

GREEN MARKETING AND GREENWASHING – ANALYSIS OF THE PHENOMENON IN BRAND PROMOTION ON SELECTED EXAMPLES

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Purpose: The article presents green marketing and greenwashing as phenomena in the context of the promotion of selected brands. The aim of the article is to present the essence of green marketing and greenwashing and, on this basis, to show and expose bad practices used in marketing activities that pretend to be truly ecological projects.

Design/methodology/approach: In the article, the following research methods and techniques were used: problem, analytical, synthetic, chronological, interview, questionnaire, comparative, and participant observation.

Findings: Green marketing was sufficiently shown in many studies. Greenwashing, on the other hand, as a dynamic and willingly practiced in marketing activities phenomenon, aroused the greatest research attention of the Author, who, by giving many examples, revealed tricky methods and eristic tricks leading to a quick promotion of a company and achievement of undeserved profits. In the opinion of the Author, it is advisable to present brands that promote themselves through green marketing, because their names should be remembered. On the other hand, for companies that use greenwashing, as entities negatively assessed by consumers, being included in the scientific text, cannot be an opportunity to promote.

Originality/value: Despite many positive actions, we can still observe companies using greenwashing that soak their messages with ecological hollow words. Greenwashing harms not only consumers, but also honest companies that take problems of sustainable growth seriously. Therefore, the ability to recognize unfair practices is extremely important. At this point, we can indicate the relationship between the level of environmental awareness of customers and the actual or apparent activities of companies. Therefore, this article is aimed especially at consumers and people interested in sustainability.

Keywords: green marketing, greenwashing, promotion, brand, ecological products

1. Research problems and methods

The main research problem presented in this article concerns the following issues:

- identification of the credibility of the strategy and brand creation implemented in the trend of caring for pro-environmental and animal-friendly problems,
- showing the reliability of advertisements and their credibility against the background of brands that play unfair.

In the article, the following research methods and techniques were used: problem, analytical, synthetic, chronological, interview, questionnaire, comparative, and participant observation.

The following hypotheses were helpful in solving the main research problem:

- it is necessary to expose, disclose and publicly stigmatize companies, enterprises, corporations, and brands that use greenwashing in their activities,
- changes and modifications in the domestic law of Poland, as well as in the European Union and on a global scale are insufficient,
- the models of international cooperation and control of the greenwashing phenomenon developed so far only partially work,
- the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, and especially the consequences of the virus among millions of convalescents around the world, require special care of national and global brands to plan and implement a truly ecological method of production and distribution,
- the current state of knowledge on green marketing and greenwashing, as well as the hypothetically assumed improvement in the implementation of procedures developed by national and international experts, will make societies able to effectively take care of minimizing the impact of harmful methods of production, transport and sales on the condition of the environment.

2. Introduction

Green marketing, most often called ecological, green, environmental, natural or simply eco-marketing, is a phenomenon that has been functioning in the consciousness of pro-ecological social groups since the 70s of the XX century. Slow, but increasingly clear, perception of this phenomenon was a reaction to the evident examples disclosed by various specialists, but also by consumers themselves, demonstrating the harmful impact of production methods, organization of goods transport, their composition and forms of sale on the condition of the human environment. Constant progress of civilization, growing human needs, both food

and related to the organization and rationalization of everyday life, force an increase in demand and, consequently, a dynamically growing scale of production and sales.

It is worth emphasizing that in 1975 the American Marketing Association (AMA) published one of the first definitions of green marketing - "environmental marketing is a type of activity that consists in the distribution of products considered safe for the environment on the market" (Zachnik, 2022).

In the following years, along with the development of ecological awareness and the accumulation of new experiences, many definitions appeared. In 1988, Richard N. Jeurgens stated that "green marketing is the deliberate awakening of the ecological awareness of potential customers who, by definition, are not interested in environmental protection" (Zaremba, 2002b). This American businessman argued that the company's policy is to change the behavior of its consumers and cause them to buy organic products. Pro-ecological behavior is to be generated by the producers themselves. Professor Ken Peattie, held a slightly different view. In 1992, he defined green marketing as "a management process that is responsible for identifying, anticipating and meeting the needs of consumers in a way that is cost effective for the producer and takes into account environmental protection requirements" (Peattie, 2008).

