

Greenwashing, Advertising and Climate Justice: Addressing Misinformation in the Energy Transition Discourse

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Greenwashing , Advertising and Climate Justice: Addressing Misinformation in the Energy Transition Discourse

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Abstract

This paper discusses how energy transition can be effectively realised by addressing misinformation. The paper observes that the rise of greenwashing in the energy transition discourse presents a significant hurdle in tackling climate change. The paper defines greenwashing. It examines the various forms of greenwashing. The paper notes that the prevalence of greenwashing in energy transition hinders efforts to confront climate change due to the spread of false, misleading and deceptive information thus undermining trust, credibility, transparency, ambition and action needed to tackle the climate crisis. In light of these concerns, the paper argues that tackling greenwashing is necessary towards actualising energy transition for people and planet. It discusses how misinformation can be effectively addressed in the energy transition discourse towards climate justice.

1.0 Introduction

Achieving climate justice has become a crucial ideal for both people and planet in light of the worsening impacts of climate change. The concept of climate Justice recognizes the disproportionate impacts of climate change on the people and places least responsible for the climate crisis including developing countries, low-income communities, indigenous peoples, women and the youth¹. Climate justice involves focusing on how climate change impacts people differently, unevenly, and disproportionately, as well as redressing the resultant injustices in fair and equitable ways². It has been argued that climate justice is

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¹ What is Climate Justice?., Available at <https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/> (Accessed on 23/01/2026)

² Sultana. F., 'Critical Climate Justice.' Available at <https://www.farhanasultana.com/wp-content/uploads/Sultana-Critical-climate-justice.pdf> (Accessed on 23/01/2026)

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based on the understanding that the adverse impacts of climate change are not felt equitably among people and nations³. The concept of climate justice links human rights and development to achieve a human-centred approach on climate action, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable including the poor, women, the youth, indigenous peoples and communities in developing countries, and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its resolution equitably and fairly⁴. Climate justice therefore means putting equity, inclusivity, fairness and human rights at the core of decision-making and action on climate change⁵.

Energy transition has emerged as an effective pathway towards securing climate justice for people and planet. Energy transition involves transformation of the global energy sector from fossil-based to zero-carbon sources with emphasis on renewable sources of energy, hydrogen and sustainable biomass⁶. At the core of energy transition is the global energy sector's shift from fossil fuel-based systems of energy production and consumption including oil, natural gas and coal to renewable energy sources like wind and solar⁷. Energy transition has been described as a continuing process requiring long-term energy strategies and planning, with country-tailored focus on applying appropriate energy technologies to reach net-zero emissions⁸.

³ Aliozi. Z., 'Climate Justice and Human Rights, in a World in Climate Emergency' Available at <https://repository.gchumanrights.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/2eba3de1-1427-481b-a2d6-07818e00a53b/content> (Accessed on 23/01/2026)

⁴ Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice., 'Principles of Climate Justice' Available at <https://www.mrfcj.org/pdf/Principles-of-Climate-Justice.pdf> (Accessed on 23/01/2026)

⁵ United Nations Development Programme., 'Climate change is a matter of justice - here's why' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/climate-change-matter-justice-heres-why> (Accessed on 23/01/2026)

⁶ International Renewable Energy Agency., 'Energy Transition Outlook' Available at <https://www.irena.org/Energy-Transition/Outlook> (Accessed on 23/01/2026)

⁷ S & P Global., 'What is Energy Transition?' Available at <https://www.spglobal.com/en/research-insights/articles/what-is-energy-transition> (Accessed on 23/01/2026)

⁸ United Nations Development Programme., 'Energy Transition' Available at <https://www.undp.org/energy/our-work-areas/energy-transition#:~:text=Annual%20energy%2Drelated%20CO2%20emissions,90%25%20of%20the%20necessar y%20reduction.> (Accessed on 23/01/2026)

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With fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas being the largest contributor to global climate change, accounting for over 75 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions and nearly 90 percent of all carbon dioxide emissions, achieving energy transition is vital in protecting people and planet from the climate crisis towards climate justice⁹. It has been observed that achieving energy transition presents a unique opportunity to address key global challenges including climate change, energy access disparities, poverty, inequality, and health impacts of the energy sector therefore laying the foundation for a sustainable, just, inclusive and more resilient future¹⁰. Consequently, energy transition is gathering pace all over the world with investments in renewable sources of energy such as wind, solar, hydro and geothermal significantly increasing¹¹. Despite its role in fostering climate justice, the global quest for energy transition faces several challenges including greenwashing¹². Consequently, it has been argued that addressing misinformation in the energy transition agenda is vital towards achieving climate justice for people and planet¹³.

