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Faculty of tourism and business logistics -  
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# **CHALLENGES OF TOURISM AND BUSINESS LOGISTICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY**



**Gevgelia, 24-25 October 2017 & Shtip, December 2017**



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## PREFACE

The Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics in Gevgelija, at the Goce Delcev University - Stip, hosted the First International Scientific Conference, "Challenges of Tourism and Business Logistics in the 21st Century".

The conference was held on 24 and 25 October 2017 in Gevgelija with an optional visit to Dojran - Dojran Lake.

32 works of 60 authors from Serbia, Latvia, Turkey, Poland, Bulgaria, Kosovo and Macedonia were presented at the Conference.

The purpose of the Conference is exchange of ideas and experiences of the participants coming from Macedonia and abroad, and establishment of cooperation for further development of tourism and business logistics in Macedonia and beyond.

The results of the Conference are visible through publication in a collection of papers, which is presented to a wider scientific audience and the public.

In this way, we want to promote the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, to promote Gevgelija and Dojran as the most visited settlements in the south-eastern part of Macedonia.

Gevgelija - Stip,  
December 2017

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# GREENWASHING IN TOURISM, SO HOW COMPANIES SHOULD NOT CREATE AN IMAGE

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## Abstract

*The image of a company and its offer stems from characteristics which are highlighted in promotion, as well as from everything that a potential recipient of information is able to find on the market. Building the image of ecologically sensitive and responsible business may affect not only its perception, but also buying decisions of customers. It seems, however, that in recent years statements and symbols relating to ecology, nature, and sustainable development are excessively exploited. Manifestation of this trend is greenwashing, defined as an apparent care for the environment by suggesting that the product is environmentally friendly (or natural), or a company is ecologically sensitive, which is not entirely true. But through such activities an image of a socially responsible business may be built.*

*It was found that greenwashing means information that is partly false, irrelevant, incomprehensible, or omits critical issues. So, it could be stated that a manufacturer (or a seller) deceives potential customers. Results of research show, however, that consumers are guided not only by information about environmental characteristics of products, but also by a good brand and aesthetics. This article discusses characteristics of greenwashing with some examples from tourism.*

**Key words:** *creation of image, consumer behaviour, ecology, promotion, business responsibility, tourism*

## Introduction

Protection of the environment and the pursuit of sustainable development arise from too expansive human activity and desire to preserve Earth's resources for future generations. However, this willingness on the side of business is often only declarative. It means that they take apparent actions, or simply do nothing, informing about a broad commitment at the same time (Zatwardnicka-Madura B., 2013; Witek L., 2013; Parguel B., Benoît-Moreau F., Larceneux F, 2011). On the other hand, 76% of leaders believe that success in business in the future will be connected with transparency and commitment (Worldwide Report 2010), so surely some companies come with conviction to pro-environmental actions and will lead towards more responsible business. Today, it manifests itself in environmental programs or broader activities known as CSR (corporate social responsibility).

The term greenwashing was created by an environmentalist and activist Jay Westerveld in 1986. Then, in one of the hotels, he read information that a hotel asks for towels` reuse, because thanks to this less gallons of wash water will be used and important natural resource will be rescued (Motavalli J., 2011). Westerveld wrote then an article about the apparent environmental activities, calling them greenwashing.

Environmental issues were noticed, however, much earlier than the term greenwashing appeared. It is worth mentioning, for example, that 22 April 1970 was the first Day of the Earth, which was a result of concerns related to wars, consumerism and destruction of natural resources ([www.earthday.org](http://www.earthday.org)). Currently, greenwashing refers to the practice of apparent efforts of protecting the environment and suggestion that a company bears some costs of these activities, when in fact it even earns. Hence, greenwashing shows a market strategy of a company in false light, therefore it is a lie ([www.springerreference.com](http://www.springerreference.com)). The main reason for this behavior is a desire to create a positive image, understood because of company's activities positioning, classifying it as better than the competition. Therefore, greenwashing's aim is to convince potential customers that a given company and its offer care about social expectations and are environmentally friendly, so clients should buy their products.

### **Creation of the image**

The image of a company in tourism, or any other business, is a result of different characteristics highlighted in promotion, and also a result of what a potential recipient of information is able to find on the market. Therefore, the history of a company, its products (services) along with packaging, affect an image as well as experience of other consumers, and commercial and statistical information. From a company's point of view, it is important that actual market activities and information activities are consistent because only then will it build a positive image effectively. The concept of image building, but also the overall philosophy of a company based on social and environmental needs, is known as corporate social responsibility (CSR). It is defined as a plan of running a company under which business activities are integrated with social and environmental issues on a voluntary basis (Nyilasy G., Gangadharbatla H., Paladino A., 2013).

So, if a company is obliged by law to manage its waste adequately, then you cannot call it CSR, but if a company voluntarily limits production of waste, or tries to reuse it, then we may talk about social responsibility. Such a good image, for example, can be built by "green promotion", understood as promotion of environmentally-friendly products. One could clarify this notion by giving the concept of Banerjee, Gulas and Iyer (1995), who thought that a message should meet at least one of the criteria given below:

- clearly refer to the relationship between product and environment,
- promote a green lifestyle,
- show a given company as an environmentally responsible one.