An approximate definition was presented in 1996 by marketing professor, Henryk Bronakowski. He claimed that "ecological marketing is a system of skills, knowledge and management styles that enable the fulfillment of the needs expressed by market participants of ecological goods and services" (Bronakowski, 1997).

In 1997, professor of economics, Józef Penc, described "green marketing as marketing activities that result in the production of products that are harmless to the natural environment" (Penc, 2007).

It is also worth presenting the definition proposed by Jan Leśniak, a professor of economics, who noted that "ecological marketing is a process aimed at analyzing the market in order to determine the needs of consumers. The needs for ecological, environmentally friendly products and services should be implemented into production, and consumers should be informed about the positive qualities of these products. The system of analysis, production and communication must work simultaneously to fulfill its role" (Leśniak, 2001).

An interesting definition of ecological marketing was also presented by Dr. Sabina Zaremba-Warnke. She recognizes that it is "the phenomenon of satisfying the expectations of customers and society through the effective implementation and planning of the concept, distribution and prices of goods, services and ideas in such a way that it satisfies both sides of the market - producers and consumers" (Zaremba-Warnke et al., 2009).

The above-mentioned definitions, selected as examples of an accurate definition of this phenomenon, do not end the whole problem. The concern for natural environment, at the level of managing the market of goods and services, is a very complex process, as it covers the functioning of the global marketing and promotion system. Each year in European and world markets brings new experiences and challenges, especially the years of crisis, marked by the

COVID-19 pandemic and after February 24, 2022 marked by the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The constant increase in the level of social awareness, including concern for the extension and comfort of human existence, generates the need for a sustainable lifestyle, and especially respect for the principles of ecological development. The increasing demand for consumer products caused, especially in highly developed countries, a dynamic increase in the production and distribution of many goods. The irrepressible desire for profit caused the spread of advertising practices known as greenwashing, i.e. the imitation of ecological marketing. In this case, eco-trends are only a marketing gimmick which, after revealing real intentions, inevitably leads to a brand image crisis. In a colloquial language, this phenomenon is called dissemination of disinformation, green eyewash, green lie, or eco-scam. It is regrettable that deceptive marketing practices become popular, as signaled in the TerraChoice Environmental Marketing Report. The analysis of over 1000 advertisements promoting pro-environmental slogans showed that only one of them could not be accused of greenwashing (Lane, 2013). It is hard not to notice that the scale of the problem is serious.

3. The state of research

The analysis of literature on the subject revealed that the essence of the phenomena of "green marketing" and "greenwashing" was defined more or less accurately.

Since green marketing has already been introduced, the phenomenon of greenwashing will be discussed in the following part. Lucyna Witek, in her article, presented the genesis, concept and types of greenwashing. She presented an interesting analysis of factors which promote the development of these types of practice in the context of consumer behavior (Witek, 2013). Anna Jakubczak in the article "Greenwashing strategies in selected retail chains in Poland" presented a deep analysis of the phenomenon of greenwashing, more and more often practiced by business in order to "introduce consumers to the misconception about the image of a company or product as environmentally friendly" (Jakubczak, 2018). Interesting and valuable analyzes were also prepared by the following authors: (Chen, 2013; Delamas, Burbano, 2011; Polonsky, 2010; Griese, 2017).

The review of the works published so far allows for a sufficiently precise definition of the concept of greenwashing as an imitation of ecological marketing. However, the shortening path in search of new green technologies, false engaging in charity campaigns ("for own glory") with own interests in mind, false work on meeting the conditions specified by international certificates, generates additional company's financial resources. Moreover, it is very time consuming. The authentic green marketing requires commitment, consistency and care for credibility. The company cannot pretend and simulate ecological ventures. In pursuit of profit,

companies consciously avoid officially declared rules of production and sales. What is more, they use noble and popular slogans instrumentally. On the other hand, even a cursory analysis of the reliability of the declared principles and methods of operation does not have much in common with the ecological activity of the company. The pseudo-ecological methods of production and distribution can be described as follows:

- company (brand) proclaims fashionable slogans and pro-ecological slogans, mainly in order to multiply its profit,
- corporation, company, brand fail to meet officially declared assumptions, consciously exploit the ignorance of consumers using deceptively captious slogans and advertising slogans that describe the false values of the product: "environmentally friendly, ecological, natural, green".