This paper discusses how energy transition can be effectively realised by addressing misinformation. The paper observes that the rise of greenwashing in the energy transition discourse presents a significant hurdle in tackling climate change. The paper defines greenwashing. It examines the various forms of greenwashing. The paper notes that the prevalence of greenwashing in energy transition hinders efforts to confront climate change due to the spread of false, misleading and deceptive information thus undermining trust, credibility, transparency, ambition and action needed to tackle the

⁹ United Nations., 'Renewable Energy - Powering a Safer Future' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/raising-ambition/renewable-energy> (Accessed on 23/01/2026)

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme., 'What is the sustainable energy transition and why is it key to tackling climate change?' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-sustainable-energy-transition-and-why-it-key-tackling-climate-change> (Accessed on 23/01/2026)

¹¹ International Renewable Energy Agency., 'Energy Transition Outlook' Op Cit

¹² United Nations., 'Greenwashing - the deceptive tactics behind environmental claims' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/greenwashing> (Accessed on 23/01/2026)

¹³ Ibid

climate crisis. In light of these concerns, the paper argues that tackling greenwashing is necessary towards actualising energy transition for people and planet. It discusses how misinformation can be effectively addressed in the energy transition discourse towards climate justice.

2.0 Impact on Greenwashing on Climate Justice.

Greenwashing is a form of misleading and deceptive practice where companies portray a false image of environmental responsibility to consumers¹⁴. It has been observed that greenwashing occurs when organizations convey a false image that their products are more environmentally sound than they actually are¹⁵. In addition, it has been pointed out that greenwashing occurs when a company invests in marketing campaigns in order to portray its products and services as environmentally friendly rather than actually minimizing its environmental impact¹⁶.

Greenwashing therefore occurs when an organisation makes vague, misleading, deceptive or even false claims about its positive environmental impact¹⁷. Greenwashing can manifest in several ways. These include claims to be on track to reduce a company's greenhouse gas emissions to net zero when there is no credible in place¹⁸; applying misleading labels such as '*eco-friendly*', '*sustainable*', '*green*', '*climate friendly*', '*biodegradable*' and '*carbon neutral*' which do not have standard definitions and can be easily misinterpreted¹⁹; emphasizing a single positive environmental attribute while ignoring other negative impacts²⁰; changing the packaging of an existing product while continuing

¹⁴ Hayes. A., 'Understanding Greenwashing: Definition, Examples, and Statistics' Available at <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/greenwashing.asp> (Accessed on 24/01/2026)

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ What Is Greenwashing?., Available at <https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/10946-greenwashing.html> (Accessed on 24/01/2026)

¹⁷ What is greenwashing?., Available at <https://www.greenpeace.org/aotearoa/story/what-is-greenwashing/> (Accessed on 24/01/2026)

¹⁸ United Nations., 'Greenwashing – the deceptive tactics behind environmental claims' Op Cit

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

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to use unsustainable ingredients or practices²¹; and investing in marketing and advertising campaigns to portray a company and its products and services as environmentally friendly²².

It has been observed that greenwashing is a common and unwanted practice that affects progress towards energy transition²³. For instance, it has been observed that many fossil fuel companies engage in greenwashing in order to delay climate action²⁴. Due to the negative environmental impacts of fossil fuels, it has been correctly noted that the energy sector is at the heart of a green and just transition to a net-zero and climate neutral future²⁵. However, false and misleading green claims have permeated into the energy sector affecting not only consumers but also the environment²⁶. For instance, when an energy company claims that its products are clean or renewable when that is not the case, consumers can be misled to use such products without knowing that they contributing to the pollution and climate crises which have negative impacts on human and ecosystem health²⁷. It has been observed that in some cases, energy companies use images of wind turbines or solar panels to convey the image that their energy is generated from renewable sources, when in fact it is still largely generated by fossil fuels thus misleading consumers to continue using polluting fossil fuels²⁸.

²¹ Greenwashing: 20+ recent stand-out examples., Available at <https://thesustainableagency.com/blog/greenwashing-examples/> (Accessed on 24/01/2026)

²² Ibid

²³ Natural Justice., 'False solutions: Advertising against Just Energy Transitions' Available at <https://naturaljustice.org/false-solutions-advertising-against-just-energy-transitions/#:~:text=Included%20in%20this%20is%20%E2%80%9Cgreenwashing,the%20Union%20of%20Concerned%20Scientists.> (Accessed on 24/01/2026)

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Greenwashing: The Energy Sector., Available at https://opp.group/upload/greenwashing_energy_1689062327.pdf (Accessed on 24/01/2026)

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

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Further, it has been observed that energy companies usually use greenwashing tactics such as heavily promoting and advertising their investments in small solar or wind projects while continuing to extract and sell vast quantities of fossil fuels²⁹. This creates a misleading picture of the overall environmental impact and commitment of energy companies³⁰. In addition, when companies make sustainability commitments to achieve net-zero without clear plans or concrete actions, this creates a positive image in the short-term but fails to deliver meaningful results in the long-term undermining energy transition³¹. Further, it has been observed that another common form of greenwashing that undermines energy transition is shifting the burden and responsibility to consumers³². For example, energy companies can invest in heavy marketing and advertising campaigns promoting energy efficiency and sustainability tips to consumers while continuing to invest in fossil fuels towards deflecting responsibility away from organizations to consumers³³.

