

Are Investors Paying to be Green?

Evidence from Mutual Funds

Joop HUIJ^{*}, Dries LAURS[§], Philip STORK[†], Remco C.J. ZWINKELS[‡]

^{*}Rotterdam School of Management and Robeco Institutional Asset Management

[§]Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Robeco Institutional Asset Management

[†]Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

[‡]Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Tinbergen Institute

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ROBECO

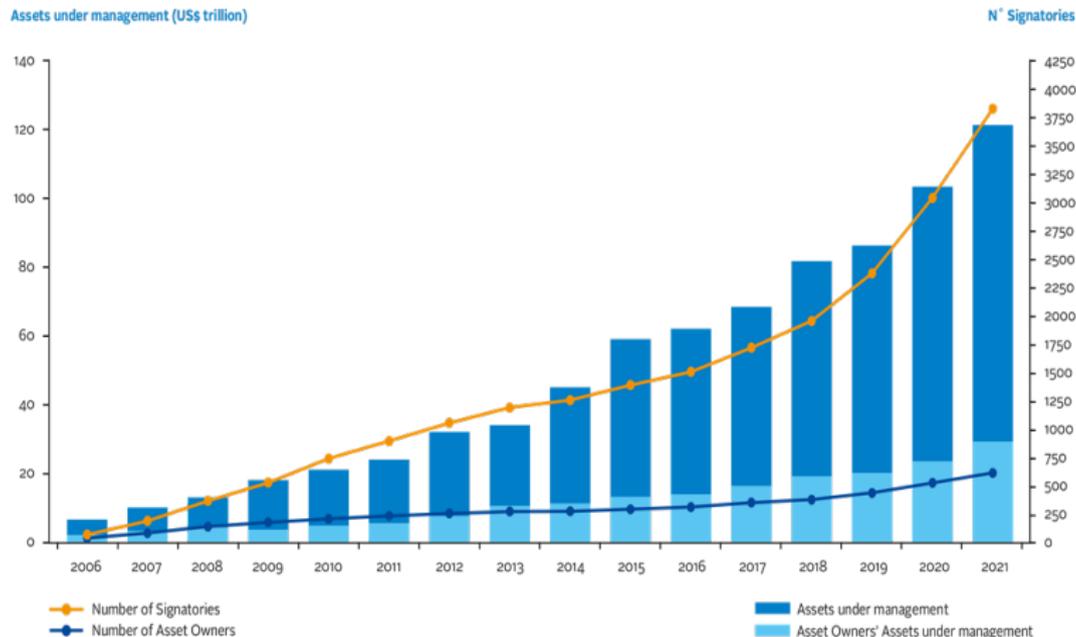


Sustainable investments are on the rise

Asset owners and managers representing over \$100 trillion in assets have committed to the UN Principles for Responsible Investment (UN PRI)

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Source: <https://www.unpri.org/pri/about-the-pri>

Why would environmentally-friendly (“green”) mutual funds be priced differently?

- More costly to run / reputational risks / compliance with regulation
- Compensation for “skill” in sustainable investing
 - Difficult to estimate how companies fare in transition
 - Ability to hedge/neutralise climate risks
- Investors might (mistakenly) believe in higher or lower returns for green investments
- Because green investors pay more, and nothing else
- ...

If we **do** believe in sustainable finance: high fees limit the potential for societal benefits (maximise impact)

If we **do not** believe in sustainable finance: we don't want fund managers to make money by offering nothing in return (minimise “greenwashing”)

Our paper:

- Investigates the '*direct*' cost of environmentally-friendly investing, whereas most academic research tends to focus on 'hidden' costs (e.g. "Is there a carbon premium?", Are green funds under-diversified?, etc.)
- Provides insight into mutual fund manager's strategic *decision to repurpose* as "green" mutual funds
- Highlights how mutual fund investors are *sophisticated* when it comes to interpreting emissions disclosure and marketing claims from funds they (potentially) invest in

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- 2 *'Green fund fee premium'*: Average green mutual fund between 5 bps and 10 bps more expensive than conventional counterpart
 - Premium is driven by funds that invest environmentally friendly, rather than by funds that have a green label
- 3 Funds that “go green” attract vastly larger flows and increase fees in quarters following the name change
 - **But** investors do not blindly follow name changes: effects are driven by name-changing mutual funds that simultaneously improve portfolio's environmental performance

