

SUSTAINABILITY

Is green washing en vogue for luxury fashion giants?

October 3, 2022



The phenomenon of companies making commitments to measurably reduce environmental impacts but not putting those into practice is alive and well. Image credit: Greenpeace

By AMIAH TAYLOR

Italian fashion company Prada and Italian fashion house Giorgio Armani were among the luxury brands that won big at the recent CNMI Sustainable Fashion Awards, while others missed the mark entirely.

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Regarding high fashion, consumers are becoming increasingly vigilant about the luxury brands they patronize and are calling for top fashion houses to improve their ethicality and minimize environmental impact versus just providing lip service. The phenomenon of companies professing environmental values, making commitments to measurably reduce environmental impacts but not putting those promises into practice, is called greenwashing, and is alive and well in the luxury fashion sector.

"Greenwashing is deliberately misinformative," said Paul Adler, professor of management and organization, sociology, and environmental studies at University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

"It is presenting an image of an organization's environmental performance that is more positive than is warranted, by highlighting small positive steps and ignoring the large environmental damage still being inflicted."

Is fashion green or greenwashing?

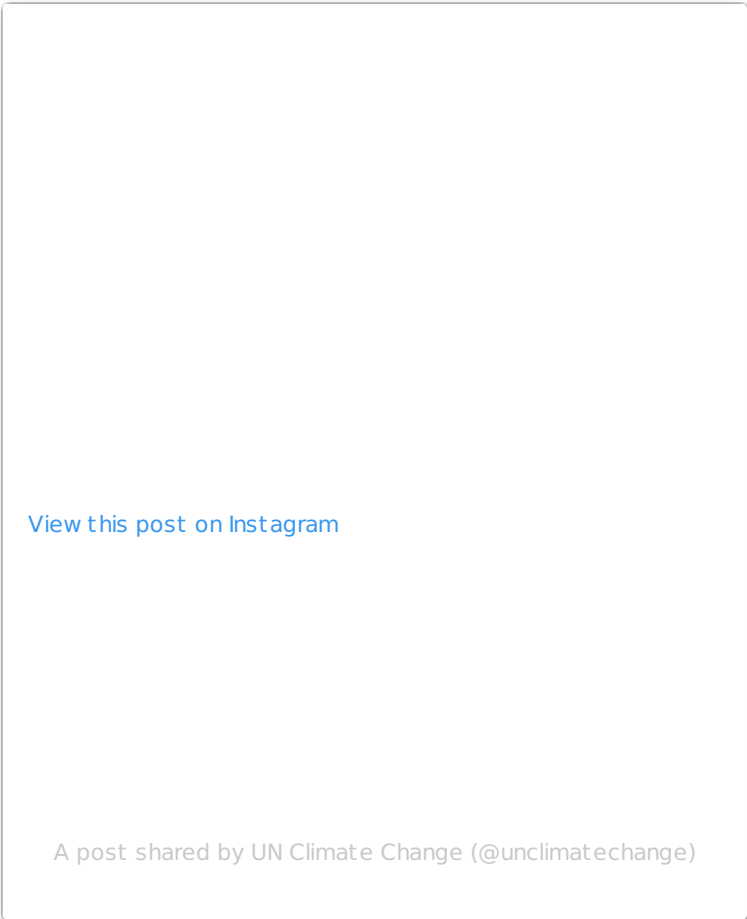
Greenwashing is not a victimless crime. The practice deceives communities that seek to evaluate a company's environmental performance, including employees, potential employees, the community, investors and customers.

Luxury products represent personal status, prestige, value and indulgence, but fewer consumers, especially Gen-Zers, are willing to indulge in luxury purchases at the expense of the environment, according to a Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute (MDPI) [report](#).

One of Italian fashion house Dolce & Gabbana's top six values is "respect for the environment," which includes a commitment to sustainable conduct when performing internal processes and an endorsement for combating climate change.

However, irrespective of its corporate promises, the brand may be less environmentally responsible than its rhetoric

would lead consumers to believe.

