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Greenwashing in Business to Business (B2B) Context. Prevalence, Motives, Risks and Mitigation Strategies

BY

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this master's thesis to my late father, R.G Marova, and my entire support system that made this dream possible.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is devoted to providing an in-depth analysis of greenwashing tactics within the sphere of B2B interactions. Greenwashing, a deceitful practice involving falsified environmental declarations by businesses, is the core focus of this study. The research utilizes stakeholder theory as its theoretical framework, capitalizing on a web-based, open-ended questionnaire to collect substantive qualitative data from a diverse group of B2B stakeholders. The study employs grounded theory as the cornerstone of its data examination, thus enabling the creation of theoretical structures that are directly rooted in the data.

The research seeks to understand the triggers, tactics, and aftereffects of greenwashing within B2B relations. It delves into the basic motivations and expectations that compel companies to partake in greenwashing and scrutinizes the problems they encounter. The study spotlights major hurdles pertaining to transparency, trustworthiness, information disparity, and stakeholder anticipations within the B2B realm.

Upon evaluation of the survey responses, the research unveils critical revelations concerning the workings of greenwashing within B2B engagements. It brings to light varied motivations behind greenwashing, such as reputation enhancement, attaining a competitive edge, and compliance with industry standards. The results underscore the hardships businesses encounter during greenwashing and offer potential solutions for bypassing or mitigating these issues.

This research augments existing knowledge by expanding our comprehension of the operations of greenwashing within a B2B framework. It offers theoretical advancements by using grounded theory to create theoretical structures derived from qualitative data. The real-world ramifications of this study propose tactics for businesses to cultivate transparency, establish verification protocols, involve stakeholders, and advance legitimate sustainability practices within B2B associations.

By procuring a comprehensive comprehension of greenwashing in B2B scenarios, this study can offer valuable insights to businesses, policy implementers, and stakeholders about the intricacies and repercussions of greenwashing practices. The outcomes can guide initiatives aimed at endorsing responsible and transparent sustainability practices, reducing greenwashing, and ultimately fostering more sustainable and ethical B2B exchanges.

Keywords: Greenwashing, Sustainability, Business-to-Business (B2B), Stakeholder Theory.

ABSTRAKT

Denne avhandlingen er viet til å gi en dyptgående analyse av greenwashing-taktikker innen B2B-interaksjoner. Greenwashing, en svikefull praksis som involverer forfalskede miljødeklarasjoner fra bedrifter, er kjernefokuset i denne studien. Forskningen bruker interessentteori som sitt teoretiske rammeverk, og utnytter et nettbasert, åpent spørreskjema for å samle inn vesentlige kvalitative data fra en mangfoldig gruppe B2B-interessenter. Studien bruker jordet teori som hjørnesteinen i dataundersøkelsen, og muliggjør dermed etableringen av teoretiske strukturer som er direkte forankret i dataene

Forskningen søker å forstå triggerne, taktikkene og ettervirkningene av greenwashing innenfor B2B-relasjoner. Den dykker ned i de grunnleggende motivasjonene og forventningene som tvinger selskaper til å delta i greenwashing og gransker problemene de møter. Studien setter søkelyset på store hindringer knyttet til åpenhet, pålitelighet, informasjonsforskjeller og interessenters forventninger innenfor B2B-området.

Etter evaluering av undersøkelsessvarene avslører forskningen kritiske avsløringer om hvordan greenwashing fungerer innenfor B2B-engasjementer. Det bringer frem ulike motivasjoner bak greenwashing, som for eksempel omdømmeforbedring, oppnåelse av konkurransefortrinn og overholdelse av industristandarder. Resultatene understreker vanskelighetene bedrifter møter under greenwashing og tilbyr potensielle løsninger for å omgå eller redusere disse problemene.

Denne forskningen forsterker eksisterende kunnskap ved å utvide vår forståelse av driften av greenwashing innenfor et B2B-rammeverk. Det tilbyr teoretiske fremskritt ved å bruke jordet teori for å lage teoretiske strukturer avledet fra kvalitative data. De virkelige konsekvensene av denne studien foreslår taktikker for bedrifter for å dyrke åpenhet, etablere verifikasjonsprotokoller, involvere interessenter og fremme legitim bærekraftspraksis i B2B-foreninger.

Ved å skaffe en omfattende forståelse av greenwashing i B2B-scenarier, kan denne studien tilby verdifull innsikt til bedrifter, policyimplementere og interessenter om forviklingene og konsekvensene av greenwashing-praksis. Resultatene kan veilede initiativer som tar sikte på å støtte ansvarlige og transparente bærekraftspraksis, redusere grønnvasking og til slutt fremme mer bærekraftig og etisk B2B-utveksling.

Nøkkelord: Greenwashing, Sustainability, Business-to-Business (B2B), Stakeholder Theory.

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B2B	Business to business
B2C	Business to consumers
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
EGD	European Green Deal
EU	European Union
GHG	Greenhouse gas
PCAF	Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials
RQ	Research Questions
SDG	Sustainable Development goals
UN	United Nations

CHAPTER 01: INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the subject under study and research, followed by a discussion of the importance of this study for further research. In addition, the purpose will be stated, followed by the research questions of this paper

1.1.Background

Nowadays, businesses are increasingly facing the criticism from different stakeholders that they must do more to lower their carbon footprints (Rege & Lavorgna, 2017; Tang & Demeritt, 2018). In this regard, stakeholders which includes employees, customers, environmental regulators, and business partners, demand that businesses must take tangible steps to address environmental concerns. These steps include reducing carbon footprints, devising environmental strategies, and improving existing supply chain management systems to contribute to carbon neutrality (Green et al., 2019; Yildiz Cankaya & Sezen, 2019). Due to the increasing pressures, many firms have voluntarily started reducing their carbon emissions (Kathy Dganda, 2014). Furthermore, numerous organizations are working to become more responsible and implemented various measures to protect the environment while conducting business. This includes developing environmentally friendly products and launching initiatives that benefit the environment, such as green branding (Dhanda, 2014), energy efficiency systems, green buildings, conservation, technology, reengineering, and other methods (Gupta & Kumar, 2012; Kinelski et al., 2021; Lopez et al., 2016).

By taking these steps, businesses can not only lessen their environmental impact but also improve their reputation (Self, Self & Bell-Haynes, 2010), attract customers who value sustainability (Parguel Benoit Moreau & Larceneax, 2011), and create new opportunities for growth and development (Chen, 2010). However, these measures can be expensive, and some companies may hesitate to adopt them. As a result, businesses may engage in greenwashing, undermining their environmental claims' credibility. Greenwashing refers to making exaggerated or false environmental claims about a product or service to deceive consumers about its environmental benefits (Terlaak & King, 2013). In other words, greenwashing is a deceptive practice in which companies make false or misleading claims about the environmental benefits of their products or services, presenting themselves as more environmentally friendly than they genuinely are (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Garriga & Mele, 2013).

Recent statistics reveal increasing prevalence of greenwashing among firms (TerraChoice, 2010). A Canadian environmental marketing firm survey found that over 95% of the "green" products they analyzed were guilty of greenwashing to some extent (Vanderbilt, 2010). Similarly, a report by the European Environmental Bureau discovered that greenwashing

is becoming a problem in the European Union, with numerous companies claiming environmental sustainability (European Environmental Bureau, 2010). Interestingly, a study by Nielson (2018) has showed that 81% of global consumers believed companies should help improve the environment, but only 46% felt they were doing so (Nielson, 2018). Some examples of companies exposed for greenwashing includes Volkswagen “clean diesel” scandal (Johnson, 2015), Nestle used unsustainable palm oil in its products, despite claiming of environmental sustainability (Gabbatis, J., 2019), ExxonMobil claim that they are reducing greenhouse gas emissions and addressing climate change (Gould, K., 2010), and DNB Bank launched "Green Bonds" which claims to finance a natural gas project in the Arctic (Norwegian climate foundation, 2019).

In the past two decades, academics have explored the concept of greenwashing due to growing concerns about companies' practices. While greenwashing has been extensively studied in the B2C context, a growing body of literature explores the motives, consequences, and best practices to avoid greenwashing in this context (Lane, 2014). However, the literature examining greenwashing in B2B context is currently limited. Some available literature discusses that: B2B firms often make purchasing decisions based on environmental claims made by suppliers, which can impact the entire supply chain. Additionally, B2B has complex supply chain that make it difficult to verify the environmental sustainability of its products and services (Chabowski et al., 2011). As a result, suppliers may make false claims to gain a competitive advantage and outperform their competitors in B2B contexts (Chen, 2010; Parguel Benoit Moreau & Larceneax, 2011). Chabowski, Mena, and Gonzalez-Padron (2011) suggested that studying greenwashing in the B2B context should consider its impact on stakeholders such as investors, regulators, and employees, going beyond just customers. Additionally, Chan & Wang (2012) proposed that a holistic approach should be considered when studying greenwashing in the B2B context, considering the impact on any of the supply chains rather than focusing solely on individual firms (business to consumers).

We argue that exploring greenwashing in the B2B context is vital for understanding its implications for various stakeholders and the environment. Researchers can promote environmental sustainability in the business landscape by examining the motives, risks, and mitigation strategies in B2B context since this will ultimately benefit the businesses, their stakeholders, and the planet. It is crucial to gain full understanding of greenwashing, determine the scope of the issue, identify contributing factors, and develop strategies to address it. This study aims to fill this research gap by examining greenwashing in the B2B context, drawing on

stakeholder theory, and investigating the motives, risks, prevalence in B2B and mitigation strategies to avoid greenwashing.

The findings can help B2B corporations make more informed decisions about their suppliers, reduce their environmental impact, and enhance their reputations as environmentally responsible organizations. Despite the increasing awareness and adoption of sustainable practices in the corporate world (Bansal & Roth, 2015; Hart, 2018), greenwashing, a deceptive use of environmental claims by businesses to portray themselves as environmentally responsible (Laufer, 2019), has emerged as a significant concern. While there is substantial literature on greenwashing in the business-to-consumer (B2C) context (Delmas & Burbano, 2022; Nyilasy et al., 2014), the phenomenon in B2B relationships remains underexplored (Walker & Wan, 2019). This research investigates the motives, risks, prevalence in B2B, mitigation strategies to avoid greenwashing in B2B.

Therefore, the research problem for this study is to what extent greenwashing occurs in B2B contexts, and what are the underlying mechanisms, strategies, and impacts of such deceptive practices on B2B relationships, trust, reputation, financial performance, and environmental outcomes? Thus, this research thesis aims to investigate the greenwashing prevalence, motives, risks, and mitigation (or prevention) strategies in context of B2B firms. Examining the prevalence, motives, risks, and mitigation of greenwashing in B2B context is crucial in promoting environmental sustainability.

According to Freeman (1984), businesses do not operate in isolation; they have critical stakeholders interested in their activities. As a result, this research will adopt stakeholder theory as its guiding theory, this research employs qualitative aspects, literature review and conduct a qualitative survey. This thesis will explore various literature, ads, and essays to review the Concept of greenwashing to achieve the research objectives.

1.2 Research Objective

This research addresses the research gaps by investigating the motives and risks of firms engaging in greenwashing in a B2B context and identifying the main challenges related to greenwashing. Furthermore, the study will explore strategies corporations can implement to avoid greenwashing in B2B, and ultimately promote environmental sustainability and improving corporate reputations. The research objective of this study is "*to understand greenwashing prevalence, different motives, associated risks and mitigation strategies in B2B context*".
This research objective is addressed through the following three research questions (RQs).
RQ1. What is the prevalence of greenwashing in B2B context and how it is different from B2C?
RQ2. What are the different motives and risks associated with greenwashing in B2B context?

RQ3. What is the different greenwashing mitigation or prevention strategies in B2B context?

1.3. Significance of the study

Greenwashing can undermine efforts to achieve sustainability by misleading customers and stakeholders about the true environmental impact of products and services. The significance of studying why and how B2B firms engage in greenwashing lies in its contribution to addressing environmental concerns and promoting sustainable business practices. By understanding the motivations and methods behind greenwashing in B2B firms, researchers and practitioners can develop strategies to promote transparency, accountability, and actual environmental responsibility.

Research has revealed that greenwashing is pervasive in the current business world. For example, a study by the Harvard Business Review found that many companies engage in greenwashing to protect their reputation, attract customers, and comply with regulations rather than promote sustainability (Eccles & Serafeim, 2013). Another study by the European Commission found that greenwashing is particularly common in the energy, transportation, and finance sectors (European Commission, 2014).

