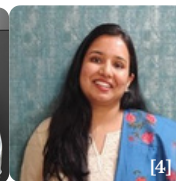


Greenwashing Alert: Is Your Bamboo Product Truly Sustainable?

KID: 20250106



Greenwashing has emerged as one of sustainability's most persistent challenges. It refers to the practice of presenting products as more environmentally friendly than they truly are. Strategic branding, selective disclosure, and the use of appealing but often unverified claims such as "100% ecofriendly" or "biodegradable" have turned packaging into an effective marketing tool. While these statements may attract consumers who wish to make responsible choices, they can also mislead, creating a polished illusion of sustainability rather than an accurate reflection of a product's environmental footprint. Certain bamboo products illustrate the ways in which greenwashing is taking place today.

Bamboo is often highlighted in sustainability discussions for its environmental credentials. Known for its rapid growth and ability to regenerate without replanting, this versatile grass thrives with minimal fertiliser or pesticide use, absorbs carbon dioxide efficiently, and releases more oxygen than trees. These characteristics have positioned bamboo as a renewable, nature-friendly option and a popular alternative to hardwoods and plastics.

However, the sustainability profile often changes once bamboo is harvested and processed. Many commercially available bamboo goods, ranging from cutlery to flooring, stationery, and textiles, undergo intensive treatments. These can include chemical pulping with strong alkalis, lamination using phenolic resins, or blending with synthetic polymers to improve durability and appearance. While these processes may enhance the product's lifespan or aesthetics, they simultaneously increase energy consumption, raise greenhouse gas emissions, and in some cases compromise biodegradability entirely. A resin-laminated bamboo board or a melamine-reinforced bamboo cup may endure years of use but, when discarded, it can persist in the environment much like conventional plastic.

Despite these realities, many such products are marketed in a way that highlights only bamboo's natural qualities. Labels frequently claim "sustainably sourced" or "compostable in 180 days", but without clear explanation or independent verification. In the absence of reliable disclosure or third-party certification, public have no easy way to confirm whether the claims reflect the entire life-cycle of the product or merely its raw material origin. This lack of clarity can not only deceive buyers but also undermines trust in genuinely sustainable innovations.

Addressing greenwashing requires shared responsibility across all stakeholders. Manufacturers can lead the way by making ethical labelling a standard practice, supported by credible life-cycle assessments that clearly present a product's true environmental impact. Regulators must not only set guidelines for environmental marketing but also ensure that awareness of greenwashing reaches communities across all sections of society, while penalising false or exaggerated statements that distort reality. Consumers, in turn, can play a vital role by questioning green claims, seeking credible certifications, and supporting brands that are transparent about sourcing, processing, and end-of-life disposal.

However, bamboo still holds real potential as a model of sustainability. When cultivated responsibly and processed with minimal chemical intervention, it can deliver both performance and environmental benefits. But real sustainability goes beyond material origin.

Achieving this goal requires integrity at every stage, from sourcing and manufacturing to marketing and disposal. It also calls for a shift towards minimalistic consumption, ensuring that even proven sustainable products are bought mindfully and only when necessary. Protecting consumers from greenwashing demands a united effort of responsible industry conduct, regulatory oversight, and informed choices. Trust, but verify the "green".

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