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❖ **DECODING**  
**GREENWASHING &**  
**DISMANTLING BUSINESS**  
**SAVIORISM** ❖

**29.04.2026**

**INPUT FROM LAVINIA MUTH**

**FOR**

**FASHION**  
**DECLARES!**  
a Climate, Ecological & Social Emergency

# ❖ TODAY'S ❖ SCHEDULE

1. The three forms of greenwashing – vague, misleading, irrelevant. We'll practice on real ads.
2. Social washing, Global South shaming, and the 'transparency trap'.
3. The new stuff – lawsuits, discovery, and why your general counsel now outranks your head of sustainability.
4. Business saviorism and how to communicate with humility, not heroism.

## ❖ 3 FORMS OF CLAIMS TO LOOK OUT FOR ❖

### **WAGUE** CLAIMS

They make up a big part of green claims and use wordings that don't have a legal definition. That makes them hard to pin down and rather meaningless. Because they create an impression of environmentally friendly behavior without actually supporting change.

### **MISLEADING** CLAIMS

A claim which is considered misleading will depend on the circumstances of each case, and what misleads one group of consumers may not necessarily mislead others. A claim can be misleading even if it is partly true.

### **IRRELEVANT CLAIMS**

Irrelevance is a little trickier to notice. They are backed up by evidence and tell the truth to some extent but they are unimportant for the environmental performance of a product. Claims are also irrelevant when they are true but unhelpful to consumers trying to find environmentally preferable products.

# ANALYZE THE FOLLOWING CLAIMS

Vague, misleading, irrelevant?

What are your thoughts?

45 Seconds

Use the chat!

The screenshot shows a Patagonia webpage with a navigation bar containing 'Activism', 'Sports', and 'Stories'. The main article title is 'Saying *no* to conventional cotton'. The text below the title states: 'Growing food and fiber with industrial techniques and harmful chemicals is a main contributor to climate change. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, agriculture, along with forestry and other land uses, generates roughly 23% of greenhouse gas emissions every year. Switching from conventional farming methods to organic practices can help turn our agricultural system from problem to solution.' To the right of the text is a circular image of cotton fabric with a pink diamond-shaped graphic overlaid. The graphic contains the text: '48% The reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions when cotton is grown organically, compared to conventional methods. This switch also saves 91% in water use.'

# ANALYZE THE FOLLOWING CLAIMS

- Cotton is grown and watered in a variety of methods
- The differences of how cotton is grown around the world are too big to generalize its water usage or other environmental impacts such as CO2 reduction!
- Cherry-picking “positive” aspects without negative impacts will not be allowed under the EU GCD.
- Organic cotton is not “better” per se.
- It uses data based on the HIGG index (that the
- Norwegian Consumer Authority found misleading in 2022)

The image shows a screenshot of a Patagonia webpage. At the top, there are navigation links for 'Activism', 'Sports', and 'Stories', followed by the 'patagonia' logo and search and user icons. The main heading is 'Saying *no* to conventional cotton'. Below this is a paragraph of text: 'Growing food and fiber with industrial techniques and harmful chemicals is a main contributor to climate change. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, agriculture, along with forestry and other land uses, generates roughly 23% of greenhouse gas emissions every year. Switching from conventional farming methods to organic practices can help turn our agricultural system from problem to solution.' To the right of the text is a large circular image of cotton fabric. Overlaid on the left side of this image is a large pink Patagonia logo. In the center of the circular image, the text reads: '48% The reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions when cotton is grown organically, compared to conventional methods. This switch also saves 91% in water use.'

## **ANALYZE THE FOLLOWING CLAIM**

Vague, misleading, irrelevant?  
What are your thoughts?

Our Indigood® collection now includes black denim options -  
crafted with 99% less water than the conventional denim-crafting  
process. What's not to love?

**SHOP MEN'S**

# ANALYZE THE FOLLOWING CLAIM

- does not adopt a “life-cycle” approach, it only touches on one step of the entire product life-cycle: the “crafting”.
- compares Wranglers Indigood® denim with “conventional” denim but it doesn’t provide reliable data for such a comparison. What data is this assumption based on?
- Under EU GCD or the UK green claims code claims are not allowed to use aggregate scoring of the product's overall environmental impact on biodiversity, climate, water consumption, soil, etc.

Our Indigood® collection now includes black denim options - crafted with 99% less water than the conventional denim-crafting process. What's not to love?