By addressing the issue of greenwashing in B2B firms, this study can contribute to developing more effective sustainability practices in the business world. These include the development of standards and certifications for sustainable products and services, increased transparency and reporting requirements for companies, and greater consumer awareness and education on environmental issues.

Finally, to the researcher, this shall help to fully appreciate the concept of greenwashing in the context of business-to-business, sustainability strategies, and their significance in today's businesses as well as fulfilling a requirement of the researcher's study program requirement.

1.4. Scope and Delimitations

This study’s scope is limited to investigating motives, risks associated with global greenwashing practices by firms in a business-to-business context, as well as the main challenges with greenwashing in B2B and how corporations can avoid them. The study will draw examples globally, including firms in the category of industries with a particular emphasis on those with a significant impact on the environment, such as manufacturing, transportation, and energy.

Cohen & Reich (2019) argued the importance of enhancing environmental sustainability strategies, disclosure, and promoting good ethical practices. This scope is clear and focused on the research questions and includes some critical specific exemplary industries focusing on

environmentally impactful industries. By examining greenwashing motives, expectations, challenges, and solutions to avoid them, the study provides valuable insights and recommendations for B2B firms and policymakers to improve sustainability practices. Factors that stimulate greenwashing can be positive or negative; both shall be highlighted in this study. The study will consider the perspective of customers, suppliers, investors, and the firms themselves. This focus will allow the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors that drive greenwashing in B2B firms relenting from the stakeholder theory for framework and guidelines and developing recommendations for addressing the issue.

However, there are also limitations to focusing on this study in a B2B context, which is: Limited data availability and accuracy: There needs to be more literature available on greenwashing in the B2B context. Few studies have been conducted in this regard. In addition, the business sector often has complex supply chains in industries, making monitoring and verifying environmental claims challenging. In contrast, on the other hand, some corporations might not be willing to disclose information on their greenwashing practices, hence a limitation to the advancement of this study.

Lack of standardization: There currently needs to be a standardized definition or framework for greenwashing, which makes it difficult to compare findings across studies.

Difficulty in identifying greenwashing practice: Greenwashing can be challenging, particularly in the B2B context, where there may be less public scrutiny of sustainability claims.Nevertheless, while seized with these limitations to study greenwashing in the B2B context, it remains an essential area of research with the potential to improve sustainability practices, increase trust in sustainability claims and promote ethical behaviour by both business and its stakeholders.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

In this study, the stakeholder theory is adopted to help highlight the process of how greenwashing affects a firm’s reputation and relations with its surroundings as stakeholders, focusing on how companies fabricate or manipulate their environmental sustainability and the impact of its actions on a firm's stakeholders.

According to Edward Freeman, “*stakeholder theory is a view of capitalism that stresses the interconnected relationships between a business and its customers, suppliers, employees, investors, communities, and others who have a stake in the organization*”. The theory can be useful in this study to unpack stakeholder relationships with business. The theory argues that a firm should create value for all stakeholders, not just shareholders. Thus, many different business stakeholders become crucial to both the firm and its operations. Stakeholder analysis theory

provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex relationships among the various stakeholders involved in greenwashing in B2B contexts. Stakeholders can be defined as any individual or group who can be affected by or affect a company's actions. The theory proposes that companies must identify and prioritize their stakeholders based on their level of influence and interest in their activities. This approach can help companies to develop more effective strategies for managing their relationships with stakeholders and avoiding the negative impact of greenwashing and thus promoting business sustainability.

Fig 1.1 Stakeholder theory

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This research is structured based on theoretical and empirical evidence subdivided into sections. The main sections of this thesis are the introduction, literature review, methodology, results, findings, and conclusion. The introduction covers the background of the research topic, research problem, objectives for the study, guiding questions, scope, and limitations. The overall highlights in this section briefly justify the importance of this study to both business and its stakeholders.

The theoretical framework aims to discuss the concept of greenwashing, the motives behind greenwashing related to the stakeholder theory, and the challenges of greenwashing. In addition, the third chapter introduces the methodology, and an online survey is conducted to test previously presented theories and findings based on this research. Lastly, present the results and findings and conclude further research and discussion.

CHAPTER 02: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review chapter will discuss, and present relatable theories and concepts based on various scholars' previous studies, research, and literature. The aim is to provide theories and models to guide the research and analysis of the subject.

2.1. FOUNDATIONS OF GREENWASHING

2.1.1. Concept of Greenwashing

Greenwashing refers to a company's deceptive practice of making false or misleading claims about the environmental benefits of their products or services to appear more environmentally friendly than they are (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Garriga & Mele, 2013; Muteri, 2022). This behaviour undermines the efforts of genuinely environmentally conscious companies and hinders consumers' ability to make informed decisions (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010). The term "greenwashing" was first coined by environmental activist Jay Westerveld in a 1986 essay, where he criticized hotels for encouraging guests to reuse towels for environmental reasons while neglecting other, more significant environmental concerns (Patz, 2021); (Pearson, 2010). Since then, the Concept has evolved and been defined in various ways.

TerraChoice Environmental Marketing (2007) defines greenwashing as misleading consumers about a company's environmental practices or the environmental benefits of a product or service. Jay Westerveld (1986) emphasized that most organizations prioritize profit over environmental concerns. Similarly, Delmas and Burbano (2011) and Lyon and Max (2011) argue that greenwashing involves reporting false statements or claims about a company's positive environmental impact or that of its products or services. Concealing negative information about an organization's environmental impact is also considered greenwashing (Lyon & Max, 2011). The term now encompasses a range of deceptive practices, including vague or ambiguous language, irrelevant or misleading certifications, and exaggeration of environmental benefits. In the B2B context, greenwashing can occur at any stage of the supply chain, from raw material procurement to product disposal, and may include practices such as misleading labelling, false certifications, and unsubstantiated claims (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

Despite the various definitions of greenwashing, the common thread needs to be more accurate communication by companies (Lee & Suh, 2022). For instance, a company may engage in greenwashing through hidden trade-offs, promoting a product as environmentally friendly while ignoring its negative environmental impacts. A company may claim that its

product is made with recycled materials but neglect to mention that it is shipped from overseas, resulting in high emissions (Ottman, Stafford, & Hartman, 2006), which would be greenwashing.

To better understand greenwashing, scholars and organizations have identified its common pitfalls or "sins." According to TerraChoice Environmental Marketing (2010), their study found that out of 2,219 products making environmental claims, 95% committed at least one of the sins of greenwashing. TerraChoice Environmental Marketing (2010) identified the sins of greenwashing in their study as follows:

1. *Hidden trade-offs*: This sin occurs when a product is promoted as environmentally friendly but ignores its negative environmental impacts. For example, a company may claim its product is made from recycled materials but needs to mention that it is shipped from overseas, resulting in high emissions (Ottman, Stafford, & Hartman, 2006).
2. *No proof*: This sin involves making environmental claims without providing verifiable evidence, such as a company claiming its product is "chemical-free" without providing supporting evidence.
3. *Vagueness*: This sin refers to using vague language like "eco-friendly" or "sustainable" without providing specific information about how these claims are met.
4. *Irrelevance*: This sin involves making environmental claims that are technically true but unimportant, such as a company claiming its product is "CFC-free" when CFCs are already legally banned.
5. *Lesser of two evils*: This sin occurs when environmental claims are made about a product that may be marginally better for the environment than competing products but still have significant environmental impacts.
6. *Fibbing*: This sin involves making outright false environmental claims, such as a company claiming its product is certified organic when it is not. Companies that engage in these sins of greenwashing undermine the efforts of genuinely environmentally conscious companies and make it difficult for consumers to make informed choices (TerraChoice Environmental Marketing, 2010).

2.1.2 Characteristics of Greenwashing

De Jong, Harkink, and Barth (2018) suggest two main characteristic features of greenwashing in the literature: (1) an intrinsic feature representing the distance from truthfulness and (2) a communicative feature representing techniques used to mislead or

confuse people. Intrinsic features include claims that fall between half-truths and lies, such as when only some conduct is green, when the green action makes no significant improvement, or when the green conduct merely reflects an effort to correct wrongful earlier conduct indeed. Disclosed features through communication include claims that cannot be verified or use questionable certifications (Schmuck, Matthes, & Barth, 2018). Other scholars, such as Lee and Suh (2022), argue that greenwashing can take many forms but often involves vagueness or ambiguity (Meyer, 2015).

Vague or ambiguous terms: Companies may use vague or ambiguous terms, such as "natural" or "sustainable," that are difficult to define or measure (Guo et al., 2018). In addition, some companies engage in greenwashing intentionally, while others may be unaware of the rules, thus risking their reputation (Delmas & Colgan, 2011). Greenwashing can harm a company's reputation and undermine its social support, whether by accident, intent, or carelessness (Delmas M., 2018). Mitchell and Ramey (2011) assert that greenwashing always involves strategic, intentional, and voluntary corporate deception. Furthermore, vagueness, hidden trade-offs, no proof, fibbing, irrelevance, and the lesser of two evils are all considered sins of greenwashing (TerraChoice, 2010; Westerveld J., 1986).

Irrelevant or misleading certifications: Another characteristic of greenwashing is the use of irrelevant or misleading certifications. Companies may use certifications that do not directly relate to their products' environmental impact or require independent verification (Kijima et al., 2019). Third-party certification and transparency are crucial for ensuring credible and trustworthy environmental claims (Delmas & Toffel, 2011). For instance, Fiji Water was criticized in 2010 for claiming to be "carbon negative" and offsetting its carbon footprint through an uncertified forestry project in Fiji without disclosing the project's details (Gallagher, 2010), which characterized the claim as greenwashing. Greenwashing is a deceptive practice that undermines genuine environmental efforts and hinders consumers' ability to make informed choices. Companies should be aware of the sins of greenwashing and strive for transparency, honesty, and third-party verification in their environmental claims to avoid these pitfalls and maintain their reputation as responsible organizations.

Use of exaggerated claims: Finally, greenwashing often exaggerates environmental benefits (Delmas M.,2011). He argued that companies might make claims about the environmental benefits of their products that are not supported by the evidence or that only apply to a small portion of the product or production process. For example, a company might claim its product is 100% recyclable when only a tiny portion is. Recent scandals revealed that companies also act to cover up their non-sustainable practices (Siano et al.,2017). A

perfect example is the Volkswagen emissions scandal which was investigated and exposed falsification and deception to stakeholders through manipulation of business practices to support green claims. It was after it developed a device that manipulates C02 emissions. Thus, any claims that show divergence between socially responsible communications and practices (or verifiable claims) is a form of greenwashing, and corporates need to be watchful of their steps as this may affect stakeholders and green brands (Guo R et al. 2018), green trust (Chen, 2010). When a company misrepresents its environmental position, that is regarded as its corrupt culture (Lin-Hi & Blumberg, 2018) and highly intentional corporate misbehaviour (Lange & Washburn, 2012). On the other hand, all that generates distrust (Darke & Ritchie, 2007).

However, many businesses today are eager to portray themselves as eco-friendly to appeal to socially conscious consumers or influence stakeholder perceptions (Torelli et al.,2020). As a result, companies have a strong incentive to make environmental claims, even if they are not entirely accurate (Brammer & Millington, 2008). Though, according to Delmas & Burbano (2011), the lack of a regulatory body to then verify greenwashing claims creates an environment where companies can make unsubstantiated claims without fear of repercussions. In addition, the study by Ottman et al. (2006) developed a framework for identifying greenwashing that focuses on specificity, relevance, and provability for environmental claims. The authors argue that vague claims, such as "environmentally friendly" or "green," are often used in greenwashing and are challenging to verify. Hence the need for a regulatory body and standards on greenwashing.

2.2 Key drivers of greenwashing in B2B

According to Arana-Landin et al. (2011), "*Greenwashing has become a prevalent phenomenon among corporations, especially in the B2B context, where the complexity of the supply chain and the difficulty of obtaining reliable information on suppliers' environmental performance make it easier for companies to engage in deceptive environmental practices".* Since scholars have highlighted vital drivers of greenwashing in the business-to-business context, that is factors that can contribute to greenwashing. Below are some of the factors:

Complex supply chain relationships: Greenwashing in B2B can also be complicated by the complexity of supply chain relationships. According to Arli et al. (2019), companies may need more control over their entire supply chain, making it difficult to monitor and verify the environmental practices of their suppliers. This lack of control can create challenges in ensuring suppliers adhere to the same environmental standards as the company,

resulting in greenwashing. In addition, the complexity of supply chain relationships can make it challenging for companies to effectively communicate their sustainability initiatives and environmental practices to their stakeholders.