One of the black greenwashing methods is captious but false information on the packaging. The distribution of goods, produced with a shameful violation of the basic principles of ecology, takes place in packaging made of recycled materials, which also had little in common with green manufacturing. Information about recycled packaging is intended to attest to the content that was allegedly produced also in accordance with the principles of ecology. In this case, green marketing turns out to be greenwashing. It is difficult to disagree with the opinion commonly expressed by many specialists that ecology is not always an element of corporate social responsibility and is only a way to achieve greater profits through the instrumental use of current trends. The remedy for this type of practice may be the increasing level of consumer awareness, sensitivity to environmental protection, discernment and vigilance to green lies. The assumptions of eco-marketing promote pro-ecological attitudes and behavior. Unfortunately, on the market, it is often observed the use of eco-trends as marketing tricks, which in the short or long term lead to an image crisis.

On the market, a positive symptom is more and more consumers who are allergic to eco-manipulation. They uncover flashy and green slogans on products that are supposed to be ecological and supposedly warming the brand image and its concern for the environment. In fact, the practices used are sheer scams. The research conducted in Bydgoszcz for the purposes of this article allows for the conclusion that Polish consumers can be divided into at least two groups:

- the first one - people who have already developed ecological, natural, pro-environmental habits. They check ingredients of products on labels by scanning barcodes, they use special applications, eg. „Healthy shopping”, „You know what you eat”. They pack products into reusable bags. After coming home. They store the food in appropriate conditions so that it will keep its freshness as long as possible. They bring uneaten products to special food share places (there are three eateries in Bydgoszcz-Karmnik near the WSG (14 Królowej Jadwigi Street), Wspólna Spizarnia (79 Gdańska Street), and Jadłodzielnia Wisła Stary Fordon (1 Piekary Street) - the food is wholesome);

- the second one - people with still low level of environmental awareness. In Bydgoszcz and all over Poland, it is the predominant group of consumers, to whom companies use greenwashing without any reservations.

The survey and direct interviews were conducted in August 2022 in Bydgoszcz on a group of 60 people who bought various products at Galeria Pomorska, 141 Fordońska Street.

When presenting the negative face of greenwashing, it is necessary to appreciate, both on the Polish and European market, companies (brands) that effectively cultivate ethical values, modify production and distribution processes, offer customers goods and services that guarantee compliance with ecological standards. In this case, their achieved financial gains and competitive advantage are a derivative of green activities, not their main intention.

4. Positive examples of brand promotion

Ecological marketing is currently a tool used by companies, enterprises and ecological farms, because in the activities of this marketing, the greatest opportunities for brand development and promotion have been noticed, and thus achieving a competitive advantage on the market. Both the economic crisis, climate change and the increasing level of consumer awareness contribute to the growing popularity of this phenomenon. Moreover, consumers observe profit-oriented companies and expect them to act pro-ecologically. These feelings are perfectly read by companies that take advantage of the emotional commitment of their customers to promote their brands. This hypothesis is confirmed by the report Ekobarometr of the Market Research and Opinion Agency SW Research (2021). The report states that more than half of Poles (58%) declare that in the last month they saw an advertisement or promotion of a product or service that used ecological elements. It is also worth emphasizing that 74% of Poles have a very positive attitude to advertising and promotion with ecological elements, and more than half of the respondents claim that they increase eco-awareness (Ekobarometr, 2020).

