the Casper Líbero Foundation.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9050-1911

Email: ribeirolauralice22@gmail.com

Address: Largo da Porta Férrea, 3000-370, Coimbra

Paula Campos Ribeiro has a PhD in Communication Sciences in the area of organisational communication from the University of Minho. She is a visiting assistant professor at the University of Coimbra and an integrated researcher at the Communication and Society Research Centre.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1735-9189

Comunicação e Sociedade, vol. 45, 2024

Greenwashing — The Danger of Generalised False Claims and How the Portuguese Media Represent This Practice · Lauralice Ribeiro & Paula Campos Ribeiro

Email: pcribeiro@fl.uc.pt
Address: Largo da Porta Férrea, 3000-370, Coimbra