- 1 Mutual fund data from CRSP's Survivor-Bias-Free Mutual Fund Database.
 - Focus on equity (omit hedged and short funds) and mixed (equity allocation between 80% and 105%) mutual funds, removing small funds (less than \$10 million managed) and start-ups (less than 1 year since inception).
 - Aggregate to funds by value-weighting over shareclasses.
- 2 Impute missing fee information and turnover ratios from SEC's EDGAR.
 - Results in 180k+ quarterly observations on about 10,000 unique funds.
- 3 Shareclasses → fund mapping using Russ Wermers' MFLINKS.
- 4 Green labels from Morningstar Sustainable Fund Flow reports.
- 5 Holdings-level emissions and emission intensities from Asset4, MSCI, Refinitiv, Sustainalytics, and S&P Trucost.

$$\text{Flow}_{it} = \frac{\text{TNA}_{it} - \text{TNA}_{it-1}(1 + r_{it})}{\text{TNA}_{it-1}},$$

where TNA_{it} and TNA_{it-1} are the fund i 's Total Net Assets in the months t and $t - 1$ and r_{it} is the fund's gross return. Flows are winsorised at the 1st and 99th percentiles. We aggregate flows to the quarterly frequency to match the granularity of our data set.

Portfolio-level environmental measures

$$S_{it} = \sum_{j=1}^{N_i} w_{ijt} S_{jt},$$

Where:

- S_{it} is the portfolio i 's ESG, emission, or intensities' value at time t
- w_{ijt} is the weight of holding j in the portfolio i at time t
- S_{jt} is the individual portfolio holding j 's ESG or emissions value at time t .

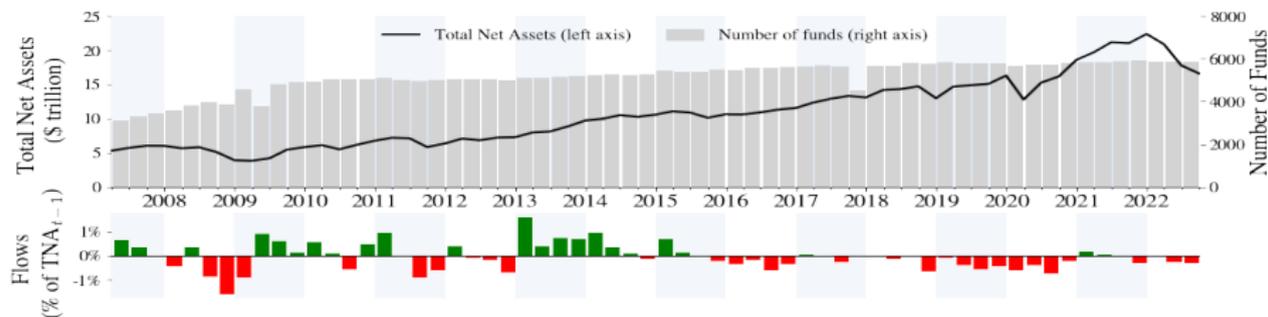
We set the variables $\mathbb{I}(\text{Low Carbon Emissions})$ and $\mathbb{I}(\text{Low Carbon Intensity})$ equal to 1 if the fund's portfolio emissions are respectively portfolio intensity is in the bottom 30% compared to that of other funds in the same CRSP objective code and otherwise equal to 0.

Summary statistics

	N. Obs.	Mean	SD	Percentiles						
				1%	5%	25%	Median	75%	95%	99%
<i>Panel A: Fund-level variables</i>										
Total Expense Ratio (%)	181,603	1.36	1.01	0.03	0.14	0.63	1.14	1.82	3.49	4.51
Return _{t,t+1} (%)	178,624	2.01	10.45	-27.48	-17.86	-2.49	3.19	7.88	17.18	26.76
Flow _{t,t+1} (% of TNA _{t-1})	177,944	1.48	19.28	-34.99	-14.89	-4.36	-1.12	3.20	23.97	76.48
Flow _{t,t+4} (% of TNA _{t-1})	161,839	8.99	80.41	-62.74	-38.09	-15.06	-4.46	11.77	87.91	268.48
Flow _{t,t+8} (% of TNA _{t-1})	145,270	24.95	177.17	-81.27	-57.77	-27.12	-8.40	23.64	188.30	608.04
Flow _{t,t+12} (% of TNA _{t-1})	129,766	43.05	264.01	-92.09	-71.43	-37.49	-12.59	33.34	289.86	1013.46
Total Net Assets (\$ millions)	181,589	2,780	17,204	16	25	103	389	1,438	9,424	41,360
I(Index Fund)	181,603	0.27	0.44	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
I(ETF)	181,603	0.21	0.41	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00
Fund Age (years)	181,603	15.44	12.36	1.26	2.25	6.68	13.00	20.80	35.57	66.26
Fund manager age (years)	180,470	32.53	19.70	3.24	7.24	18.45	26.83	46.06	71.15	86.01
Institutional share (%)	181,603	52.55	42.63	0.00	0.00	3.49	54.66	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Panel B: Portfolio-level variables</i>										
Turnover ratio (%)	181,602	61.45	460.99	2.00	6.00	21.00	41.00	75.00	160.71	337.00
Portfolio equity share (%)	181,603	93.97	4.59	81.03	84.20	91.53	94.95	97.36	99.79	100.01
Mean holding mkt. cap. (\$ billions)	181,603	95,426	125,603	675	1,625	9,711	60,939	128,330	352,693	684,959
Portfolio sector concentration	181,603	0.24	0.23	0.00	0.11	0.13	0.15	0.20	0.95	1.00
Number of portfolio holdings	176,828	232.82	489.57	17.00	30.00	53.00	88.00	186.00	920.00	2413.46
<i>Panel C: Portfolio-level and fund-level environmental variables</i>										
I(Green Fund Name)	181,603	0.01	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
I(Morningstar Green Label)	181,603	0.03	0.16	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
I(Low Carbon Emissions)	181,603	0.26	0.44	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
I(Low Carbon Intensity)	181,603	0.24	0.43	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00
Emissions (mlns tons CO ₂)	144,212	5.61	6.82	0.06	0.18	1.09	3.27	7.52	18.36	39.10
Emission intensity (tons CO ₂ / \$ million revenue)	144,212	285.60	326.13	17.02	35.01	97.83	185.97	334.21	891.77	2089.77

