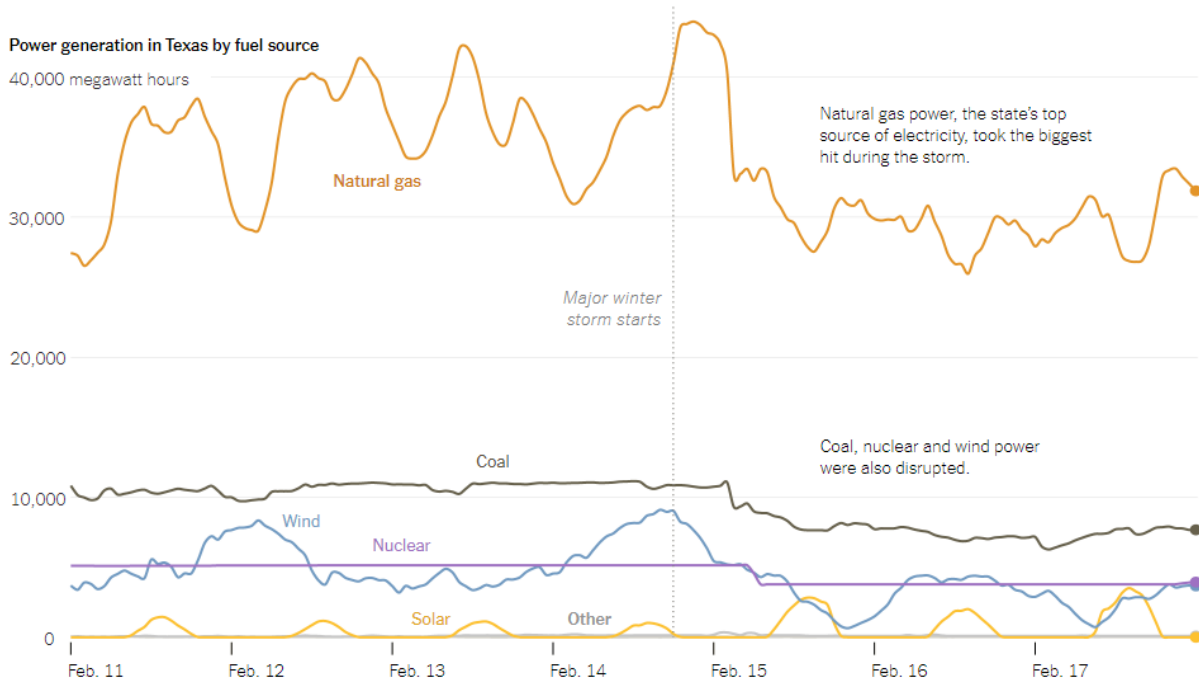


The Fossil Fuel Industry: A Tale of Greenwashing

In 2017 the era of 'clean coal' was touted as a [game changer](#) in sustainable energy. Since then there have [debunked claims](#) that electric vehicles could not outperform their fossil fuel equivalents, then debates over how natural gas can be considered a [renewable](#) energy source.

This year, severe storms in the state of Texas in the United States led to massive blackouts and failures across the State's infrastructure. As a result renewable energy [was blamed](#) rather than the state's woefully underprepared fossil fuel plants.



Source: [New York Times](#)

In every case, lobbyists, politicians, and certain media outlets were quick to support these claims. Activists have long denounced the involvement of fossil fuel companies in disseminating contrarian narratives and using their funds to further spread their messages.

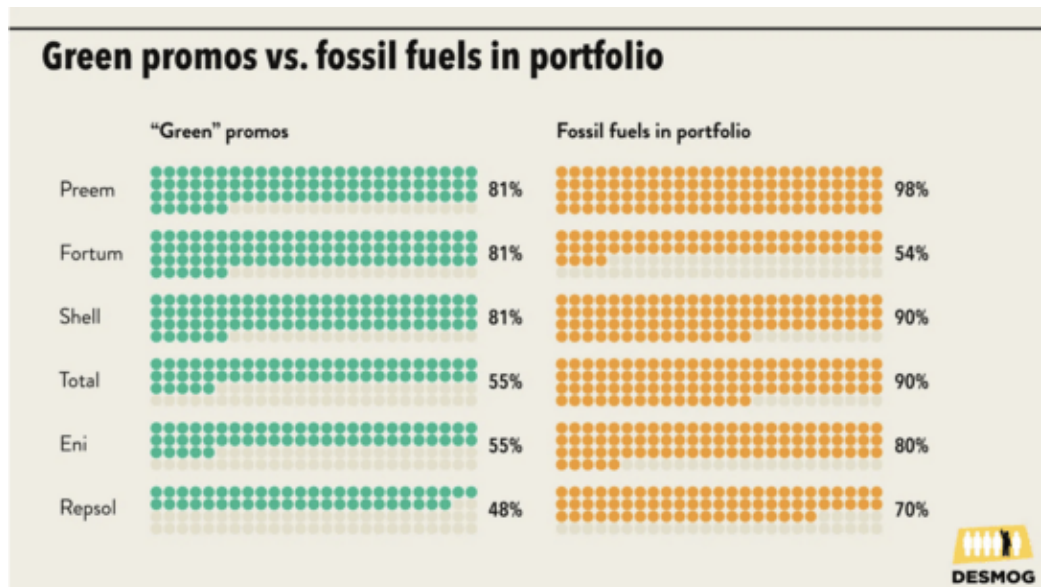
Fossil Fuel Giants Spend Millions on Social Media