Competitive pressures and reputation management: Delmas and Burbano (2011) suggest that companies may use greenwashing to gain a competitive advantage over other firms. Companies may exaggerate their environmental credentials or make false claims to attract customers (Parguel Benoit Moreau and Larceneax, 2011), particularly those prioritizing sustainability in their procurement decisions. Such claims can be instrumental in winning contracts, securing new business, and maintaining existing relationships. Additionally, companies can use greenwashing to manage their reputation and avoid negative publicity (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015, p.254). For example, according to Schaefer and Ottman (2016), a company may invest in renewable energy projects to offset the negative environmental impact of its core business activities. In addition, Schaefer and Ottman (2016) added that "green energy offsets provide a way for firms to signal their commitment to sustainability while continuing to engage in environmentally harmful business practices" (p. 90).

However, today's companies see a commercial advantage in being sustainable or appearing sustainable, eco-friendly, or green (Bansal and DesJardine (2014). “By appearing sustainable or eco-friendly, they also attract eco-friendly buyers and consumers with the expectation that companies should be responsible and contribute to society" (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). Additionally, it is argued to improve corporate brand image and the legitimacy of its products in the eyes of eco-friendly buyers (Ferrin et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2004, 2009).

Lack of clear standards: Arana-Landin et al. (2021) note that a lack of clear standards or regulations around environmental claims in a particular industry can make it easier for companies to engage in greenwashing. Felicia Jackson (2021); Delmas and Burbano (2011, p.131) argue that "the lack of clear and enforceable standards for green products and services creates a void that firms can fill with their self-generated environmental claims, often leading to misleading and confusing marketing messages." Similarly, Parguel, Benoit-Moreau, and Russell (2015) note that "the absence of a common framework for environmental marketing and communication strategies is a key factor that allows companies to make questionable claims about their environmental performance ." These clear standards for carbon offsets might lead some companies to make misleading claims about their carbon neutrality or carbon-negative status (Diebel, 2017; Rhett Power, 2022; Wolf et al., 2021).

This lack of clear standards can be particularly problematic in B2B, where companies may make environmental claims about their suppliers or partners without sufficient evidence or transparency. Arana-Landin et al. (2021) argue that "in the B2B context, the complexity of the supply chain and the difficulty of obtaining reliable information on suppliers' environmental performance make it easier to engage in deceptive environmental practices."

Some scholars have called for developing clear and enforceable environmental claims and certification standards to address this issue. For example, Ottman (2011) suggests creating a third-party certification system to validate environmental claims and help consumers distinguish between genuine sustainability efforts and greenwashing. Similarly, Parguel et al. (2015) argue that "regulatory or voluntary standards that help establish clear criteria and procedures for validating environmental claims could enhance the credibility of green marketing."

Consumer and stakeholder demand: Companies may engage in greenwashing to signal their commitment to sustainability and meet the concerns and demands of environmentally conscious consumers. Russell (2018) and Bansal and DesJardine, (2014) suggest that companies may feel pressure from consumers, investors, and other stakeholders to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility, which can lead to greenwashing to meet these expectations. Similarly, Schaefer and Ottman (2016) note that "companies engage in greenwashing because they recognize the potential financial benefits of being seen as environmentally responsible, especially in the face of increasing consumer and stakeholder demand for sustainable products and practices."They argue that greenwashing allows companies to capitalize on this demand without significantly changing their core business practices.

However, the pressure to meet consumer and stakeholder demand for sustainability can also drive companies to engage in genuine environmental improvements. Ottman (2011) notes that "green marketing can be an effective tool for driving innovation and improving the environmental performance of products and services" (p. 183). She suggests that companies can use green marketing to educate consumers about the environmental impact of their products and to encourage them to make more sustainable choices. While consumer and stakeholder demand for sustainability can contribute to greenwashing, it can also drive genuine environmental improvements and innovation. The challenge for companies is to balance these competing pressures and avoid misleading or deceptive environmental claims (Ottman, J. A. (2011).

Lack of resources or expertise: Arana-Landin et al. (2021) also note that in some cases, companies may need more resources or expertise to implement genuine sustainability initiatives, leading to greenwashing to create the appearance of environmental responsibility. Companies may need to gain the necessary skills or resources to conduct rigorous environmental assessments (Bauer et al., 2018). Similarly, according to Reimann and Schilke (2018), companies may need a deeper understanding of sustainability issues, which can lead to ineffective environmental practices and greenwashing. This lack of knowledge and expertise can also create challenges in measuring and verifying environmental claims. Additionally, companies may face challenges in clearly and concisely communicating their environmental practices and initiatives to their stakeholders (Burchell and Rettie (2016). Thus, companies may be motivated to engage in greenwashing through these communication challenges.

However, through the above discussion, greenwashing in the B2B context has been highlighted to be influenced by many factors. However, these drivers present several challenges that companies must overcome to maintain their sustainability initiatives' credibility. These challenges include a need for more transparency and accountability, limited knowledge and expertise on sustainability, complex supply chain relationships, and difficulty in measuring and verifying environmental claims. Addressing these challenges requires companies to implement effective environmental management practices (Walker & Wan, 2012), establish transparent reporting mechanisms, and engage in meaningful stakeholder dialogue (Burchell and Rettie (2016).

2.3 Stakeholder Theory & Greenwashing

Stakeholder theory is helpful for organizations to identify and understand their various stakeholders and their relationships with them (Freeman., 1984). The theory suggests that a firm do not live in isolation; its operations go beyond the shareholders to other key stakeholders who might impact and influence the business. This could concern their interests and power in the company's environmental practice and their potential impact on its reputation and bottom line. According to Sarkis et al., 2011, *"It proposes that corporates, as they do business, contribute to environmental damage by providing externalities that impact both its internal and external stakeholders"*. Hence proper accountability and consideration of stakeholder interests becomes key.

Stakeholder theory can be examined using four quadrants based on their level of interest and power. These are: (a) *high power, high interest (manage closely)*: These

stakeholders are the most influential and intensely interested in the company's environmental practices. They can significantly impact the company's reputation and bottom line. Examples include customers, regulators, and NGOs; (b) *high power, low interest (keep satisfied):* These stakeholders have significant power over the company but are not highly interested in the company's environmental practices. Examples include suppliers and industry associations; (*c) low power, high interest (keep informed):* These stakeholders have a high level of Interest in the company's environmental practices but do not have significant power over the company. Examples include community groups and environmental activists; (d) *low power, low interest (monitor):* These stakeholders have minimal impact on the company's environmental practices or bottom line. Examples include the general public and the media.

In addition, the theory provides a structured framework to help organizations identify their stakeholders, analyze their needs and interests, and develop effective engagement strategies. The theory posits that organizations exist in a complex web of stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders, regulators, and the community. Each of these groups has different interests, needs, and expectations, and the organization needs to manage and balance these interests and foster more robust and long-term collaborations with its stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2004) to achieve its goals effectively (Freeman & Reed,1983). Prechel and Morries, 2010; Roulet and Touboul, 2015 agree that “firms are prone to comply, at least in appearance, with stakeholders’ needs when trying to build or gain legitimacy."

In relation to sustainability, the theory condents that stakeholder engagement can help companies to identify and prioritize key sustainability issues, establish transparency and accountability, and create shared value for all stakeholders. Pagell and Wu (2009) suggest that stakeholder theory can help guide companies in their efforts to develop sustainable supply chains. Similarly, Freeman E (2010); (Crane A et al. 2019); (and Matten & Moon 2008) argue that stakeholder engagement is a critical aspect of sustainability, as stakeholders are often the driving force behind sustainability initiatives. In the context of greenwashing in B2B, stakeholder engagement is vital because it helps to ensure that environmental claims are accurate, verifiable, and meaningful (Freeman E, 2010). Similarly, engaging with stakeholders can also help to build trust and credibility (Linder & Williander, 2016; Yan & Holt, 2018), which is essential for any sustainability efforts (Waddock S, 2011. Waddock also suggests that companies must go beyond simply engaging with stakeholders and develop meaningful relationships based on mutual trust and respect, particularly in sustainable supply chain management. This requires companies to listen to stakeholder concerns, communicate

effectively, and take action to align with stakeholder expectations (Linder & Williander, 2016).

Overall, the literature suggests that stakeholder theory can be a helpful tool for mitigating greenwashing in B2B relationships by encouraging companies to consider the interests of all stakeholders, engage in meaningful relationships, develop consumer trust in sustainable products, and transparent and accountable sustainability practices. This theory provides a helpful framework for understanding the complex relationships between organizations and their stakeholders in the context of greenwashing in B2B. By analyzing the interests, needs, and expectations of different stakeholders, organizations can develop strategies that balance the interests of all stakeholders and promote genuine sustainability. Given that, precise stakeholder mapping is helpful to corporates.

In this diagram below, the stakeholders are mapped based on their level of interest and power in the company's environmental practices and their potential impact on its reputation and bottom line. The horizontal axis represents the level of Interest, while the vertical axis represents the power level.

By using stakeholder mapping, companies can identify which stakeholders are most influential and how to prioritize their engagement strategies (Zhu & Sarkis, 2006). This can help companies develop effective communication and engagement strategies to address stakeholder concerns and avoid the negative consequences of greenwashing (Mohr & Spekman, 1994).

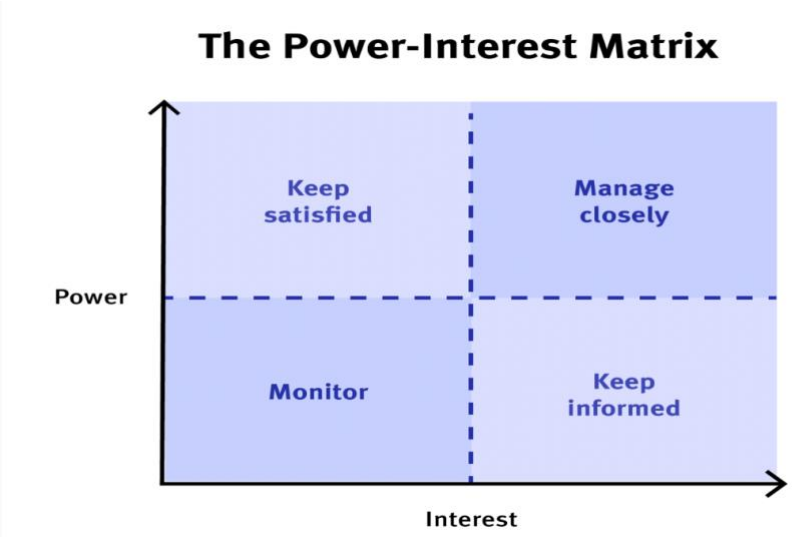


Fig 2.1: Power- Interest Matrix

CHAPTER 03: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter delineates the research methodology adopted in this study to investigate the multifaceted phenomenon of greenwashing within the B2B context. In pursuit of this objective, the study utilizes a straussian grounded theory approach characterized by its systematic, inductive, and data driven nature. The chapter expounds upon the philosophical foundations of research, the research design, data collection and analysis techniques, and ethical considerations integral to the research process.

3.1. Philosophical Standing

This study's philosophical stance is rooted in social constructivism, which posits that reality is socially constructed and subjective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By adopting a social constructivist lens, this study acknowledges that greenwashing practices are influenced by social, cultural, and historical factors and are not fixed or universally applicable (Andrews, 2012). This perspective allows for a more in-depth exploration of how organizations interpret, negotiate, and construct meaning around greenwashing in a B2B context.

Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of human interaction and communication in knowledge construction (Kim, 2001). This perspective is particularly relevant for the study of greenwashing, as it highlights the role of language and discourse in shaping perceptions of environmental responsibility and sustainability (Fairclough, 2010). Furthermore, adopting a social constructivist stance allows the researcher to delve into the subjective experiences and interpretations of the study participants, thereby unveiling the complexity of greenwashing in the B2B domain (Charmaz, 2014).

The choice of a social constructivist perspective aligns with the Straussian grounded theory approach employed in this study, emphasising the importance of context, interaction, and process in analysing social phenomena (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). By combining a social constructivist philosophical stance with the grounded theory approach, this research seeks to systematically uncover the intricate processes that underlie greenwashing practices, strategies, and outcomes in B2B settings.

3.2. Grounded Theory: An Overview

Grounded theory, developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967, is a qualitative research methodology that systematically generates theory from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The primary objective of grounded theory is to construct a theoretical explanation of a social phenomenon firmly rooted in the empirical data collected during the research process (Charmaz, 2014). This inductive and iterative approach to theory

development contrasts more deductive methodologies that test pre-existing theories or hypotheses.