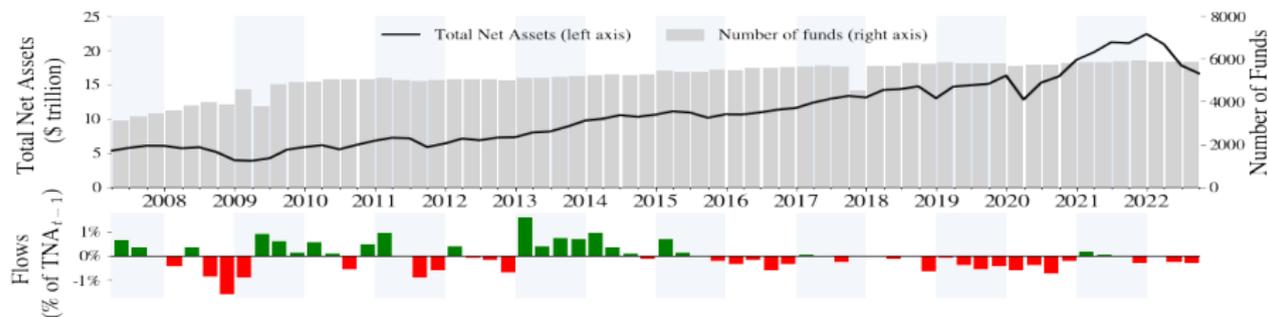
Summary statistics: TNAs & fund flows

(a) **All funds in sample**

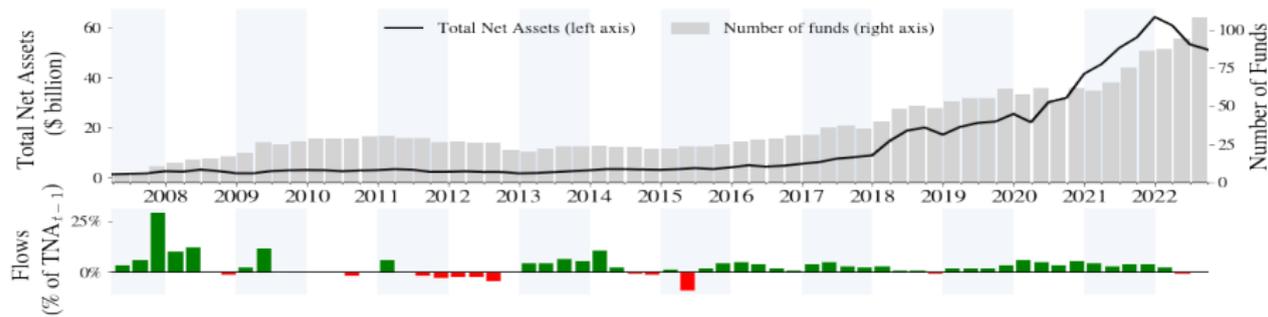


Summary statistics: TNAs & fund flows

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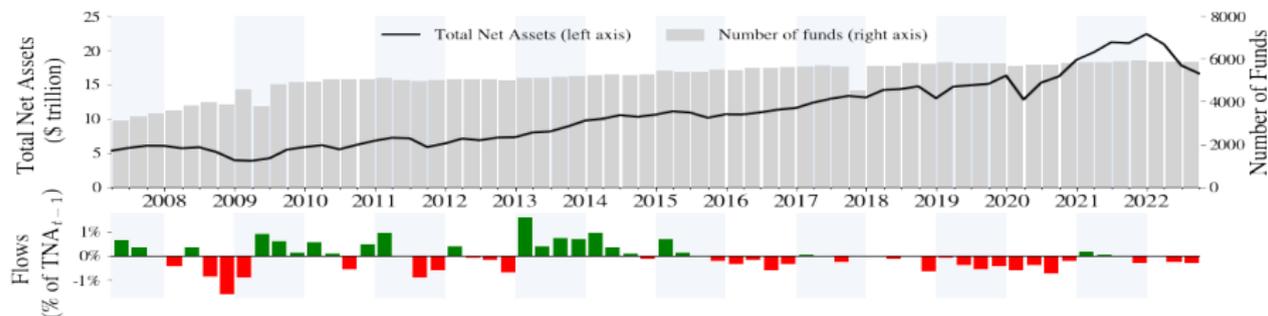


(b) Funds with green name

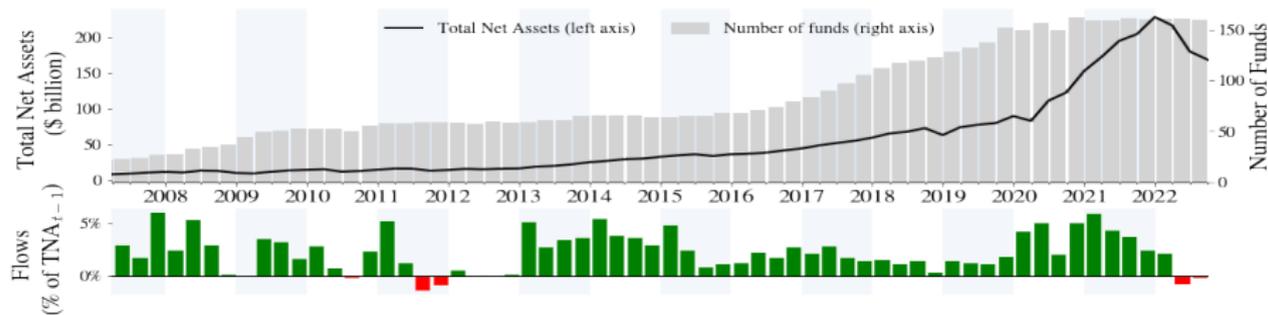


Summary statistics: TNAs & fund flows (cont'd)

(a) All funds in sample



(c) Funds with green Morningstar label

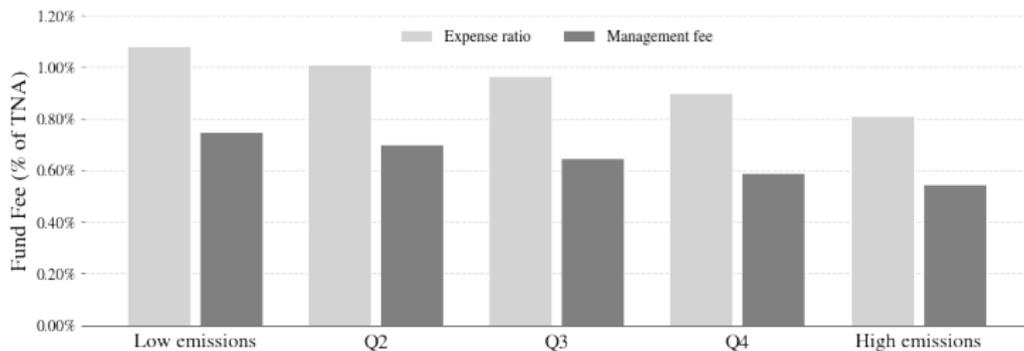


Results

Do investors care about green labels?

Dependent variable:	Quarterly Flows (%)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
II(Green fund name)	0.0150** (2.029)	0.0198** (2.478)	- -	- -	- -	- -
II(Morningstar green fund)	- -	- -	0.0346*** (6.378)	0.0366*** (4.836)	- -	- -
II(Low carbon emissions)	- -	- -	- -	- -	0.0043*** (2.847)	0.0033** (2.109)
Total Expense Ratio (bps)	-0.0060*** (-7.890)	-0.0006 (-0.663)	-0.0059*** (-7.726)	-0.0005 (-0.528)	-0.0061*** (-7.969)	-0.0007 (-0.689)
log(Total Net Assets (\$ millions))	-0.0024*** (-7.040)	-0.0028*** (-5.462)	-0.0022*** (-6.456)	-0.0026*** (-5.108)	-0.0024*** (-6.808)	-0.0028*** (-5.499)
Return _{t-3,t} (%)	0.3152*** (29.700)	0.2752*** (28.699)	0.3131*** (29.481)	0.2736*** (28.544)	0.3142*** (29.627)	0.2747*** (28.645)
Return _{t-1,t} (%)	0.5062*** (21.189)	0.4228*** (21.659)	0.5045*** (21.097)	0.4229*** (21.667)	0.5055*** (21.165)	0.4219*** (21.598)
Year-Quarter × Fund Style FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fund Company FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
N. Obs.	175,660	175,652	175,660	175,652	175,660	175,652
R ² -Adj.	0.025	0.021	0.026	0.022	0.026	0.021