Green promotion, however, from the definition talks about actual relationships of a product (or company) with nature. So, it differs from greenwashing as it contains

an element of truth. While greenwashing is attributed mostly to advertising, in this article the analysis will be focused on relationships between an offered product and the environment. Modern consumers are increasingly aware of the negative impacts of the human activity on the environment (Witek, 2013), hence they want to have the feeling that they do not cause degradation, and may even do something good.

It is significant that more often they think not only about organic food, but also lower energy and water consumption, minimizing waste from households, waste segregation, etc. Thus, in response to the trend, there is more and more natural food on the market, but also other products described as environmentally friendly. Often, however, these compounds are false, which is analyzed in the following part of the article. Building the image of environmentally sensitive, responsible business, can affect not only its perception, but also purchase decisions of customers. They can react positively (buying more often) in case of socially desirable behavior of a company and react negatively (for example, boycotting products) in case of irresponsible behavior. Especially at a time when consumers evaluate pro-social actions as selfish, or associated only with building goodwill on financial markets, one can expect negative reactions. The question of how a given company behaves is also important to employees, suppliers and public authorities.

But one should also remember that studies discussing pro-ecological consumer attitudes often talk about declarations, not actual decisions. It seems that many manufacturers, however, believe in the power of organic and natural brands, as companies such as ENEA, Nivea, Samsung, Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Toyota and Ryan Air have been accused of greenwashing. We can observe it also in stores that promote ecological shopping bags, in case of many cosmetic and hygiene products (such as baby diapers with green tea), and even in case of coal (Eco-peas).

### **The essence of greenwashing**

In practice, a given company's impact on the environment results from three aspects: the specific nature of operations, introduced regulations and organization of processes (Delmas M.A., Burbano V.C., 2011). This means that the pro-environmental behavior should be assessed in the context of close businesses or one industry, as a comparison assumes similarities from above. However, one should assume that certain areas are directly related to harmful economic activity (chemical, cosmetic or mining industry), hence they are vulnerable to skeptical assessments and it is difficult to talk about ecological image, although the implementation of CSR is very much possible.

In recent years, in fact, terms relating to ecology, nature, and sustainable development, have become overexploited. Regarding the effects of global warming, disappearance of species, depletion of natural resources, almost everyone wants to be "eco". This can be seen in advertisements and other promotional materials, as well as on assorted products' packaging. While analyzing information about activities of companies, one should pay attention to whether information about characteristics of a product is true, if placed symbols and labels are honest, or highlighted information

is relevant, and if statements and symbols suggest the actual relationship with nature. One should note if a manufacturer or services provider:

- defines a product as eco, or "green" using a full analysis of the components, emphasizing some and excluding others,
- provides information that is difficult to verify,
- emphasizes expressions, statements that are vague, or may be misunderstood by consumers,
- writes accurate information, but which is not relevant to consumers seeking eco-friendly products,
- suggests that something is the lesser evil,
- gives false information on the functioning / use of the product,
- composes labels whose aesthetics suggests relationships with nature or ecology (The sins of greenwashing).

So, if reasoning leads to the conclusion that the decoded information has little in common with reality, then we have to deal with the practice of greenwashing.

### **Greewashing in tourism**

A report of Rahman, Park, and Geng-qing Chi (2015) says, that 79% of tourists, while selecting a hotel, pay attention to different ecological declarations. They also proved that American hotels are losing their regular tourists if they do not really live up to their promises. The research found also that recognition of a self-serving motive made consumers skeptical and unlikely to participate in the green practice or revisit the hotel in the future. Let us remember that the term greenwashing was born in an American hotel. So, what actions would one expect not to call them greenwashing? A hotel to be eco-friendly and responsible, could think about: 1) lighting, 2) water consumption and re-use, 3) washing and cleaning agents, 4) products brought to the restaurants, 5) reuse of packaging, 6) materials used to decorate the interior, 7) energy production. Moreover, hotels and other agents could think how to be more responsible by being in contact with small businesses and buying products on the local market. Instead, hotels ask their guests to use towels for longer time, and in this way, they suggest that they are trying to be responsible. We can indicate other similar actions, that can be called greenwashing, for example: when a hotel states that it uses solar panels for water heating, but the property has no water conservation program; or when hotels and restaurants claim to serve organic food, but nobody knows where from it is supplied (Kuehnel, 2017). The success in tourism business mostly can be expected by reputable brands - reputable means not lying. Sustainability is actually what drives many hoteliers to make an eco-friendly hotel or green hotel in the first place. But sustainability is not only about the environment. The locals and the home-grown society are also the part of it. By the greenwashing, not only are the guests deceived, but it also brings destruction to the environment and society. This should be remembered. As one can see, manifestations of greenwashing can be found quite often in each area, also in tourism. And the causes for greenwashing in tourism industry are no different than in other sectors. Moreover, the consequences are the same: loss of customers, bad image, and income decline.

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