The range of pro ecological activities of various brands is very wide. EKOMaty, i.e. vending machines, which enable the selective collection of plastic and metal beverage packaging, are becoming more and more popular. The collected raw material is used to produce new bottles. Such practices are used, for example, by Żabka and Żywiec Zdrój. Companies such as: Yope, Swapp, Carrefour promote refilling stations, i.e. automatic machines, thanks to which you can pour, for example, liquid soap and other cosmetics into their packaging. The aforementioned activities are aimed at reducing the number of disposable packaging used so far. For using this type of machines, customers get additional bonuses, e.g. discounts on subsequent purchases of this brand's products. An innovative and very interesting method of marking products with light is more and more often used, especially in the food sector, where fruit and vegetables are labeled non-invasively with natural light instead of bio stickers.

The focused beam of light works like a regular tattoo and such practices have already been introduced by the Lidl chain of stores. Pro-ecological projects are more and more often carried out by clothing brands. It is worth mentioning here the Loop system, in which old clothes are washed and new ones are sewn from recovered materials. Importantly, no harmful chemical reagents or water are used in the entire process, only a small amount of new cotton fibers are added. Such practices are implemented by the Swedish company H&M. The Answear brand collects clothing, for example as part of the "Eko Is The Answear" or Wear & Share campaigns. They involve giving new life to unworn clothes. From the collected funds, 500 trees were planted and some financial support was given to the ecological foundation Zielona Akcja. The brand also takes care of its shipments with its products. The company focused on certified materials, mainly from recycling and the so-called poly mailers made of at least 80% recycled materials. In turn, all cardboard boxes are made of recycled paper and are FSC MIX certified. This means that the waste paper used to make them consists of at least 70% wood from FSC® certified forests (Małecki et al., 2021).

Toy brands have also started to carry out activities aimed at protecting the natural environment. For example, Mattel launched the production of world-famous dolls made of plastic obtained from the ocean, and announced the "Play-Back" program, under which anyone who owns the brand's toys can send unused toys to the company for free. Everything will be recycled.

The projects related to the protection of fauna and flora are used by many companies. A good example is the Żubr brand, which in animated spots not only saves various species of animals, with the help of the mighty King of the Forest, but also successfully implements the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) strategy, which protects and rescues endangered species. Within two years, the brand donated over million Polish zlotys to organizations that support the protection of endangered species and carried out two nationwide educational campaigns. The Bison Fund (Fundusz Żubra) was also established, which has the ambition to become one of the most important nature protection organizations in Poland.

The companies that produce household appliances more and more often meet the ecological expectations of their customers. The BSH brand (manufacturer of Siemens, Bosch and Gaggenau) took care of such a course of its technological process that would be neutral in terms of carbon dioxide emissions. In practice, this means that the washing machine, refrigerator, dishwasher, oven, vacuum cleaner and all other devices manufactured by BSH are made without leaving a carbon footprint. The brand strives for the so-called the circular economy model, shifting from a one-way "production-use-disposal" to a closed cycle „production-use-repair-renewal-re-use-processing". All those actions are to offer customers high-quality devices that are developed and operated in an environmentally friendly manner as much as possible. It is also worth emphasizing that BSH headquarters in Poland are adapted to the highest ecological standards. The green areas around the factories are used in other ecological ways, e.g. in the area of the dishwasher factory in Łódź, an apiary for bees is established. Hundreds

of thousands of bees live there. The company has taken steps to provide these beneficial creatures with conditions similar to natural ones - the frequency of mowing the grass is reduced, and the green areas around the factory are not artificially fertilized. Around the factory in Wrocław, BSH planted about 100 trees and built 600 meters of bicycle path and pavement, which contributes to improving the safety of employees and residents (Małecki et al., 2021).

The cooperation with food banks, withdrawal from egg production using cage breeding methods, are other positive actions at the ecological level (Eurocasach). An interesting form of caring for the environment was proposed by the BGŻ BNP Paribas brand, which introduced the Carpooling application, enabling employees to commute to work together.

The projects of the world-famous Swedish company IKEA, which systematically strives to achieve energy independence, can be assessed similarly positively. It currently produces more electricity than it consumes. In addition, taking care of its brand image, it runs an anti-food waste program, uses and promotes recycling and rational disposal of raw materials. An important project carried out by IKEA is the "Buy Back" initiative. The chain buys used furniture from its customers, which is then put up for sale or - if it is not reusable - it is recycled. The brand also decided to completely abandon plastic in its disposable packaging, and also became involved in the Food Waste Watcher campaign - preventing food waste.