Are green funds more expensive?



Are green funds more expensive? (cont'd)



Are green funds more expensive? (cont'd)

Dependent variable:	Total Expense Ratio (percentages)							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
II(Green fund name)	-0.0133 (-0.411)	0.0356*** (2.556)	-	-	-	-	-	-
II(Morningstar green fund)	-	-	-0.0003 (-0.012)	-0.0020 (-0.108)	-	-	-	-
II(Low carbon emissions)	-	-	-	-	0.0963*** (14.302)	0.0569*** (11.491)	-	-
II(Low carbon intensity)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0524*** (8.602)	0.0313*** (7.154)
Control Variables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-Quarter × Fund Style FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fund Company FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
N. Obs.	189,767	189,767	189,767	189,767	189,767	189,767	189,767	189,767
R ² -Adj.	0.426	0.236	0.426	0.235	0.426	0.235	0.426	0.235

Show control variables

Repurposing Mutual Funds: Green Name Changes

Which funds “repurpose”?

$$\mathbb{I}(\text{Green Name Change})_{it} = \alpha + \beta X_{it-1} + \sigma_{it} + \epsilon_{it},$$

where:

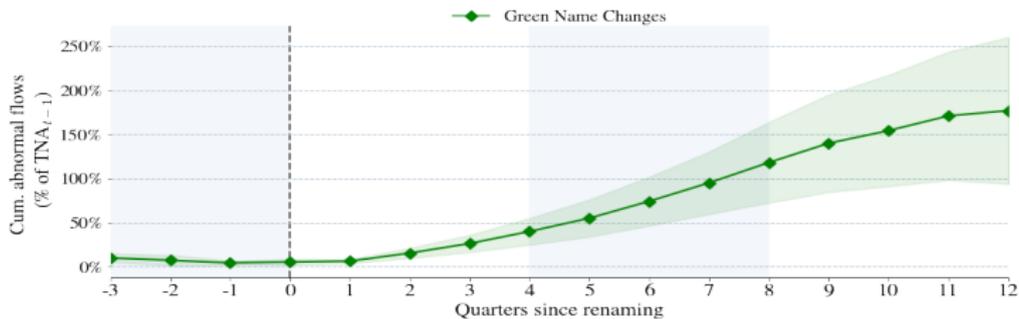
- $\mathbb{I}(\text{Green Name Change})_{it}$ equals 1 if fund i undertakes a green name change in quarter t
- X_{it} includes the fund's fee, age, size, investor base, whether or not it is an index fund, past-quarter and past-year returns, past-quarter and past-year flows, its portfolio's emissions, and its portfolio's ESG score
- σ_{it} is a year-quarter \times fund style fixed effect

Selection effects (cont'd)

Dependent variable:	I(Green Name Change)	
	(1)	(2)
Total Expense Ratio (bps)	0.195 (0.1836)	0.229 (0.1870)
log(Fund age (years))	0.494* (0.2652)	0.517* (0.2693)
log(Total Net Assets (\$ millions))	-0.347*** (0.1120)	-0.340*** (0.1119)
Institutional funds (%)	0.399 (0.4808)	0.498 (0.4850)
I(Index fund)	-0.422 (0.5675)	-0.496 (0.5842)
Return _{t-3,t} (%)	6.415*** (1.7881)	6.377*** (1.8427)
Return _{t-1,t} (%)	-0.621 (4.3851)	-1.644 (4.3314)
Flow _{t-3,t} (%)	-3.605*** (1.3928)	-3.682*** (1.3803)
Flow _{t-1,t} (%)	0.017 (0.0644)	0.015 (0.0648)
log(Mean Emissions S1&2)	-	-0.326** (0.1557)
Mean ESG score	-	0.038** (0.0185)
Year-Quarter × Fund Style FE	Yes	Yes
N. Obs.	173,514	151,548
Pseudo R ²	0.133	0.151