Grounded theory is characterized by fundamental principles, such as theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis, and developing theoretical codes and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Theoretical sampling involves selecting participants, settings, and situations based on their potential contribution to the emerging theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative analysis involves continuously comparing data, codes, and categories to identify data patterns, relationships, and variations (Birks & Mills, 2015). The coding process in grounded theory consists of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, which enable researchers to systematically analyze the data, identify core categories, and integrate these categories into a coherent and explanatory theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3.2.1 Straussian Grounded Theory

The Straussian grounded theory, also known as the "second generation" of grounded theory, was developed by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin in the 1990s to refine the original methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The Straussian approach differs from the Glaserian grounded theory approach in several key aspects, such as the emphasis on context, interaction, and process in analysing social phenomena (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

One of the main distinctions between the two approaches is the role of the researcher's pre-existing knowledge and assumptions. In the Straussian approach, researchers acknowledge their prior knowledge and actively engage with it during the research process, making reflexivity an essential component of the methodology (Charmaz, 2014). This contrasts with the Glaserian approach, which emphasizes the importance of remaining neutral and avoiding the influence of preconceived ideas on the data analysis (Glaser, 1992).

Another critical difference between the two approaches lies in the coding process. In the Straussian grounded theory, axial coding, which involves establishing relationships between categories and subcategories, plays a significant role in data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This focus on the interconnectedness of categories is unique to the Straussian approach and contributes to a more contextually grounded and process-oriented understanding of social phenomena (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

This study employed the Straussian grounded theory approach because it offers a systematic, context-sensitive, and process-oriented methodology for generating theory grounded in empirical data. The Straussian approach is well-suited to investigating complex

and nuanced social phenomena, such as greenwashing in the B2B context, by emphasizing the importance of reflexivity, interaction, and context.

3.3. Research Design

The research design employed in this study is an exploratory, qualitative design, which is particularly well-suited for investigating complex and under-researched phenomena like greenwashing in the B2B context (Creswell, 2013). This design facilitates an in-depth understanding of greenwashing practices' underlying processes, motivations, and consequences and the meanings and interpretations participants attach to these practices (Patton, 2015).

This study employs an iterative and emergent research design in line with the social constructivist perspective and the Straussian grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014). This means that the research process is flexible and adaptive, allowing for modifying research questions, data collection techniques, and data analysis strategies as the study progresses and new insights emerge (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). This iterative design is essential for the inductive development of a grounded theory firmly rooted in the empirical data collected during the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

A vital component of the research design is purposive sampling, which involves selecting participants based on their relevance to the research questions and their potential to contribute to the emerging theory (Palinkas et al., 2015). This study recruited participants from diverse backgrounds, roles, and experiences in the B2B sector, ensuring a rich and varied data set reflecting greenwashing practices' complexity and heterogeneity. The sampling process continued until data saturation was achieved, which occurred when no new insights or themes emerged from the data (Saunders et al., 2018).

Overall, the research design employed in this study is characterized by its exploratory, qualitative nature, emphasis on iteration and emergence, and commitment to in-depth, context-sensitive inquiry. By adopting such a design, this study seeks to uncover the complex and nuanced processes that underlie greenwashing practices, strategies, and outcomes in B2B settings.

3.4. Data Collection

There are many ways of collecting data: face-to-face, interviews, surveys, etc. This study data was collected through online open-ended essays written by participants with experience or knowledge of greenwashing practices in B2B settings. The open-ended essay format was chosen because it allows participants to express their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives on greenwashing flexibly and unstructured (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This

approach fosters rich and detailed data, providing insights into participants' meanings and interpretations of greenwashing practices (Bradding & Hortsman, 1999; Dhir et al., 2017a; Ronen et al., 2001).

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants with diverse backgrounds, roles, and experiences in the B2B sector (Palinkas et al., 2015). This strategy ensures that the collected data represents a wide range of perspectives and experiences, enhancing the validity and transferability of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sampling process continued until data saturation was achieved, which occurred when no new insights or themes emerged from the data (Saunders et al., 2018).

To ensure the quality and consistency of the data collection process, participants were provided with clear and concise instructions on how to complete the open-ended essays, as well as a set of guiding questions to help them structure their responses (Flick, 2018). These guiding questions were designed to elicit information about participants' experiences with greenwashing practices, their perceptions of the motivations and consequences of these practices, and their understanding of the broader B2B context (Yin, 2015).

The researcher maintained regular communication with the participants throughout the data collection process, offering clarification and support as needed (Bryman, 2016). This approach not only helps to ensure the quality and relevance of the data but also fosters a sense of trust and rapport between the researcher and the participants, which is crucial for eliciting honest and candid responses (Tracy, 2010).

Table 3.1: Participants' Profiles

Participant	Industry	Job Title	Gender	Age
P1	Manufacturing	Operations Manager	Male	38
P2	Retail	Marketing Manager	Female	45
P3	Agriculture	Sustainability Coordinator	Male	50
P4	Energy	CEO	Male	62
P5	Construction	Environmental Engineer	Female	28
P6	Technology	Chief Sustainability Officer	Male	48
P7	Healthcare	Facilities Manager	Female	35
P8	Finance	Risk Manager	Male	42
P9	Hospitality	General Manager	Female	40
P10	Transportation	Logistics Manager	Male	52

P11	Manufacturing	Sustainability Manager	Male	46
P12	Retail	Sales Manager	Female	31
P13	Agriculture	Farmer	Male	55
P14	Energy	Operations Manager	Male	43
P15	Construction	Project Manager	Female	37
P16	Technology	Environmental Scientist	Male	29
P17	Healthcare	Nurse Manager	Female	47
P18	Finance	Compliance Officer	Male	39
P19	Hospitality	Operations Manager	Female	32
P20	Transportation	Fleet Manager	Male	44
P21	Manufacturing	Production Manager	Male	51
P22	Retail	Store Manager	Female	36
P23	Agriculture	Agronomist	Male	33
P24	Energy	Environmental Specialist	Male	30
P25	Construction	Site Manager	Female	41

Table 3.1 provides an overview of the 25 participants in the study, including their industry, job title, gender, and age. The sample included male and female participants, ranging in age from 28 to 62, with a mean age of 41.8 years. The sample was diverse and representative of the population of Interest, with participants from various industries, including manufacturing, retail, agriculture, energy, construction, technology, healthcare, finance, hospitality, and transportation.

The participants' job titles also varied, including operations managers, marketing managers, sustainability coordinators, CEOs, environmental engineers, chief sustainability officers, facilities managers, risk managers, general managers, logistics managers, sales managers, farmers, operations managers, project managers, environmental scientists, nurse managers, compliance officers, store managers, agronomists, environmental specialists, site managers, sustainability analysts, medical directors, investment managers, food and beverage managers, plant engineers, visual merchandising managers, soil scientists, maintenance managers, quantity surveyors, sustainability consultants, quality managers, financial analysts, human resources managers, and safety coordinators. The diversity of the sample and the variety of job titles ensure that this study's findings apply to a wide range of organizations and stakeholders in the business-to-business context.

In summary, this study's data collection process involved open-ended essays, purposive sampling, and clear communication with participants. This approach enabled the collection of rich, varied, and contextually relevant data, the foundation for the inductive development of a grounded theory on greenwashing in the B2B context.

3.4.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in any research Endeavor, mainly when dealing with human participants and sensitive topics (Israel & Hay, 2006). This study adhered to the ethical principles and guidelines outlined by the research institution's ethics committee and followed established best practices in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Critical ethical considerations addressed in this study include informed consent, confidentiality, and minimizing potential harm.

Informed Consent: Informed consent is a fundamental ethical principle that ensures participants understand the research's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits and voluntarily agree to participate (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Before data collection, participants were provided with an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study without penalty (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Written consent was obtained from all participants before they submitted their open-ended essays, ensuring that they understood and agreed to the study's terms and conditions (Emanuel et al., 2000; Sharma & Vageriya, 2019).

Confidentiality protects participants' identities and personal information from unauthorized disclosure (Saunders et al., 2018). To ensure confidentiality, all data collected during this study were anonymized, and any identifying information was removed or replaced with pseudonyms (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, data were stored securely on password-protected devices, with access limited to the researcher and authorized personnel (Israel & Hay, 2006). When reporting the findings, the researcher-maintained participants' anonymity and avoided disclosing any information that could potentially identify them (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Minimization of Potential Harm: Researchers have an ethical obligation to minimize potential harm to participants resulting from their involvement in the study (Wiles et al., 2008). The researcher took several steps to minimize potential harm because greenwashing can be a sensitive and controversial topic. First, the open-ended essay format allowed participants to respond to the research questions at their own pace and in their own words,

reducing the potential for emotional distress (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Second, the researcher maintained regular communication with the participants, offering support and clarification as needed and fostering a sense of trust and rapport (Bryman, 2016). Finally, participants were provided with resources and contact information for relevant support services if they experienced any negative emotions or discomfort related to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In summary, this study prioritized ethical considerations by obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and minimizing potential harm to participants. By adhering to these ethical principles and guidelines, the researcher aimed to conduct a rigorous, transparent, and responsible investigation of greenwashing practices in the B2B context.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study followed the systematic and iterative procedures outlined in the Straussian grounded theory approach, as described by Corbin and Strauss (2015). The analysis involved several stages, including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, which enabled the researcher to identify patterns, relationships, and variations in the data and develop a coherent and explanatory theoretical framework. Table 1 provides an overview of the data analysis process.

Table 3.2. Overview of the Data Analysis Process

Stage	Description
Open Coding	Initial coding of the data to identify and label concepts, themes, and categories
Axial Coding	Connecting categories and subcategories by establishing relationships between them
Selective Coding	Integration of categories to develop a core category and build a cohesive theoretical framework

3.5.1 Open Coding

The first step of the data analysis process, open coding, involved the line-by-line examination of the open-ended essays to identify and label concepts, themes, and categories that emerged from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). During this stage, the researcher remained open to all possible interpretations and meanings, allowing the data to "speak for themselves" (Charmaz, 2014). This inductive and data-driven approach facilitated the identification of a broad range of categories that captured the complexity of greenwashing practices in the B2B context (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

3.5.2 Axial Coding

In the axial coding stage, the identified categories and subcategories were systematically connected and organized by establishing relationships between them (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This stage involves a constant comparative analysis, which entails continuously comparing data, codes, and categories to refine and consolidate the emerging theory (Birks & Mills, 2015). Through this process, the researcher identified the underlying patterns, dynamics, and mechanisms that shape greenwashing practices and their consequences in B2B settings (Flick, 2018)

3.5.3 Selective Coding

The final stage of the data analysis process, selective coding, involved the integration of the developed categories in constructing a core category and building a cohesive and explanatory theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This stage required the researcher to decide which categories were central to the emerging theory and to systematically relate these categories to other categories and subcategories (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). The resulting theoretical framework provided a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of greenwashing in the B2B context, shedding light on its practices, motivations, and consequences. By engaging in this rigorous and context-sensitive analysis process, the researcher developed a grounded theory that captures the complexity and nuance of greenwashing practices in B2B settings.

3.6 Validity and Reliability of Qualitative Data

Data validity and reliability are crucial concepts in research methodology, particularly in ensuring the quality and accuracy of data collected for analysis. Validity refers to the extent to which a measure or instrument accurately measures what it intends to measure, while reliability refers to the consistency and stability of the measurement.

Data validity is concerned with the extent to which data accurately represent the construct or phenomenon under investigation. It ensures that the measurement instrument is capable of capturing the intended variables or concepts. Validity can be assessed through various methods, such as content validity, criterion validity, and construct validity (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the consistency and stability of the measurement over time or across different conditions. It assesses the degree to which the measurement instrument produces consistent results when repeated measurements are taken.

Reliability can be evaluated using techniques such as test-retest reliability, internal consistency reliability, and inter-rater reliability (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

Trustworthiness: Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research is essential for establishing the findings' credibility, transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study employed various strategies to enhance trustworthiness, as outlined below.

Credibility: Credibility is the extent to which the research findings accurately represent the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To enhance credibility, this study employed several strategies, including:

1. Prolonged engagement: The researcher spent an extended period collecting and analyzing data, which allowed for a deeper understanding of the research context of greenwashing practices in B2B settings (Creswell & Miller, 2000).
2. Triangulation: Although the primary data source was open-ended essays, the researcher consulted relevant literature and industry reports to corroborate and contextualize the findings (Denzin, 2012).
3. Member checking: Participants were allowed to review and comment on the preliminary findings, ensuring their experiences and perspectives were accurately represented (Birt et al., 2016).