A notable positive example is Patagonia Company, which produces outerwear (jackets, coats, overalls, capes, tents, blankets) designed to protect the human body against adverse weather conditions. Following the animal maltreatment signals, the company began to make all its clothes from organic cotton, abandoning natural merino wool. In addition, the brand uses the down only from controlled sources. It was the first company in the world that started the production of surf foams made of natural materials, and developed and donated to producers the technology of using recycled raw materials free of charge.

Another positive example is Checky Panda company, which promotes the massive use of bamboo. Obtaining this raw material, which comes from the most renewable plant in the world, which grows extremely quickly, is a real pro-ecological action.

Due to the limited scope of this article, it is difficult to present all pro-ecological brands. In everyday life, we more and more often witness many actions and projects that, to a greater or lesser extent, change the world to be more environmentally friendly. Even small campaigns, such as „Kwiaty za elektrograty" (Castorama), „Pan Karp zarybia Wisłę" (Anwil), build environmental awareness, especially of the young generation.

In general, it can be said that there are many companies that strive to meet ecological standards in the production and distribution process with great care. It seems that the future in the global market belongs to these brands.

5. Pseudo-ecological activities

Companies that use catchy slogans to achieve short-term profits, hide the actual composition of their products, repaint their packaging green, pretend to be eco-friendly, and apply a not-so-praiseworthy practice - greenwashing, will not have clear prospects for a long time. The image situation on the market will force them to change their priorities. A brand that has so far devoted more time and resources to promote its own ecological image than actual ecological projects, must radically change the directions of its activities.

Very disturbing data appeared on greenwashing in the Ekobarometr Report. The survey shows that only 13% of respondents knew this phenomenon and were able to define it. 35% of respondents said that they were most annoyed by pseudo-ecological packaging. The respondents emphasized that a product packed in paper or cardboard with plant graphics did not mean an ecological product. Very often, unfortunately, the packaging that looks like ecological is made of plastics. In addition, 32% of respondents paid attention to the so-called unhealthy compositions of supposedly ecological products. This is another point of conflict in the brand-consumer relationship. The brand owner ensures that the product is "natural", "vege", „organic” - and this is written on the packaging. In fact, the composition does not match the declared one (Ekobarometr, 2020).

Greenwashing is also called feigned ecology. It is hard not to notice that eco-fraud is practiced by companies, associations, politicians of various levels, local public administration, celebrities and sports clubs. These practices are aimed primarily at consumers and customers with a low level of environmental awareness. The danger of practicing greenwashing is that it promotes products and services as ecological that are not ecological. Companies offer consumers "ecological" products to satisfy them and force to participate actively in environmental protection. Intrusive advertising and false promotional campaigns often cause consumers to become indifferent to products and brands that undertake genuine pro-ecological projects. For "specialists" promoting pseudo-ecological products, greenwashing seems to be a recipe for quick, convenient and cheap achievement of, for example, sales growth. In the longer term, the company's actions based on false assumptions may lead to loss of consumer confidence and damage to the company's reputation, image and well-established position on the domestic or international market. And the reconstruction of the brand's prestige is a long and costly process, often exceeding the profits obtained from the sale of pseudo-ecological goods and services. Nowadays, however, eco-manipulation, despite these threats, has become quite a common mechanism. It should be clearly emphasized that in the end it is not profitable for the company. Despite this awareness, many companies try to "green" their image, because there are still no specific legal regulations, as well as specialized authorities that could efficiently prosecute and punish brands that use unreliable and unethical practices.

The TerraChoice Report lists seven major violations and irregularities that should be attributed to supporters and practitioners of greenwashing:

- „hiding" unfavorable features,
- lack of information, evidence and certificates about the product as ecological,
- too general, imprecise, euphemistic product description (terms: "eco", "green", "bio", "earth-friendly", "100% natural"),
- information that the product does not contain banned chemicals, e.g. freons, the use of which has long been prohibited,
- using words "less evil" for some products, e.g. ecological cigarettes,
- „white lie" - when a company uses eco-labels and certificates illegally and groundlessly,
- false labels - eco-similar labels on products, using graphics and texts allegedly confirmed by an independent environmental organization" (ekologia.pl/srodowisko, 10.09.2022).