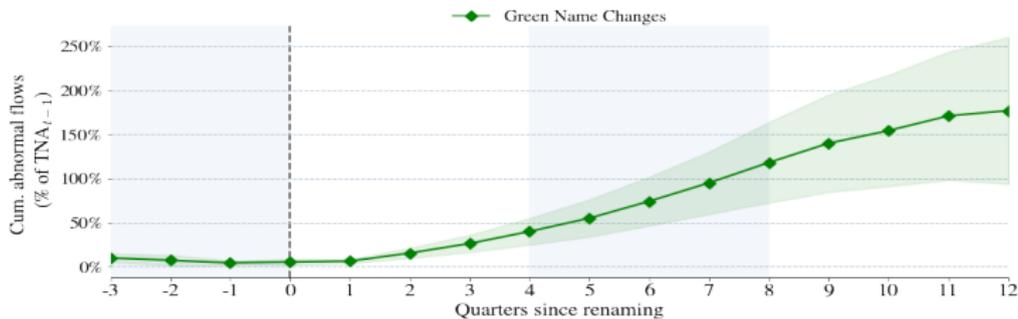
Green name changes: Effect on flows

(a) Unconditional effect

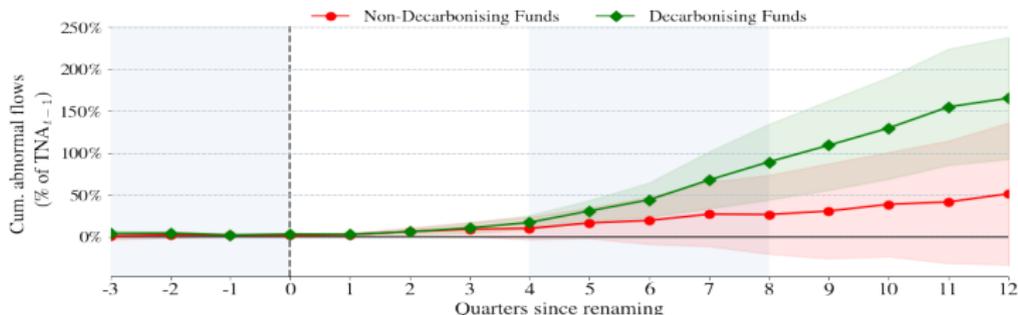


Green name changes: Effect on flows

(a) Unconditional effect



(b) Conditional on decarbonisation



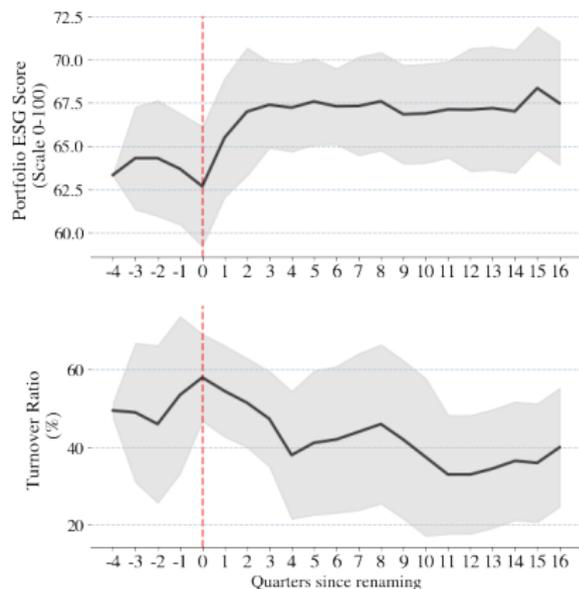
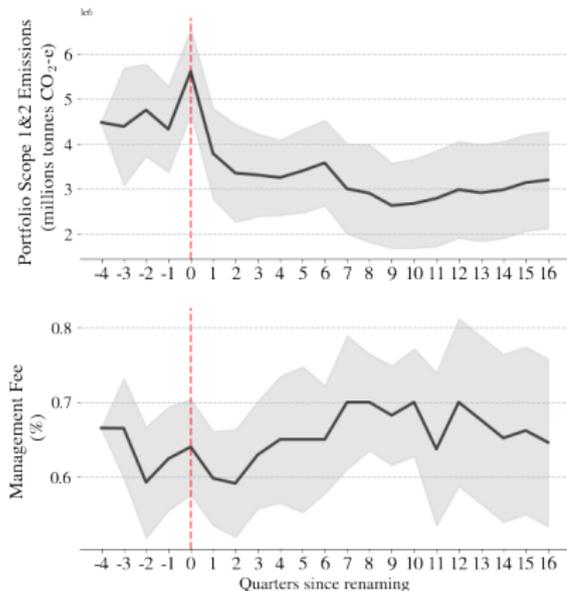
Green name changes: Effects on flows