[SHOP MEN'S](#)

# ANALYZE THE FOLLOWING CLAIM

Vague, misleading, irrelevant?  
What are your thoughts?

**T ECO JACKET**



**68 lbs**  
trash collected

**68 lbs**  
CO<sub>2</sub> captured

**56**  
bottles recycled

The image shows a man in a blue hooded jacket standing outdoors. To the right of the man is a large orange plus sign followed by an equals sign, indicating a comparison or equivalence between the man and the environmental claims listed on the right.

# ANALYZE THE FOLLOWING CLAIM

- shows specific environmental metrics such as the lower CO2 emissions (or the illusion of “capturing” CO2) without providing a holistic view of the overall environmental impact. This can create a skewed perception of the sustainability of the synthetic fiber.
- does not take all the significant environmental aspects and impacts into account to assess the environmental performance.
- refers to recycled bottles as a sustainability feature but this practice is widely discussed in the industry as not favourable.



# OTHER FORMS OF WASHING

**Social Washing:** refers to misleading information about the social responsibility of a company's products or services.

**Diversity Washing:** is when a company's external publicity is inconsistent with the actual performance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

**Woke Washing:** is marketing social justice topics to create a positive image without taking meaningful action. (More popular since companies capitalize on purpose-driven consumerism.)

**Global South Shaming:** means publicly criticizing or shaming countries from the Global South for reasons such as human rights violations or underdevelopment.



# ❖ LET'S HAVE A CLOSER LOOK AT SOCIAL WASHING ❖

## TRANSPARENCY IS JUSTICE

While disclosing data on social working conditions in supply chains might have a positive effect on ethical consumer perception, don't confuse it with accountability and justice. The fundamental rules have not yet changed, making it still difficult for most workers to achieve justice through sole transparency.

## ❖ MADE IN EUROPE ❖ IS A SAFE HAVEN

Nope, it is not. Free trade within the European Union is not to be confused with fair trade. Because there is widespread evidence that working conditions in Europe lack due diligence and security for garment workers.

## BRANDS PAY FAIR WAGES.

Most brands do not own the factories where their clothes are made. Instead, they outsource their manufacturing. So it's the manufacturers paying textile workers wages. Brands pay prices for the products they buy from supply chain partners.

## ANALYZE THE FOLLOWING AD

Social Washing? Woke Washing? Global South Shaming? What are your thoughts?



## ANALYZE THE FOLLOWING AD

- Per definition Global South shaming refers to the practice of unfairly denigrating or stigmatizing manufacturing practices and locations in countries, particularly in the Global South, while simultaneously promoting production in Western nations as inherently superior.
- That's what this ad by Orilabo Projects is doing and is therefore a typical example of Global South shaming.
- It combines the terms “fair fashion” with “made in Portugal” and frames production in Bangladesh with very low prices.
- Shames Bangladesh as a production country and positions “Made in Portugal” as the “fair” alternative.



# ANALYZE THE FOLLOWING AD

Social Washing? Woke Washing? Global South Shaming? What are your thoughts?

The advertisement is split into two panels. The left panel has a green background and features a clear plastic bottle hanging from a faucet with water dripping into it. The text 'Warming the planet.' is centered over the bottle. The right panel has a light blue background and shows a person in a dark puffer jacket looking up. The text 'Warming you.' is centered over the person. A small text box in the top right of the right panel says 'This puffer is made from 16 discarded plastic bottles.' The Everlane logo, a green diamond with a white cross, is positioned between the two panels. At the bottom of each panel, the text 'EVERLANE ReNew' is displayed.

This puffer is made from 16 discarded plastic bottles.

Warming the planet.

Warming you.

EVERLANE ReNew

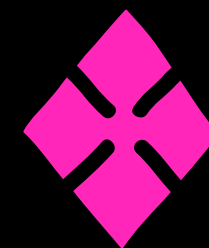
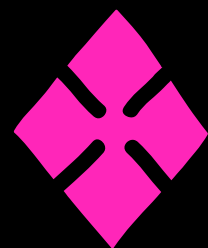
EVERLANE ReNew

# ANALYZE THE FOLLOWING AD

- Makes a big stretch conceptually from plastic bottles “warming the planet” to the supposedly better use case of “plastic bottles warming you”.
- Is highly misleading because using recycled PET from bottles as material input DOES not directly contribute to minimizing global warming. Taking plastic bottles out of a working recycling system is highly criticized in the industry as textile recycling is not nearly as efficient as PET recycling (there’s currently only 1 % textile-to-textile recycling).
- Is not backed up with any scientific evidence.
- Exploits multiple crisis for a campaign that sells products (that again are contributing to the crisis). In our opinion this is highly unethical.