Transferability: Transferability is the extent to which the research findings can be applied to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance transferability, the researcher provided a rich and detailed description of the research context, the participants, and the data collection and analysis processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach allows readers to assess the applicability of the findings to their specific contexts and settings (Geertz, 1973).

Dependability: Dependability concerns the consistency and stability of the research findings over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure Dependability, the researcher maintained a detailed audit trail of the research process, including data collection and analysis procedures, decision-making processes, and developing categories and themes (Shenton, 2004). This audit trail enables other researchers to assess the consistency and reliability of the findings and potentially replicate the study (Morse, 2015).

Confirmability: By employing strategies to enhance credibility, transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability, this study aimed to establish trustworthiness in its findings, providing a rigorous and contextually grounded understanding of greenwashing practices in the B2B context. Confirmability is the degree to which the research findings are

free from researcher bias and can be corroborated by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance Confirmability, the researcher engaged in reflexivity, critically examining their assumptions, beliefs, and potential biases throughout the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the researcher maintained a clear and transparent record of the data analysis process, demonstrating the logical progression from raw data to the emerging theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

Ensuring data validity and reliability is crucial in research as it enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Valid and reliable data provide a solid foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions and making accurate interpretations.

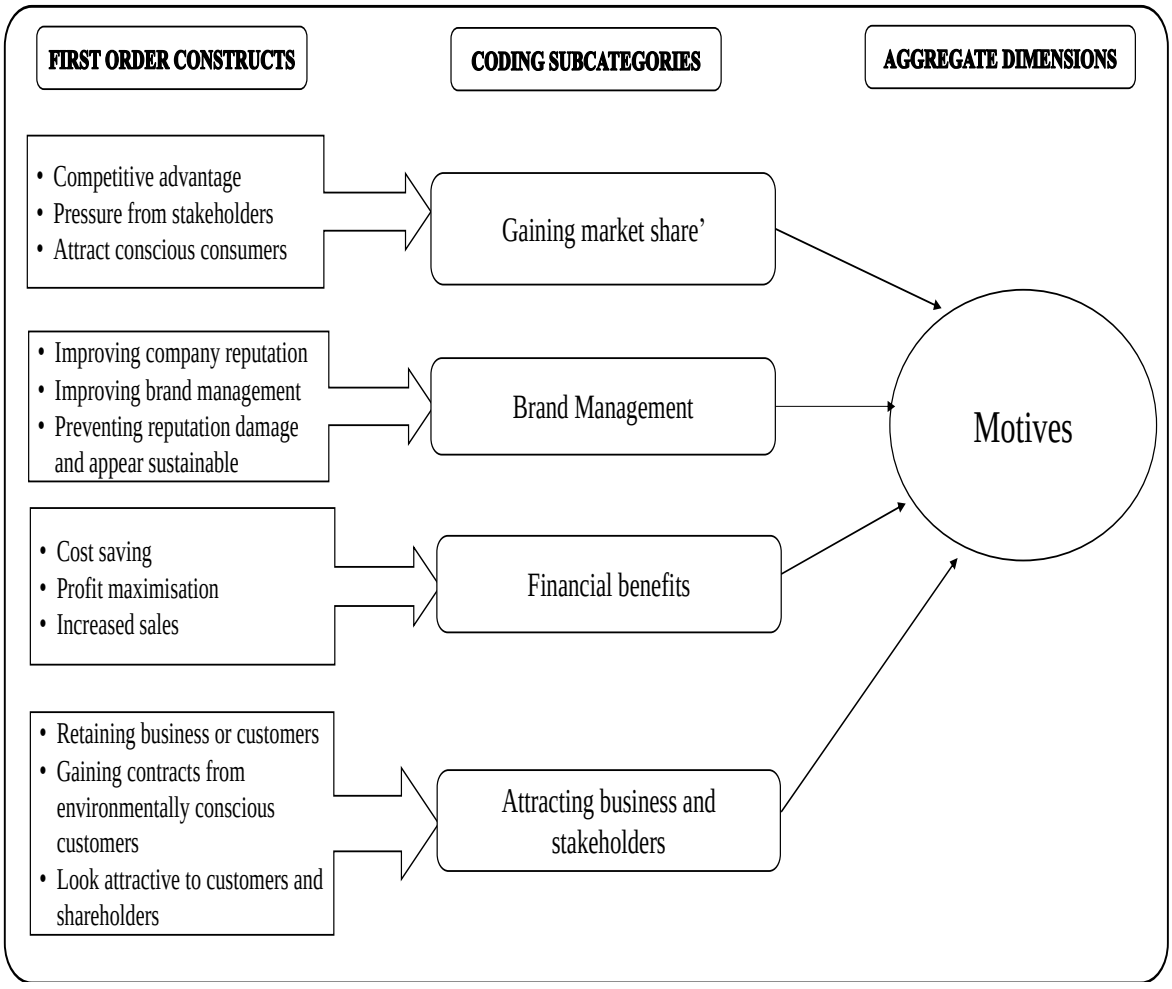
CHAPTER 04: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This chapter focuses on presenting the results and findings of a qualitative data analysis which was conducted following the principles and guidelines of the grounded theory, as explained in the previous chapter. The researcher collected 45 responses and the results analyzed have been classified into five themes which are: motives, perceptions of prevalence, risks associated with greenwashing, differences between B2B and B2C, prevention or mitigation strategies against greenwashing.

4.1 MOTIVES OF B2B GREENWASHING

The study findings revealed different motivations behind greenwashing by B2B firms. The four key motivations are "*gaining market share*", "*brand management*", *financial benefits*", and *attracting business and stakeholders*". Each of these motivations is discussed in detail below.

Figure 4.1: Results structure motives of greenwashing



4.1.1 Gaining market share

The study participants have highlighted that B2B firms have increasing pressure to communicate about the "greenness" of their products and services to gain the benefits of acquiring a considerable market share. Due to this, B2B firms may engage in greenwashing to compete with other firms that make unsubstantiated green claims. By doing so, B2B firms can potentially gain a competitive advantage by attracting and retaining new customers. This perspective emphasizes the pressure firms may feel to keep up with their competitors and the potential benefits they may derive from portraying themselves as environmentally responsible.

In addition to being seen as green, greenwashing can give a supplier a competitive advantage. B2B firms observe that consumers are likely to consider environmental claims and factors like price and service when choosing between suppliers. As a result, suppliers who do not highlight their environmental policies may not even be considered, leading them to exaggerate their claims potentially.

However, despite the potential motivations behind greenwashing and the possible benefits that B2B firms can gain from portraying themselves as environmentally friendly, it is essential to note that greenwashing undermines the credibility of genuine sustainability efforts and can lead to misinformation and consumer disillusionment.

Table 4.1: Gain market share themes

Aggregate dimensions	**First Order Concepts**	**Quotes from participants**
	Competitive advantage	*"Being seen to be green can give a supplier a competitive advantage. When we have a choice of suppliers, we are likely to consider their environmental claims in addition to price, service etc. Suppliers may not even make it to our shortlists if they are not talking about their environmental policies. As a result, they could exaggerate their claims. Greenwashing could also be seen as an easy way to get more publicity - be seen as doing good and getting people to talk about it" (P9).*

Gain Market share	Pressure from stakeholders	*"B2B firms may feel pressure to compete with other firms that make unsubstantiated green claims. By exaggerating their environmental credentials, these firms may gain a competitive advantage, attract new customers, and retain existing ones", (P15)*
	Attract conscious consumers	*"An example of competitive advantage is* when *a company may promote a product as "green" or "eco-friendly" to appeal to customers who are looking for environmentally responsible products, even if the product's environmental impact is unclear or negligible", (P37)*

4.2 Brand Management

Brand management deals with the reputation and image of a company or organization's brand. The reputation and image of the company have significant implications for the success of any business. When firms engage in greenwashing, participants note that it improves the company's reputation and brand image, prevents reputational damage, and appears sustainable.

Since the increase in preference for sustainable products, the results show that businesses work towards safeguarding their reputation to benefit from reckoned brands. Businesses give contracts or choose partners that satisfy the needs of the end-users of their products. Hence, firms put ecolabels and use vague language in advertising and marketing their products. Vague terms could be "biodegradable" or "compostable" in product packaging.

On the other hand, brand repair is costly. *"For example, in 2016, Volkswagen was caught using software to cheat on emissions tests for its diesel cars, which significantly hit the company's reputation. Since then, Volkswagen has been investing heavily in electrification and sustainable manufacturing practices to improve its image as an environmentally responsible company" (P14).*

Table 4.2: Brand management themes

Aggregate dimensions	**First Order Concepts**	**Quotes from participants**

Brand Management	Improving brand reputation	*"B2B firms may engage in greenwashing to manage their reputation or avoid negative publicity. By presenting themselves as environmentally responsible, these firms may enhance their image and improve their standing among stakeholders, including customers, employees, and investors (P15)."*
	Improving brand image	*"Companies may engage in greenwashing to improve their brand image and reputation. Companies will be able to meet the customer's demands because many companies are under pressure from their customers to adopt sustainable practices and reduce their environmental impact. Some companies engage in greenwashing to comply with environmental regulations or to avoid penalties for non-compliance" (P34)*
	Preventing reputational damage and appear sustainable	"*The potential benefits for B2B firms that engage in greenwashing practices, it is important for companies to be transparent and provide concrete evidence to support their environmental claims. Companies that engage in greenwashing risk damaging their reputation and credibility in the long term"(P1).*

4.1.3 Financial Benefits

The financial benefit of greenwashing in the B2B context is the potential for cost saving through avoiding investing in environmentally friendly practices. These could be costly such as the installation of green equipment and technologies, as it is costly to companies. Participants reviewed that greenwash companies experience significant cost savings due to avoiding proper implementation of sustainable practices. In addition to claiming to be sustainable, B2B firms become appealing and look like they are good. Hence, they can lead to winning contracts and partnerships with other firms seeking to reduce their environmental impact and are willing to pay a premium for products and services that align with their values. Winning contracts and business could be profitable for companies and motivate the shareholders to continue investing in that business.

While financial benefit serves as a motive for greenwashing in the B2B context, it is crucial for companies to be transparent and authentic in their sustainability efforts to avoid negative consequences associated with the practice (Ramanathan & Balaji, 2017)

Table 4.3: Financial benefit themes

Aggregate dimensions	First Order Concepts	Quotes from participants
Financial benefit	Cost saving	*"It will cost companies money to install things to make them more "green". "Realistically it becomes cheaper in the long run for certain green practices, we have certainly got our share of greenwashing to make it look like we are green" (P35)*
	Increased sales	*"I think maybe to capitalize on the growing demand for eco-friendly products and services. As consumers become more environmentally conscious, they increasingly seek products and services that align with their values. By claiming to be eco-friendly, firms can attract these consumers and increase sales" (P14).*
	Profit maximization	*"According to myself, what motivates these large companies to take part in greenwashing practices is the top and bottom line of their balance sheets. Everything in today's world is to do with profit. Keep the shareholders happy with continual growth and regular dividends. Shell, BP and plenty of others are perfect examples" (P36).*

4.1.4 Attracting Business and Stakeholders

Attracting environmentally conscious businesses and stakeholders is another motive for greenwashing for firms in B2B. In B2B relationships, Participants mentioned that companies desire to appear attractive to stakeholders (such as shareholders and other businesses) concerned with sustainability issues. This is done by creating the perception of being environmentally friendly and more likely to do business with environmentally conscious organizations.

Certain companies have specific sustainability requirements or standards they require to engage with the business. In this context, research has confirmed that firms are motivated to greenwash to meet those requirements and appear sustainable, be selected on bids and contracts, or be retained as sustainable suppliers in the business. The following survey participants discussed these insights:

Table 4.4: Financial benefit themes

Aggregate dimensions	First Order Concepts	Quotes from participants
Attracting business and stakeholders	Retaining business or customers	*"One motivation for my firm to engage in greenwashing practices is to paint a better image to our shareholders. By doing so, shareholders will think more positively about the company and will continue to invest in the company. This will allow the company a more budget for growth and make it look better to outsiders as well" (P32).*
	Gain contracts from environmentally conscious suppliers	*"The main motivation would be the desire to win business. If the requirement to win a bid, or even be considered for one, is to meet a particular standard (sustainability-related or otherwise), then there is pressure to do so. In areas with more resources/a more established practice, the equivalent of greenwashing is unlikely. Our CFO or CISO would not state we were compliant with a particular standard if weren't, but there is nobody with the same seniority focused on sustainability" (P12).*
	Look attractive to customers/other business	*"The main motivation for our firm to engage in greenwashing practices is that it looks good to potential customers and clients. It is usually not enough to make somebody retain us or not, but it is just a nice thing to add on to make people feel good about using our company. The motivation for our firm is more for image and not as much for profits"* (P13).