Dependent variable:	Cumulative Flow _{t,t+q}							
	1Q	4Q	8Q	12Q	1Q	4Q	8Q	12Q
Quarters ahead:								
I(Green Name Change)	0.0606*** (4.718)	0.3975*** (5.156)	1.1808*** (5.051)	1.7704*** (4.160)	- -	- -	- -	- -
I(Green Name Change) × I(High Decarbonisation)	-	-	-	-	0.0176** (2.047)	0.1329*** (2.706)	0.9035*** (3.955)	1.6276*** (4.638)
I(Green Name Change) × I(Low Decarbonisation)	-	-	-	-	0.0226** (2.349)	0.1071 (1.241)	0.3105 (1.131)	0.5768 (1.118)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fund FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-Quarter × Fund Style FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N. Obs.	169,723	156,995	140,665	125,424	138,358	126,599	111,420	97,197
R ² -Adj.	0.009	0.003	0.002	0.003	0.009	0.002	0.002	0.002

Green name changes: Effects on fund fees

Dependent variable: Quarters ahead:	Δ Total Expense Ratio $_{t,t+q}$ (percentage points)							
	1Q	4Q	8Q	12Q	1Q	4Q	8Q	12Q
$\mathbb{I}(\text{Green Name Change})$	0.0091 (0.734)	0.0467 (1.628)	0.1024*** (2.613)	0.1063*** (2.734)	-	-	-	-
$\mathbb{I}(\text{Green Name Change}) \times \mathbb{I}(\text{High Decarbonisation})$	-	-	-	-	-0.0095	0.0294	0.1292**	0.1128
$\mathbb{I}(\text{Green Name Change}) \times \mathbb{I}(\text{Low Decarbonisation})$	-	-	-	-	(-0.818)	(0.961)	(2.104)	(1.235)
	-	-	-	-	-0.0047	0.0202	-0.0323	-0.0113
	-	-	-	-	(-0.436)	(0.697)	(-0.635)	(-0.248)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fund FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-Quarter \times Fund Style FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N. Obs.	176,865	162,965	145,611	129,563	140,016	127,606	111,865	97,189
R ² -Adj.	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.002	0.001	0.000	0.000

Green name changes: Effect on other variables



- Investors care about environmental aspects: Both green labels and green portfolio allocations are strong drivers of fund flows

Conclusion

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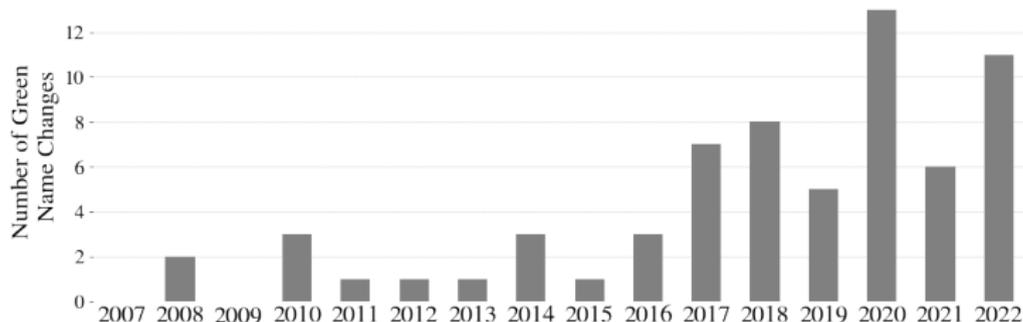
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- Yet investors do not blindly follow name changes: effects are driven by name-changing mutual funds that simultaneously improve portfolio's environmental performance

Appendix

Appendix: Are green funds more expensive?