**FORGET ESG SCORES. THE  
ONLY HONEST METRIC IS THE  
DOCKET OF A COURTROOM.**



## ❖ 3 TYPES OF CASES REDRAWING THE MAP ❖

### **GREENWASHING** **CLASS ACTIONS**

The pattern: brand makes a claim. Claim is false or unsubstantiated. Discovery reveals internal emails knew the truth.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS** **❖ DUE DILIGENCE ❖**

This is workers suing, not consumers. Parent companies can no longer hide behind suppliers.

### **SUPPLY CHAIN** **TRANSPARENCY**

This is the quietest but most consequential. Even cases that haven't been decided yet – discovery alone has produced more transparency than any voluntary report.

## **THE NEW POWER CENTER:**

## **WHY GENERAL COUNSEL OUTRANKS HEAD OF SUSTAINABILITY**

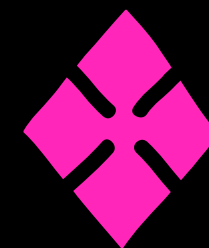
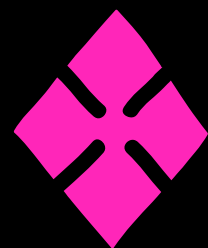
**The brands navigating this well have sustainability, legal and communications aligned before the brief lands.**

- Sustainability knows what can be substantiated.
- Legal knows what would survive a challenge.
- Communications knows how to translate facts into credible copy.

When these three work together, you get more specific, not less – because specificity backed by evidence is your best defense.

# **A SINGLE QUESTION**

**"IF EVERY WORD OF THIS WENT  
INTO EVIDENCE TOMORROW,  
WOULD IT HELP US OR HURT US?"**



# OH WAIT! BEFORE WE GO...

## Have you heard of “business saviorism”?

Saviorism = Narratives that portray companies as the sole problem solvers, often combined with paternalistic language (“We are saving the oceans”) and the invisibilisation of local actors.

“White saviourism” as a basic pattern

- White saviourism: “We are bringing education to Africa” → Business saviourism: “We are saving the oceans”.
- Both narratives suggest one-sidedness (“saviours vs. those in need”) and obscure power structures.



Sports ▾  
We're in business to save our home planet.

patagonia

Sports ▾ Stories

We're in business to save our home planet.

## **BUSINESS SAVIORISM IN ACTION**

However, only 20 points out of 40 in the B Corp Environment Assessment ([2023 Impact Report](#)). Focus on philanthropic growth vs. actual systemic change?

Want to save the ocean one refill at a time, for *free*?

Join more than 85,000 people that have helped collect plastic and stopped this from entering the ocean.

And that's just the start: register your bottle on our Ocean Bottle App and we collect more plastic every time you use it.

TELL ME MORE



Want to save the ocean one refill at a time, for *free*?

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And that's just the start: register your bottle on our Ocean Bottle App and we collect more plastic every time you use it.

TELL ME MORE



## BUSINESS SAVIORITY IN ACTION

But: Plastic is only collected if you use their bottles and, ideally, buy more of them. Focus on growth vs. systemic change?

**SUSTAINABILITY  
REQUIRES HUMILITY, NOT  
HEROES.**

**❖ REAL CHANGE ❖**

**HAPPENS WHEN WE  
LISTEN, LEARN AND SHARE  
POWER - NOT WHEN WE  
PLAY THE "SAVIOR".**

# ❖ **PRINCIPLES** ❖ **TO GO WITH...**

Instead of alarmism ('must act now') → 'needed now.'

Instead of absolutism ('the only way') → 'strategies we can implement.'

Instead of our mission → support efforts.

Instead of 'why so much plastic' → 'understanding challenges.'

Instead of 'multipliers' → 'lead the way.'

# WE COVERED:

- How to spot vague, misleading and irrelevant claims.
- Why transparency isn't justice and Global South shaming is coloniality in action.
- The legal landscape that actually matters – lawsuits, discovery and why your general counsel is now your best friend or your biggest risk.
- And how to communicate with humility instead of heroism.



# QUESTIONS?



**Coaching - Workshops - Speaking**

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