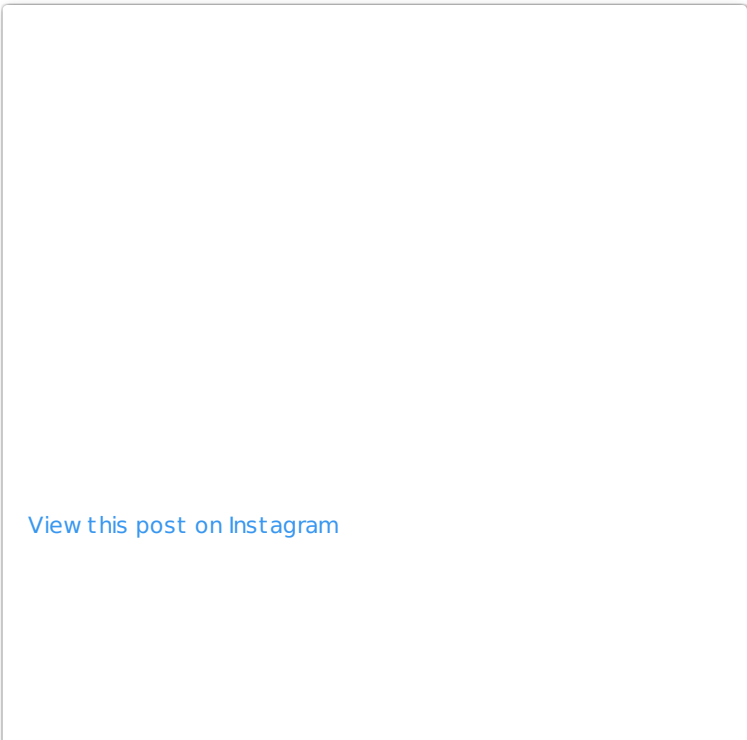


The UN urges action on the climate change front

While corporate narratives can make companies appear greener, the absence of fundamental shifts towards clean practices means that greenwashing is still occurring.

Dolce & Gabbana was not honored or shortlisted for any awards or recognitions at the recent CNMI Sustainable Fashion Awards in Milan. Despite the luxury fashion house pledging to phase out fur completely in January, critics are still decrying the Italian fashion house for not being environmentally conscious or sustainable enough.

The label has also not transparently stated that it pays supply chain workers a living wage, per [Good On You](#), a resource for rating the sustainability and ethicality of fashion brands.



The 2022 Fashion Transparency Index announcement from not-for-profit global movement Fashion Revolution

Additionally, the brand has not confirmed that it has a policy in place to minimize the suffering of animals, receiving a score of zero to five percent in the [2022 Fashion Transparency Index](#).

The Fashion Transparency Index reviews brands' public disclosure on human rights and environmental issues across multiple categories. With respect to spotlight issues which include decent work and purchasing practices; gender and racial equality; sustainable sourcing and materials; water and chemicals; and climate change and biodiversity, Dolce & Gabbana received a duplicate score of zero to five percent.

Other luxury fashion brands that ranked poorly on the 2022 Fashion Transparency Index include U.S. fashion brand Tom Ford, Italian retail company Diesel, Italian fashion label Valentino and French leather and accessories brand Longchamp.

Sustainability as a buzzword

The emerging trend of sustainable luxury is putting pressure on top brands to revamp their environmental friendliness, which can include important business aspects such as their supply chain, materials, and fabric waste.

Balmain recently announced a forthcoming beauty line that is set to launch in 2024 ([see story](#)) under the leadership of Balmain Beauty's newly appointed president of global brands, Guillaume Jesel ([see story](#)).

However, despite releasing a film on the healing power of beauty, in the eyes of many environmental critics, Balmain has not taken tangible steps to heal its own detrimental actions toward the environment.

While some Parisian luxury brands like Hermès have opted to swap animal materials for a cruelty-free approach ([see story](#)), Balmain is staunchly continuing its use of animal leather.

The luxury French label, akin to Dolce & Gabbana, has not transparently stated that it pays supply chain workers a fair living wage, per [Good On You](#). Moreover, Balmain also appears to lack a clear policy on animal cruelty.

"The evidence is clear that corporations are increasingly talking the talk, but very few are walking the walk at anything like the pace we need," Mr. Adler said.

"The changing talk reflects business's concern to buttress its legitimacy in the face of growing public concern about climate change and the increasing likelihood of regulatory action," he said. "As they say, hypocrisy is the compliment vice pays to virtue."