Overall, there are many motives for greenwashing for companies in the B2B context. The above highlighted are the ones that most participants mentioned. However, companies need to be transparent and authentic in their sustainability efforts to avoid damaging their reputation and losing the trust of stakeholders. A study by Jones et al. (2016) found that consumers are becoming increasingly sceptical of green marketing claims and are more likely

to support companies that demonstrate a genuine commitment to sustainability through actions rather than words.

4.2 RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH GREENWASHING BY COMPANIES IN B2B

Risk is referred to as the possibility of harm or damage that might result from an action or decision (O'Hagan & Buck, 2019). It can arise from various sources, such as greenwashing in this context. In business operations, the risk is often associated with uncertainty and potential adverse outcomes. The researcher found three significant risks of greenwashing in B2B: Trust and reputational damage, Loss of collaboration and partnerships and legal consequences.

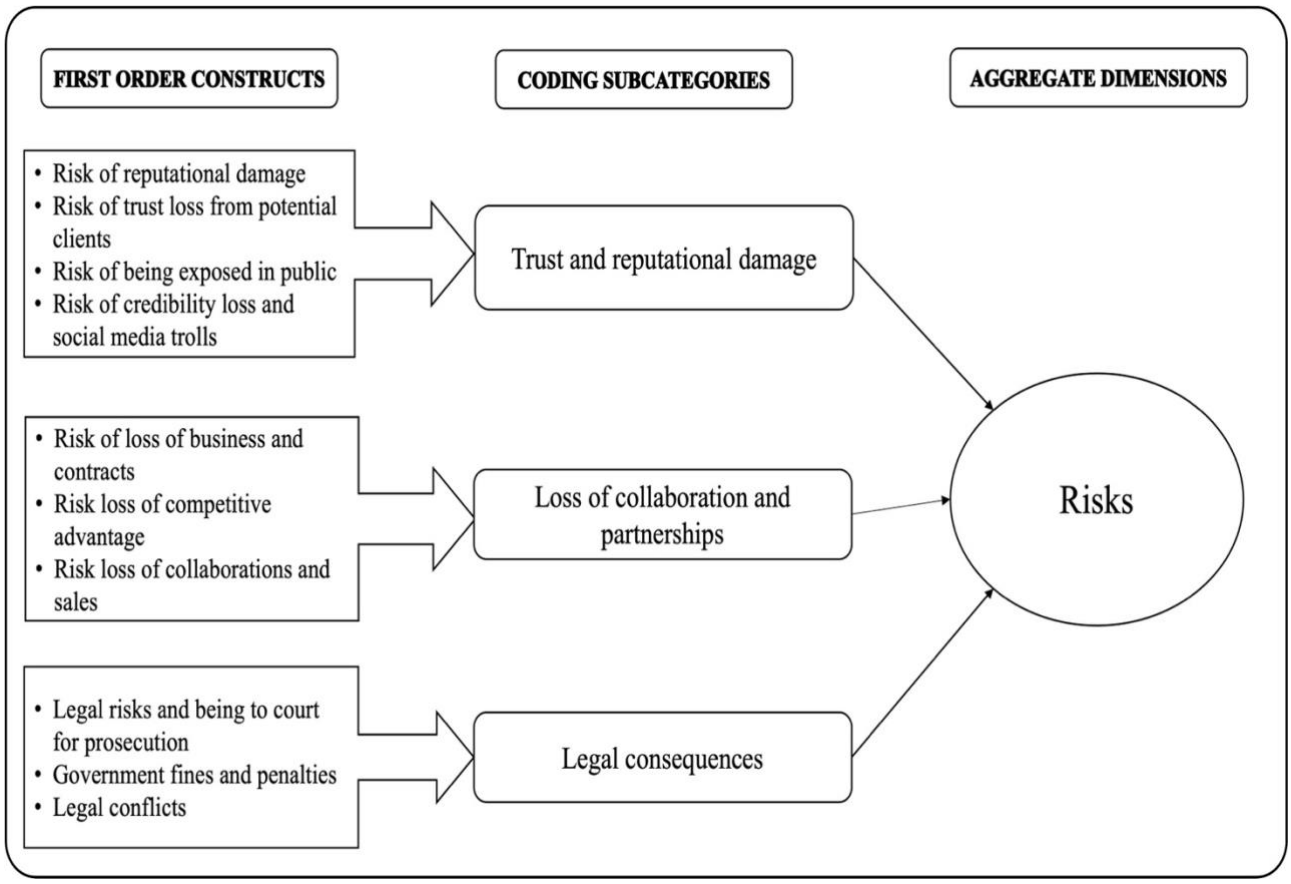


Fig 4.2 Risks associated with greenwashing by companies in B2B

4.2.1 Trust and Reputational Risk

Trust and reputational damage are leading risks associated with greenwashing for companies in the B2B context. The risk of trust and reputational damage is a significant consequence of engaging in greenwashing practices. Participants agree to suggest that due to the loss of trust and reputation, the companies might lose sales, market share and brand value. In addition, it is associated with a loss of credibility and goodwill. An example of Beyond Petroleum (BP) was criticized for greenwashing, and lack of proper environmental

safeguards, thus leading to its damaged reputation in 2010. This example perfectly illustrates the negative consequences associated with the risk of loss of trust and reputation due to greenwashing.

Table 4.5: Risk Trust and reputational damage themes

Aggregate dimensions	First Order Concepts	Quotes from participants
Trust and reputational damage	Risk of reputational damage	*"Reputational Risks: B2B firms that practice greenwashing and are caught can face serious reputational damage. Companies that prioritize profits over the environment can be perceived as dishonest and may lose customers who prefer environmentally friendly products. This negative perception can lead to market share, brand value, and goodwill loss. For example, BP suffered significant reputational damage after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, which was caused by a lack of proper environmental safeguards" (P7).*
	Risk of being exposed	*"The risks of greenwashing in a B2B context include loss of credibility, legal action, damage to brand reputation, and loss of customers. For example, British Airways was fined for greenwashing claims about reducing carbon emissions, which were deemed misleading. BP's "Beyond Petroleum" campaign was criticized as greenwashing, which damaged the company's reputation during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010. These examples show how greenwashing can result in negative consequences for B2B firms", (P20).*
	Risk of credibility loss and social media trolls	*"If a firm makes false or misleading sustainability claims, it damages its reputation and erodes customer trust. One example is if a construction firm claims to use sustainable building practices but actually uses harmful materials, there will likely backlash from customers and stakeholders", (P37).*

4.2.2 Risk of loss of collaboration and partnership

The responses of participants suggest that the relationship between greenwashing and the risk of loss of collaboration and contracts is that through the practice, companies

undermine their credibility and trust, potentially leading to the loss of collaborative relationships and partnerships.

In B2B relationships where companies need to secure contracts and business for their existence, once trust and reputation is damaged, there is an additional risk of losing contracts and not being considered for projects in future. That is remarkably regarded as a loss of business. That has further potential to lead to loss of sales and customer loyalty. It is stated that once B2B partners discover that the company has engaged in greenwashing, it erodes trust and credibility with stakeholders, such as investors and customers concerned with environmental sustainability.

B2B collaborations and partnerships are often built on trust and shared values. When one party is found and exposed to greenwashing, the results show that B2B firms lose respect, and other companies will not want to be associated with it. Now, due to social media use, it will potentially lead to social media trolls. This creates a risk of damaging collaborative relationships and partnerships, and this might not be easy to gain back.

Table 4.6: Risk of loss of collaboration and partnership themes

Aggregate dimensions	**First Order Concepts**	**Quotes from participants**
Risk loss of collaboration and partnerships	Risk loss of contracts	*"The risks are you get caught out and ruin your business reputation, you could lose contracts and also not be considered for contracts and projects in the future", (P10)*
	Risk loss of collaborations	*"Biggest risk is being exposed and losing businesses. if this happens the B2B loses respect and potentially a lot of business as other companies will not want to be associated with them. and nowadays, once this happens, it gets around fast because of social media. once a company loses that trust, it can be very difficult to regain it, especially if it involves a subject that people find important, like the environment " (P41).*
	Risk loss of sales	*"By making false or exaggerated claims about their environmental credentials, B2B firms can undermine their credibility and damage their reputation, leading to decreased sales and customer loyalty. Moreover, such practices can result in legal disputes, penalties, and fines, especially if they violate advertising regulations or environmental laws. Greenwashing*

		can also erode trust and credibility with stakeholders, including customers, investors, suppliers, and employees, who may question the firm's commitment to sustainability" (P29).

4.2.3 Legal Risk/ Consequences

Legal risks or consequences are the exposure of organizations to legal liabilities and adverse outcomes due to greenwashing, as in this context. They arise from non-compliance or failure to meet set standards on environmental legal requirements, as highlighted by the noted participant's quotes presented below. The main legal risks highlighted are legal conflicts, fines from government or regulatory bodies and lawsuits. Legal risks will further lead to higher running costs for companies.

There are business environmental regulatory bodies highlighted to be inexistent, such as "*The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the National Advertising Division (NAD)".* These can sue, process lawsuits, fines, or charge penalties for misrepresenting environmental claims. The fines will be charged to a firm after being exposed to greenwashing. Other than the costs, there is a double risk of being red flagged which risks further reputational damage and loss of sales due to scepticism of the use of a company's products. FTC and British Airways are some of the highlighted companies fined for greenwashing in 2019 and 2010, respectively.

Table 4.7: Legal risks themes

Aggregate dimensions	**First Order Concepts**	**Quotes from participants**
Legal consequences	Legal risks and being taken to court for prosecution	*"B2B firms that make false or misleading environmental claims on their products or services may face legal action by regulatory bodies or customers. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the National Advertising Division (NAD) are examples of regulatory bodies that monitor businesses' environmental marketing claims. For instance, in 2019, the FTC sued Chemence, a manufacturer of adhesive products, for falsely claiming its materials were biodegradable",(P6)*
		"The risks of greenwashing in a B2B context include loss of credibility, legal action, damage to brand reputation, and loss of customers. For example, British Airways was fined for

	Government fines and penalties	*greenwashing claims about reducing carbon emissions, which were deemed misleading. BP's "Beyond Petroleum" campaign was criticized as greenwashing, which damaged the company's reputation during the Deepwater orizon oil spill in 2010. These examples show how greenwashing can result in negative consequences for B2B firms", (P20)*
	Legal conflicts	*"Potentially legal conflicts might get invoked if a consumer counters that a service they licensed used more energy to run than it was promised - as such the buying company experienced greater running costs AND failed the green promises," (P19)*

4.3 PERCEPTION OF GREENWASHING PREVALENCE IN B2B

The perception of the prevalence of greenwashing in B2B varies among different stakeholders and industries. This study provides valuable insights into the perceptions. Participants highlighted the existence of greenwashing in both B2B and B2C, though most of the responses indicated more prevalent in B2C. B2C was also argued hard to differentiate greenwashing claims and hence might exist without being observed in a long time. The study highlighted the significant presence of greenwashing in B2B and raised concerns about the trust and credibility of environmental claims made by these firms. These practices highlighted included exaggerating environmental benefits, misrepresenting product attributes, or making unsubstantiated claims about sustainability efforts.