It is sometimes hard to discern how many third parties are involved in helping the fossil fuel agenda, and to what extent it was successful - until now.

As reported by [CNN](#), pro-fossil fuel Facebook ads targeting the United States were viewed 431 million times in 2020, the fruit of a USD 9.6 million ad campaign by oil and gas companies.

The prevalent nature of social media is now on full display as Facebook fights claims of [not doing enough](#) to curb misinformation and hate speech on its platform. It is clear that it has been helping

- inadvertently or not - big oil and other fossil fuel giants in muddying the waters of sustainability among consumers.



The discrepancy between "green" posts, as identified in the study, and the share of companies' fossil fuel portfolios according to publicly available figures. Credit: Sam Whitham

The number of "green" ads & social media posts compared to the number of fossil fuel assets they hold. Source: redgreenandblue.org

Changing the Outlook on Greenhouse Gas Emissions

In a similar vein, the fossil fuel industry has spent a lot of time and money promoting a [sustainable outlook](#) on their brand. From posting videos online about renewable energy and curbing carbon emissions to then actively lobbying against climate science both [in person and online](#). Fossil fuel companies have been actively using third parties to slow down the global transition towards a clean, sustainable future.

While those involved in the sector will downplay any greenwashing or misinformation surrounding their companies and products, their underbelly has betrayed their often-covert attempts to discredit their sustainable competitors.

"Did we aggressively fight against some of the science? Yes. Did we join some shadow groups to work against some of the early efforts? Yes, that's true. But there's nothing illegal about that. We were looking out for our investments. We were looking out for our shareholders." This is just one example from an exchange filmed [with a hidden camera](#) by investigators from Greenpeace UK with Exxon lobbyist Keith McCoy.

While McCoy's candid answers made headlines, climate activists were not surprised. There is evidence of the fossil fuel sector's efforts to downplay climate change dating [as far back as 1977](#).

GREENWASHING

Spending more time and money claiming to be “green” through advertising and marketing rather than actually implementing business practices that minimize environmental impact.

@unschools // @LeylaAcaroglu



Source: [Medium](#)

Public Opinion on Fossil Fuel Production is Changing

Greenwashing has become synonymous with misinformation and fossil fuel companies continue to spread its reach in order to sway public opinion.

However, as Jeremy Dalton [points out](#), younger generations have become more in-tune with attempts by big companies to become more personable and subversive in their advertising.

“Where oil once represented progress and prosperity for a broad swath of the public, today, young people panicked about climate change regard the industry with suspicion and contempt. Companies are keenly aware of this fact and have responded with ads and social media campaigns aimed at winning over the next generation of workers and consumers.”

Key Aspects of Greenwashing

The [subtly behind the advertising](#) and greenwashing efforts can be surprising. From the use of words ('green', 'eco', etc) or the setup of the advert (using foliage, evoking nature), and even cherry-picking statistics have been used by companies seeking to seem more environmentally friendly.

One of the most important factors in greenwashing is that consumers can't verify all of the information they read on the internet. This makes it challenging to weed out misinformation from

facts. This is particularly true with greenwashing when there is a lot of data available. Misrepresented data can be nearly impossible for uneducated consumers to catch.

How To Catch Greenwashing



Source: [Green Buoy Consulting](#)

So, what exactly can consumers do to not fall victim to greenwashing and misinformation?

- [Be skeptical](#) of news that seems too good to be true, or contrarian to other sources
- Question the meaning behind ads
- Check the sources being quoted by a report
- Read into the background of the journalist or company making a claim

The good news is that groups and ad hosts are beginning to independently verify and crack down on [misinformation](#), but it always pays to double check and cross-reference information yourself.