Dependent variable:	Total Expense Ratio (percentages)							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
II(Green fund name)	-0.0133 (-0.411)	0.0356*** (2.556)	-	-	-	-	-	-
II(Morningstar green fund)	-	-	-0.0003 (-0.012)	-0.0020 (-0.108)	-	-	-	-
II(Low carbon emissions)	-	-	-	-	0.0963*** (14.302)	0.0569*** (11.491)	-	-
II(Low carbon intensity)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0524*** (8.602)	0.0313*** (7.154)
log(Total Net Assets (\$ millions))	-0.0868*** (-34.995)	-0.0468*** (-24.035)	-0.0868*** (-34.959)	-0.0468*** (-24.047)	-0.0858*** (-35.151)	-0.0463*** (-24.035)	-0.0869*** (-35.202)	-0.0468*** (-24.089)
log(Fund age (years))	0.0503*** (8.795)	0.0165*** (3.504)	0.0503*** (8.798)	0.0165*** (3.500)	0.0482*** (8.522)	0.0152*** (3.243)	0.0495*** (8.689)	0.0156*** (3.322)
Institutional funds (%)	-0.3041*** (-28.513)	-0.3034*** (-30.046)	-0.3041*** (-28.501)	-0.3034*** (-30.040)	-0.3067*** (-29.152)	-0.3068*** (-30.609)	-0.3042*** (-28.679)	-0.3044*** (-30.241)
Turnover ratio (%)	0.0006*** (9.008)	0.0004*** (6.865)	0.0006*** (9.001)	0.0004*** (6.864)	0.0006*** (9.060)	0.0004*** (6.896)	0.0006*** (9.023)	0.0004*** (6.864)
II(Index fund)	-0.3961*** (-35.158)	-0.3719*** (-32.391)	-0.3962*** (-35.114)	-0.3719*** (-32.341)	-0.3894*** (-34.891)	-0.3707*** (-32.615)	-0.3920*** (-34.855)	-0.3709*** (-32.407)
Number of shareclasses	0.0263*** (15.333)	0.0292*** (12.695)	0.0263*** (15.329)	0.0292*** (12.694)	0.0271*** (15.998)	0.0292*** (12.926)	0.0266*** (15.607)	0.0291*** (12.739)
log(Number of holdings)	-0.0299*** (-7.569)	0.0239*** (6.822)	-0.0299*** (-7.571)	0.0239*** (6.823)	-0.0266*** (-6.795)	0.0252*** (7.270)	-0.0263*** (-6.544)	0.0258*** (7.327)
log(Mean holding mkt. cap. (\$ billions))	-0.0022 (-0.617)	-0.0075*** (-2.654)	-0.0022 (-0.616)	-0.0075*** (-2.653)	0.0050 (1.490)	-0.0041 (-1.469)	-0.0040 (-1.163)	-0.0085*** (-3.028)
Portfolio sector concentration	0.0194 (1.332)	0.0235 (1.312)	0.0195 (1.331)	0.0235 (1.312)	0.0157 (1.424)	0.0219 (1.331)	0.0175 (1.367)	0.0224 (1.321)
Year-Quarter × Fund Style FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fund Company FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
N. Obs.	189,767	189,767	189,767	189,767	189,767	189,767	189,767	189,767
R ² -Adj.	0.426	0.236	0.426	0.235	0.426	0.235	0.426	0.235

Appendix: Frequency of name changes



Green Term	N.o. Funds with Green Term in Name	N.o. Name Changes
SUSTAINAB	57	33
CLEAN	9	0
CLIMATE	8	3
CARBON	5	1
ENVIRONMENT	4	1
TRANSITION	3	1
FOSSIL	2	0
RENEWABLE	2	0
EARTH	1	0
ECOLOG	1	0
SOLAR	1	1

Appendix: Correlations of green measures

	Portfolio Emissions						Portfolio ESG-scores								
	Asset4	MSCI	Refinitiv	Sust.	Trucost	Mean	Asset4	FTSE	MSCI	Refinitiv	RepRisk	S&P	Sust.	TruValue	Mean
<i>Portfolio Emissions</i>															
Asset4	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
MSCI	0.81	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Refinitiv	0.85	0.89	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sustainalytics	0.78	0.85	0.79	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Trucost	0.80	0.94	0.90	0.84	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mean	0.85	0.92	0.88	0.88	0.92	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Portfolio ESG-scores</i>															
Asset4	0.19	0.35	0.28	0.29	0.33	0.33	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
FTSE	-0.06	-0.17	-0.05	0.01	-0.16	-0.19	0.00	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
MSCI	-0.13	0.04	-0.06	-0.12	-0.03	0.02	0.49	0.17	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-
Refinitiv	0.02	0.23	0.15	0.08	0.17	0.25	0.55	-0.06	0.54	1.00	-	-	-	-	-
RepRisk	-0.09	-0.35	-0.18	-0.18	-0.32	-0.36	-0.35	0.54	-0.15	-0.38	1.00	-	-	-	-
S&P Global	0.05	0.20	0.17	0.11	0.22	0.21	0.44	0.15	0.21	0.24	-0.17	1.00	-	-	-
Sustainalytics	-0.19	-0.17	-0.25	-0.32	-0.22	-0.21	0.19	0.13	0.44	0.11	0.07	0.10	1.00	-	-
TruValue	0.15	0.23	0.10	0.10	0.21	0.23	0.33	-0.22	0.11	0.33	-0.37	0.10	0.38	1.00	-
Mean	0.06	0.35	0.26	0.04	0.32	0.32	0.63	-0.04	0.63	0.53	-0.38	0.44	0.29	0.43	1.00