There are over a dozen entities in Poland that issue appropriate certificates and labels for ecological products. The certificate is issued after an in-depth analysis and control of the entire production process of a given raw material and then of goods for sale. The procedure often takes several years, therefore many companies, shortening this path, invent similar-looking packages, labels, e.g. "fully natural", "100% natural", "made of ecological ingredients". There is still a narrow group of entrepreneurs who apply, for example, for the Eco-label on the packaging (it resembles a daisy). The Eco-label is a guarantee that the product meets the highest ecological standards. The symbol of organic production in the European Union is the so-called Euro-leaf. It is also worth paying attention to the European quality markings of regional products - "Protected Designation of Origin", "Protected Geographical Indication" and "Traditional Specialty Guaranteed", as well as the most important quality markings of this type of products appearing in Poland, "Quality Tradition", "List Traditional Products", "Pearl - Our Culinary Heritage", "Culinary Heritage", "Integrated Production" and "Meet Good Food". All these markings guarantee the highest quality of products (Bryła, 2015).

The cases of greenwashing can be reported to the Advertising Council. A form is published on the website www.radareklamy.pl. It must be completed and submitted to the Council. However, the Advertising Council does not have strong competences to effectively stop greenwashing. It is difficult to disagree with the opinion of experts that the greatest innovation would be to make organic products sold as ordinary products, and not ordinary products sold as organic.

It is regrettable that the phenomenon of greenwashing is practiced by both global brands and small companies. Their behavior is reprehensible and the brand image is definitely losing its shine. There are many examples that clearly demonstrate such practices. Brands consciously use the low awareness of many customers, and deceive them with the form and content on the packaging, similar to ecological, or even worse - the ingredients of the product. An example is

an action organized by a distributor of well-known mineral water in Poland. The management of the company, using the image of a famous journalist (with her consent), tried to convince the public that plastic bottles are more environmentally friendly than those made of glass. This type of marketing campaign did not contribute to the increase in popularity and importance of the brand on the market. Some companies use their green image insidiously with very subtle methods. This is particularly reprehensible because the consumer does not know that the brand is misleading him. There are many more such practices on a daily basis.

TV programs and YouTube channels, run by, among others Katarzyna Bosacka "I know what I eat", "Re-wiselyJemy", "EkoBosacka", as well as profiles on Facebook and Instagram are very helpful in the fight against greenwashing. It is worth paying attention to the enormous role played by influencers in this regard. "Naturalnieproste" on Instagram by Dominika Chirek, who, together with a group of observers, exposes reprehensible practices carried out by the cosmetics industry, helping to distinguish natural cosmetics from those that only pretend to be them. Similarly, on her profile "Eko.paulinagorska", the author carries out ecological education. Sylwia_Majcher_Eko, on the other hand, argues that everything what is eco is great. The "Eco_friendly_change" channel continues similar activities. It is also worth noting the action of the "Ecosy" profile on Instagram. The site gathers in one place many ecological Polish brands, such as local manufactories, up-cycling, sustainable fashion. The "Czytamyetykiety" profile, which analyzes the labels of food and cosmetic products and runs educational e-books, also plays a positive role. There are also places where you can learn about the offer of regional eco products. Local producers of natural food play a major role there, e.g. Frymark Bydgoski in Bydgoszcz, where you can buy ecological products. Due to the limited scope of this article, only a few examples of both green marketing and greenwashing are provided.

6. Conclusion

When analyzing the reports on ecology and the natural environment, it can be clearly stated that Poles perceive a serious threat to the Earth, especially the natural environment, and notice the need to take appropriate remedial measures. The respondents consider armed conflicts (57%) and environmental pollution (55%) to be the greatest threats. They clearly expect specific actions from companies and brands to protect the planet and more and more care for the ecological production process (Małecki et al., 20021).