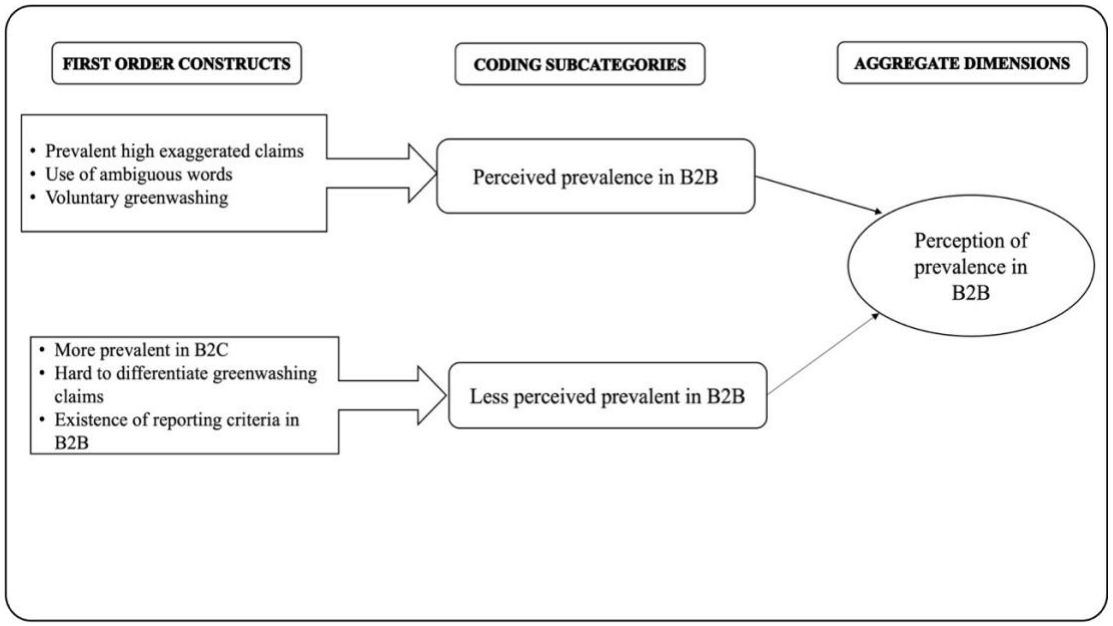


Fig 4.3: Shared Perceptions of Prevalence on Greenwashing in B2B

Table 4.8: Perception of prevalence in B2B

Aggregate dimensions	First Order Concepts	Quotes from participants
Perception of prevalence in B2B	Perception of prevalence in B2B	*"Not only do I believe it is widely prevalent, but almost unanimously done by most companies. It is a level of dishonesty that has real-world consequences for our health and the environment "(P37).* *"This is absolutely prevalent. Businesses will do ANYTHING to make money, so bending the truth about the products they are trying to sell to other businesses is no issue at all to them. They'll sell paper towels to a hotel and tell them the product is made from only recyclable material, just to secure the purchase"(P43)*
	Less perceived prevalence in B2B	*"Wide variety of greenwashing in the B2B sector, but it is somewhat less prevalent than in the B2C sector. For instance, sometimes suppliers will include aspects such as "recyclable" on products that are very problematic for my sector, for example, for items like coffee cups and stationery. These are often provided to the customer, and we have no control over that recycling process which makes it impossible to prove in our own recycling and sustainability process. However, on the contrary, in the B2B sector, we can often require customers to be more clear about environmental credentials. For example, when purchasing fuel, we can require detailed information about biomass composites which inform our sustainability reporting" (P40)*

4.4 DIFFERENCE OF B2B AND B2C

75% of the participants highlight that B2B and B2C contexts exhibit similarities. However, substantial differences exist in terms of the target audience, marketing channels (which could be communication strategies), Complexity in the supply chain and the nature of businesses. Below is a chat table with detailed quotes from some of the participants that explained a bit further:

Table 4.9: Main differences between B2B and B2C themes

Aggregate dimensions	First Order Concepts	Quotes from participants
Differences in B2B and B2C	Marketing channels	*"B2B and B2C firms may use different marketing channels to promote their products or services, which can affect the greenwashing practices they engage in. B2B firms may rely more on industry-specific trade shows, conferences, and publications to reach their target audience. In contrast, B2C firms may use social media, online advertising, and product packaging to appeal to individual consumers" (P15).*
	Complexity in the supply chain	*" B2B firms typically have more complex supply chains than B2C firms, which can make it more difficult to trace the environmental impact of their products or services. This can create more opportunities for greenwashing, as B2B firms may make claims about their environmental impact that are difficult to verify or may shift responsibility for environmental impact onto other parties in their supply chain" (P15).*
	Distinct target audience	*"Target audience: B2B and B2C firms have different target audiences, which can influence the types of greenwashing practices they engage in. B2B firms typically sell products or services to other businesses, while B2C firms sell directly to individual consumers. This means that B2B firms may focus more on meeting the sustainability standards and requirements of their corporate customers, while B2C firms may prioritize appealing to individual consumers' values and preferences" (P16).*
	Nature of business	*"B2C firms often use emotional appeals and green imagery, while B2B firms rely more on data to support environmental claims. B2B firms focus on supply chain and operations, while B2C firms focus on product impact. Examples include Volkswagen's emissions scandal and ExxonMobil's funding of climate denial research" (P20)*

4.4.1 Marketing Channels

Business marketing channels serve as the means through which companies communicate their sustainability claims, promote products or services, and interact with their target audience. However, the specific marketing channels used for greenwashing may differ between B2B and B2C contexts. B2B greenwashing was highlighted to be focused on publications, industry events and conferences, whereas B2C greenwashing is in traditional advertising channels such as tv, radio etc., packaging and labelling to appeal to customers and social media influencer marketing. The differences in these channels to achieve a company's goal to attract customers pose a firm to employ different specific strategies that can be necessary and relevant for greenwashing.

However, it is essential to note that these marketing channels can be used for genuine sustainability communication and greenwashing practices.

4.4.2 Complexity in supply chain

B2B has been highlighted to have complex supply chains as compared to B2C. These may be more challenging to manage or trace the environmental impact of their products or services. Hence B2B can make environmental claims that are difficult to verify or may easily shift responsibility to other parties in the supply chain.

However, both B2B and B2C face similar risks associated with greenwashing. These could be reputational damage, trust loss and legal liabilities. The results point out that no firm is safe with greenwashing and that firms are better off practising genuine sustainability to safeguard their future engagements with key stakeholders that have a vested interest in the business.

4.4.3 Distinct target audience

B2B greenwashing targets other businesses, such as suppliers and corporate clients. The focus is to appeal to their audience; thus, the greenwashing will be related to their operations and supply chain. The focus is on establishing and maintaining business relationships, meeting procumbent criteria, or aligning sustainability expectations of B2B partners (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). B2C greenwashing is related directly to the company's products. That is targeting individual consumers or end users of products. Differences in the target audience can influence the greenwashing practice the company can engage in.

4.5 PREVENTION OR MITIGATING STRATEGIES

In general, understanding and managing risk is an essential part of decision-making in business and life. By identifying potential risks and taking steps to mitigate them, individuals and organizations can reduce the likelihood of adverse outcomes and improve their chances of success. The researcher found four major prevention strategies: setting regulatory standards, using credible environmental certification, avoiding ambiguous terms and voluntary measures. Below is a summary of the suggested strategies by respondents who participated in the survey.

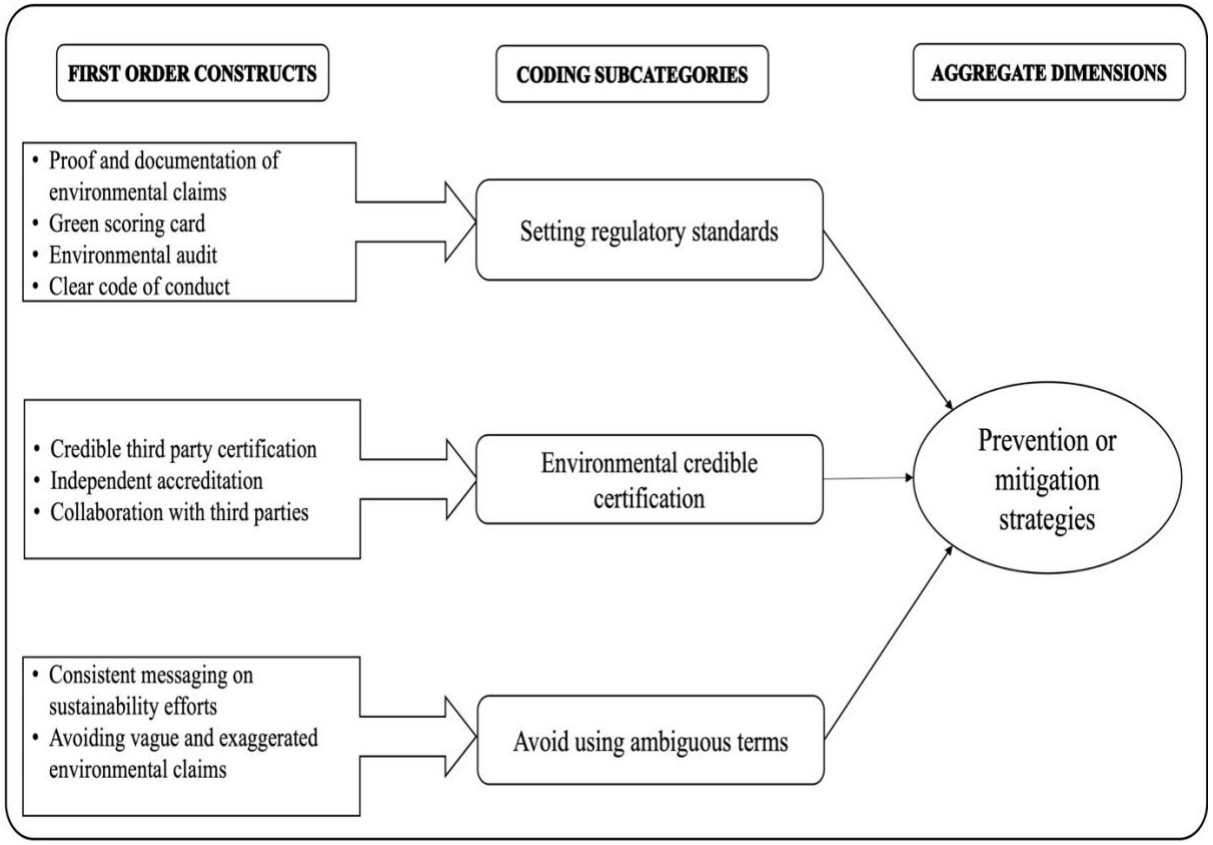


Fig 4.4 Prevention strategies

4.3.1 Setting Regulatory Standards

Participants suggest that setting regulatory standards is crucial to preventing greenwashing in the B2B context. These can be in the form of clear guidelines and requirements for companies to ensure that their environmental claims are accurate, transparent, and substantiated. The results hugely suggest mandatory sustainability reporting, independent verification of claims as a mitigation strategy to the risk of greenwashing and promoting honest and responsible environmental practices. In addition, the participants' further point out the EU green deal and Eco label program as practical regulatory standards.

An example of Adidas having auditors check on the accuracy of claims is further suggested as a good example of a regulatory measure to check on a company's claims to see whether they are substantiated enough with evidence and documented proof. These standards are argued to help firms to comply with standard legal requirements and avoid potential misrepresentation that has further potential to ruin the business reputation and integrity. Enforcing audits as regulatory standards will force companies to ensure their claims are based on valid and reliable data and protect customers and businesses from misrepresented claims.

Table 4.10: setting regulatory standards themes

Aggregate dimensions	First Order Concepts	Quotes from participants
Setting regulatory standards	**Clear code of conduct**	*"Regulatory measures such as mandatory sustainability reporting, independent verification of claims, and penalties for false claims are necessary to combat greenwashing in a B2B context. Examples of effective regulations include the EU's Green Deal with its Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation and Ecolabel program, as well as the UK's Green Claims Code with its guidance for accurate and transparent environmental claims" (P20).*
	Environmental audits	*"Regulatory measures are necessary to combat greenwashing in a B2B context. Without any oversight, the company would make any claim they want. Adidas has an outside auditor to check for accuracy of claims" (P34).*
	Green scoring card	*" Specifically, a scoring card would have a number attached to businesses that submit themselves to regular inspections by an independent, taxpayer-funded body", (P3)* *"There are regulatory measures that can help such as Mandatory Disclosure Requirements, Independent Auditing and. These types of regulatory measurements can help firms to comply with standard and legal requirements. It can also avoid any potential misrepresentation and help firm to protect their reputation and their business integrity"(P42).*

4.3.2 Environmental credible certification

As highlighted above, Environmental certifications are independent third-party assessments that verify and validate a company's environmental claims, practices, and performance. By obtaining and displaying credible certifications, companies can demonstrate their commitment to genuine environmental stewardship, build trust with B2B partners, and differentiate themselves from greenwashing competitors.

However, due to the strictness to acquire credible third-party certifications and obtaining independent accreditations, tick marks could instil confidence that claims are genuine and that there is no greenwashing in a firm's environmental claims. Hence, it strengthens trust relationships as mentioned above (on risks) and improves the likelihood of obtaining partnerships and business from conscious stakeholders.