Greenwashing is therefore a common and unwanted practice that affects progress towards energy transition. This fuels climate injustices. For example, it has been observed that by misleading the public to believe that a company is doing more to protect the environment than it is, greenwashing promotes false solutions to the climate crisis that distract from and delay concrete and credible action with severe consequences for both people and planet³⁴. Greenwashing advertising can mislead consumers to continue using polluting fossil fuels thus worsening climate change³⁵. It has been observed that the negative consequences of greenwashing include hindering, delaying, deflecting or blocking necessary climate action and deceiving consumers which is an untenable

²⁹ What Role Does Energy Transition Play in Greenwashing?., Available at <https://energy.sustainability-directory.com/question/what-role-does-energy-transition-play-in-greenwashing/> (Accessed on 24/01/2026)

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ United Nations., 'Greenwashing – the deceptive tactics behind environmental claims' Op Cit

³⁵ What Role Does Energy Transition Play in Greenwashing?., Op Cit

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situation for both people and planet in the wake of a mounting and severe climate crisis³⁶. Consequently, it is imperative to address misinformation in the energy transition discourse towards climate justice for people and planet.

3.0 Addressing Misinformation in the Energy Transition Discourse for Climate Justice

The spread of misinformation through greenwashing in the energy transition discourse affects climate justice by misleading vulnerable consumers to continue utilising harmful and polluting fossil fuels³⁷. It also deflects responsibility from energy companies who have the primary responsibility of spearheading the energy transition discourse due to the harmful environmental and human impacts of fossil fuels which dominate the global energy supply³⁸. Tackling greenwashing is therefore vital for both people and planet in pursuit of climate justice.

In order to effectively address misinformation in the energy transition discourse, there is need to strengthen transparency, accountability and integrity³⁹. It has been observed that since the adoption of the Paris Agreement, a legally-binding global instrument aimed at strengthening efforts to confront climate change, many companies have made pledges and commitments to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero⁴⁰. However, due to lack of transparency and accountability on such commitments, many companies are spreading misinformation over their climate action through greenwashing⁴¹. Consequently, it is imperative to strengthen transparency and accountability mechanisms including through mandating accurate and verifiable data for sustainability claims⁴².

³⁶ Greenwashing: The Energy Sector., Op Cit

³⁷ Greenwashing: The Energy Sector., Op Cit

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ United Nations., 'Greenwashing – the deceptive tactics behind environmental claims' Op Cit

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² What Role Does Energy Transition Play in Greenwashing?., Op Cit

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In addition there is need to develop and implement appropriate legal and policy frameworks on environmental advertising⁴³. It has been observed that legal and regulatory loopholes allow companies to get away with false and misleading advertising such in cases where companies buy Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) without actually investing in clean sources of energy⁴⁴. In order to counter such challenges, there is need to strengthen legal, policy and regulatory frameworks in order to hold perpetrators of greenwashing accountable.

There is also need to encourage environmental/sustainability consciousness among consumers⁴⁵. For example, shifting to verifiable and sustainable products including clean sources of energy can reduce greenwashing by necessitating companies to embrace energy transition⁴⁶. Further, it has been observed that when consumers understand sustainability tenets and the common greenwashing tactics employed by companies, this can reduce this negative practice towards actualising energy transition⁴⁷.

International cooperation is also crucial in addressing misinformation in the energy transition discourse including the development of harmonized and standardized practices on key sustainability issues such as net-zero pledges and commitments⁴⁸. International cooperation can also bolster the capacity of developing countries to tackle greenwashing including through ensuring just, equitable, transparent, accountable and sustainable energy transitions that address global imbalances in the energy sector⁴⁹.

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Greenwashing., Available at <https://www.goodenergy.co.uk/learn/greenwashing/#:~:text=Greenwashing%20is%20when%20a%20company,any%20directly%20from%20renewable%20generators>. (Accessed on 24/01/2026)

⁴⁵ United Nations., 'Greenwashing - the deceptive tactics behind environmental claims' Op Cit

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Greenwashing: The Energy Sector., Op Cit

⁴⁹ What Role Does Energy Transition Play in Greenwashing?., Op Cit

4.0 Conclusion

Greenwashing is a negative phenomenon that undermines climate justice by fuelling misinformation in the energy transition discourse. It is therefore imperative to tackle greenwashing by strengthening transparency, integrity and accountability, developing appropriate legal, policy and regulatory frameworks on greenwashing and environmental advertising, encouraging consumers to be environmentally conscious and bolstering international cooperation⁵⁰. Addressing misinformation in energy transition discourse is therefore a key approach towards tackling greenwashing for climate justice.

⁵⁰ United Nations., 'Greenwashing – the deceptive tactics behind environmental claims' Op Cit