When we consider the problem on a global scale, it can be concluded that ecological marketing is an important element of the strategy of small businesses and large enterprises. In Poland, the process of active pro-ecological activities is more and more dynamic. In order to be able to boast about ecological products, the company should inform truthfully about the ingredients and production methods. In addition, it is obliged to use biodegradable or recycled

packaging, it cannot violate the standards of ecological production method, and it is not allowed to carry out tests on animals. In its activities, it should focus on financial support for social campaigns promoting ecology and broad cooperation with eco-influencers.

The latest results of the Ecobarometer Report are optimistic, as they prove that Poles are eager to care for the environment - 84% of them regularly segregate waste, 83% - reduce power consumption, and 81% - reduce water consumption. They, as consumers, are also increasingly aware of their role in caring for the environment. Nearly half of our citizens pay attention to whether the packaging is ecological, and 44% of respondents are ready to pay more for clothes and shoes made of ecological materials. It is worth emphasizing, that the respondents are cautious in making decisions about changing eating habits for the sake of the environment. 54% of respondents admit that they will not give up eating meat, even knowing the fact that animal husbandry is non-organic. On the other hand, almost half of the respondents engage in promoting pro-ecological behavior. 46% of respondents claim that they instruct their friends to be more ecological (Ekobarometr, 2020).

Systematic observations are in line with the data from the Ecobarometer Report. In fact, more and more often we become more sensitive to phenomena and problems related to our Earth (on a micro and macro scale). Collaborative activities, focusing on waste segregation, responsible buying, switching from meat to a plant-based diet, sustainable development, using hybrid or electric cars, buying in second hand shops, using reusable bags, drinking with paper straws, are clear examples of pro-ecological behavior. Not only celebrities of world format, but also the so-called ordinary people contribute to the protection of the environment. They do it more and more boldly and without any complexes. It is worth mentioning one of the influencers on Instagram who strongly criticizes Coca Cola and puts mineral water on a pedestal. The examples of global brands that care more and more about the fate of the planet inspire optimism.

Despite many positive actions, we can still observe companies using greenwashing that soak their messages with ecological hollow words. Clever marketers know what vocabulary is often adopted without any reflection by customers. "Green empty words", without a real content ("natural", "environmentally friendly", "Eco & Bio", "Biodegradable", "green"), have a broad impact on consumers of goods and services. This procedure can be used freely, because in many countries there are hardly any effective regulations and official norms. Dishonest companies extensively use this situation to create their own ecological image with help of generalities and half-truths.

In the United States, the practice of greenwashing is restricted by law. An example is the American manufacturer of children's mattresses, who advertised his products as organic, environmentally friendly and made with the use of plant materials. The untrue information was further enhanced by the award of the Green Shield (which the company invented and admitted to itself, which was carefully hidden from customers). This evident example of greenwashing

was interrupted by the US Federal Trade Commission, that ordered to stop deceptive practices misleading customers.

Greenwashing harms not only consumers, but also honest companies that take problems of sustainable growth seriously. Therefore, the ability to recognize unfair practices is extremely important. At this point, we can indicate the relationship between the level of environmental awareness of customers and the actual or apparent activities of companies. The possibility of verifying advertising messages of brands is determined by the environmental awareness of customers, as well as their readiness to undertake activities, including the functioning of market of goods and services. It is also worth considering the functioning of relevant services in this area. Their establishment could ensure a safe market of goods and services in Poland. It is difficult to accept shifting all responsibility onto customers and relying only on their choices. It is the relevant institutions that should take care of the ecological composition of products, the quality of services and the elimination of goods harmful to health from the market.

As a research problem, we can propose a wider dissemination, development and implementation of Codes of ethics for companies, specifying precisely, inter alia, all pro-ecological standards that should be strictly used in the production, distribution and promotion of a given brand. In this way, the quality guarantee, consistent with the content of the label, would become the brand's business card in contacts with their consumers. A company's code of ethics, strictly followed, should open wide doors in the global market. Breaking its rules would mean not only destroying the company's reputation, but most of all eliminating it from the group of honest producers and distributors.

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