Table 4.11: Environmental credible certification themes

Aggregate dimensions	First Order Concepts	Quotes from participants
Environmental credible certifications	**Credible third-party certifications**	*"Regulations could require the use of standardized green labels or certifications for products that adhere to strict environmental standards. These standards could be established based on proven and widely recognized environmental criteria. For example, the EU Ecolabel is awarded to products which meet strict environmental and performance criteria" (P6).*
	Independent accreditation	*"B2B firms meeting these standards could be given a green tick mark or similar form of accreditation, or maybe bronze, silver, gold rating etc. This would give everyone confidence that claims are genuine and that greenwashing is not taking place" (P9)*

4.3.3 Avoid the use of ambiguous terms

Ambiguous terms are jargons that might be difficult to understand for ordinary consumers, whereas, on the other hand, they might not be substantiable, meaning they are challenging to back up by evidence of environmental claims. Ambiguous terms can be vague,

misleading, or open to interpretation, allowing companies to create an impression of environmental responsibility without providing clear and specific information.

By avoiding ambiguous terms and instead using precise and well-defined language, companies can enhance transparency, reduce the risk of greenwashing, and foster genuine environmental practices. Thus, as highlighted in Fig 4.3, consistent messaging on sustainability efforts, specificity in environmental claims (avoiding vague and exaggerated environmental claims) and compliance with industry standards are suggested to enhance communication and thus influence stakeholders to make well-informed decisions and foster trustworthy business engagements with valued environmental actions.

Table 4.12: Avoid use of ambiguous terms themes

Aggregate dimensions	**First Order Concepts**	**Quotes from participants**
Avoiding using ambiguous terms	Consistent messaging on sustainability efforts	*Greenwashing practices in the B2B context are prevalent, and companies must be transparent and provide concrete evidence to support their environmental claims. Businesses must conduct thorough research and due diligence when making sustainability claims and ensure that their marketing messages accurately reflect their environmental impact(P20).*
	Avoid vague and exaggerated claims	*There needs to be effective and unambiguous regulations to ensure businesses do not attempt to circumnavigate regs using jargon. Legalese or weasel words. For example if a business states that the source only sustainable materials they should be made to publish there supply chain to demonstrate that is the case "(P38).*

4.3.4 Voluntary measures

Voluntary measures refer to self-regulation and proactive initiatives companies in B2B take to address environmental concerns and promote transparency in their sustainability actions. It has been suggested as one of the measures that companies in B2B can use to mitigate against greenwashing. Self-regulation by companies on matters related to sustainability reporting has been highlighted as it could be effective in reducing

greenwashing in B2B. The participants highlighted that businesses cannot easily get away with greenwashing in the long run. Thus, emphasis on self-regulation.

This could be companies voluntarily adopting industry-specific environment standards, frameworks that are useful and respected in their industry. In addition. Some participants further assume that not even governments care enough to stop greenwashing practices. Thus, the need for companies to be upfront on environmental issues. Some stakeholders' experts in B2B operations who participated in the survey had this to say:

"I do not think there needs to be strict regulatory measures against B2B greenwashing. I feel that it will almost regulate itself in most cases. A business can not get away for long greenwashing a bunch of other companies without being impacted " (P16).

"I do not think government cares enough either to completely stop it, Companies just need to be honest "(P43)

voluntary standards and certifications can help promote sustainability,(P7)

CHAPTER 05: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter summarises the whole research thesis by addressing the research objective and questions presented in the first chapter. Theoretical and practical implications are then presented, and finally stating and addressing the limitations that lead to further research gaps and proposals

5.1 Discussion

This thesis studied greenwashing in the context of B2B. The aim was to investigate the phenomenon of misleading environmental claims businesses make in their B2B relationships. It explored the motivations, strategies, and consequences of greenwashing practices in B2B transactions. The research utilizes theoretical frameworks, such as stakeholder theory, to understand the dynamics and implications of greenwashing in stakeholder relationships. Data were collected through open-ended essay surveys, allowing in-depth exploration of stakeholder perspectives and experiences. The grounded theory approach is employed to analyze the qualitative data and generate theoretical frameworks directly derived from the data. The study provides theoretical contributions by enhancing our understanding of stakeholder dynamics, institutional influences, information asymmetry, trust-building, and ethical considerations in the context of greenwashing.

The research was guided by three research questions (RQs). RQ1 seeks to identify the prevalence of greenwashing in B2B and how it differs from B2C. Given that, the thesis explores the prevalence of greenwashing in the B2B context. It highlights the extent of greenwashing practices within B2B engagements and examines the perception of greenwashing prevalence among different stakeholders. It acknowledges the existence of greenwashing in both contexts, though the dynamics of operations differ due to the differences in supply chain structural complexities in B2B. Similar to the discussed literature, several studies acknowledge the existence of greenwashing in both B2B and B2C settings. For example, Delmas and Burbano (2011) found that approximately 40% of the B2B firms analyzed engaged in greenwashing practices. This indicates a considerable prevalence of greenwashing in B2B engagements. Concerning this, the findings revealed mixed views of perception of prevalence in both B2B and B2C.

Similarly, studies examining greenwashing in B2C have highlighted widespread deceptive environmental claims in the marketplace (TerraChoice, 2010). However, it is crucial to recognize that the dynamics of greenwashing operations can differ between B2B and B2C contexts due to the differences in supply chain structural complexities. The complexities of

B2B engagements, involving multiple stakeholders, longer value chains, and intricate procurement processes, influence the perception of the greenwashing prevalence.

RQ2 seeks to understand the motives and risks associated with greenwashing in B2B. This thesis uncovered the reasons behind firms' decision to present misleading environmental claims. It examined their motivations, such as (a) reputation management, (b) competitive advantage, (c) financial benefits, and (d) shareholder retention. By understanding these motives and expectations, the study contributes to our knowledge of the factors influencing greenwashing behaviour in the B2B context. Moreover, the research investigates the risks associated with greenwashing in B2B, mainly focusing on trust and reputational damage, loss of collaboration and partnerships, and potential legal consequences. The findings shed light on the potentially detrimental effects of greenwashing practices on firms' long-term relationships, market positioning, and legal liabilities. Delma & Burbano (2011); Parguel et al. (2011) also noted similar motivating factors for firms to do greenwashing. They further discussed that firms seek to rebuild trust and credibility, which can positively influence their relationships with key stakeholders. Overall, the academic literature shows that firms in a B2B context are driven by various factors when greenwashing. These factors are the same as highlighted by this thesis's results. Understanding these motivations is essential to firms in developing effective strategies to address greenwashing and promote genuine sustainability.

Lastly, the research provides valuable insights into effective mitigation strategies to combat greenwashing in B2B, which answers (RQ3). It examines the role of regulatory standards, environmentally credible certifications, voluntary measures, and avoiding ambiguous terms in mitigating greenwashing practices. The proposed strategies enhance transparency, credibility, and accountability in B2B sustainability communications. Like the literature, avoiding ambiguous terms is essential in mitigating greenwashing practices. Clear specific language is important in environmental communication and reporting to avoid misleading interpretations (Parguel et al., 2011). Thus, firms should provide accurate and meaningful information about their sustainability initiatives, avoiding vague terms that can easily be misinterpreted and manipulated.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The significant theoretical contribution of this study is the contribution to the literature on greenwashing in B2B, which helps understand the concept and practice of greenwashing by the B2B sector. This could be useful to businesses and other relevant stakeholders in decision-making and ensuring transparency and genuine sustainability in their business engagements. To the researcher's knowledge, this study is one of the first to explore

this topic, specifically in B2B. Therefore, the research provides valuable insights into the motives, risks, and implications of greenwashing in B2B. The findings reveal the importance of understanding this concept and developing concrete measures to promote genuine sustainability.

The literature discussed in this research was just a short distance from the findings. Using the stakeholder theory and its relationship with the concept of greenwashing in business provides insights into the stakeholders involved in B2B transactions and their expectations regarding sustainability practices and greenwashing. The research shows the power dynamics, interests, and influence of various stakeholders such as suppliers, buyers, industry associations, and regulatory bodies. Thus, contributing to further understanding of how these stakeholders perceive greenwashing, its impact on their decision-making processes, and the potential consequences for B2B relationships (Freeman, 1984).

In addition, the study revealed information asymmetry between buyers and sellers. Sellers often abuse this information gap to be ahead of the buyer to attract them more to their business and contribute to its business and product growth. This study revealed how greenwashing practice exploits information gaps and asymmetry to present a false impression of environmental responsibility. On top of that, it highlights the challenges of evaluating and verifying sustainability claims in B2B transactions, thus emphasizing the importance of information sharing, transparency, and trust in mitigating greenwashing practices (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). B2B context offers into the role of trust in buyer and seller relationships. This research also revealed how greenwashing erodes trust and hinders relationship-building between companies. Thus, understanding the consequences of greenwashing on trust can inform strategies to build and maintain trust in B2B engagements emphasizing the importance of accountability and shared sustainability values (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)

The qualitative data were collected using a survey. Furthermore, the open-ended essay survey allows for a rich and detailed exploration of participants' perspectives, experiences, and attitudes towards greenwashing in the B2B context. It provides valuable insights into the nuances, complexities, and underlying motivations of greenwashing practices in B2B relationships. It also allowed participants to express their views freely and provide in-depth explanations, Thus enabling a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). On the other hand, using grounded theory as a data analysis methodology provided theoretical frameworks and explanations derived from the data itself (Charmza, 2006). This was useful in uncovering the relationship and some processes related to

greenwashing in B2B interactions by contributing to developing a grounded understanding of the phenomenon.

By further investigating greenwashing in B2B, researchers can enhance and broaden the understanding of stakeholder dynamics, institutional influences, trust building and ethical considerations. These theoretical contributions provide valuable insights for academia and practitioners in addressing greenwashing and promoting genuine sustainability practices in B2B relationships.

5.3 Practical Implications

The research study provides a deeper understanding of greenwashing practices by firms in B2B. It reveals many drivers/motives of firms engaging in this practice. The key to note is the main motives for gaining market share, brand management, financial benefit, and attracting new stakeholders. However, these motives have challenges or risks, such as those revealed by this study, risk of trust and reputational damage, risk of loss of collaboration and partnership, and legal consequences. An in-depth understanding of these provides several practical implications that can guide businesses, policymakers, and stakeholders in addressing and mitigating greenwashing practices.

Firstly, the study revealed the importance of trust and transparency relationships in B2B. It suggested that B2B contracts and businesses are won chiefly based on trust. Hence, it is hard to regain once lost due to misrepresenting environmental claims or engaging in deceptive practices, such as greenwashing. The results further suggest that the firm might lose business and credibility. B2B firms need to provide transparent and verifiable information regarding their sustainability practices, certifications, and performance matrices. This can help build trust, facilitate informed decision making and enable B2B partners to make sustainable choices based on reliable information.

In addition, the research sheds light on the role of trust and relationship building in B2B transactions. Companies should prioritize long-term relationships based on shared sustainability values, open communication, and collaboration. By fostering solid supplier-buyer relationships, businesses can work together to address greenwashing, promote genuine sustainability, and drive positive environmental outcomes.

The study also suggested the importance of the due diligence and verification process of B2B sustainability transactions. It highlights the need for buyers to evaluate and verify sustainability claims made by suppliers critically. This can be done by implementing robust verification mechanisms, such as independent audits, third-party certifications, and supply

chain traceability. Moreover, these can help ensure the accuracy and reliability of sustainability claims and mitigate the risk of greenwashing.

Finally, regulatory and policy standards have been highlighted for their need to be enforced. The government and responsible regulatory bodies can only enforce these. The insights, challenges and gaps shared in this research on current regulatory frameworks show the need to develop stricter standards for environmental claims, labelling requirements and disclosure obligations by firms. Such regulations can deter greenwashing practices, protect consumers, and promote responsible business practices. This research informs policymakers and regulatory bodies in developing and implementing effective regulations and policies.

By considering these practical implications, the researcher believes businesses can adopt responsible and transparent sustainability practices, buyers can make informed purchasing decisions, policymakers can develop effective regulations, and stakeholders can actively combat greenwashing in the B2B context. These actions can foster genuine sustainability, promote responsible business practices, and achieve positive environmental outcomes.

5.4 Study Limitations and Future Directions

Like every research with limitations, this study thesis has its limitations. This qualitative research study was conducted online to only participants who could access the survey. Generally, qualitative research studies often have smaller sample sizes due to the in-depth nature of data collection and analysis. Therefore, likewise, the findings of this study may be representative of only some of the B2B population, limiting the generalizability of the study (Creswell, 2014). The findings may only provide insights into specific cases or contexts, and caution must be exercised when extrapolating the results to a broader B2B setting. Secondly, the study was based on an open-ended survey on participants' willingness and ability to provide detailed responses. This poses the possibility of response bias, where participants may selectively respond or provide socially desirable answers, particularly when discussing sensitive topics like greenwashing (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). This bias could influence the richness and accuracy of the data collected, potentially impacting the study's validity. According to the survey data, in some responses, some participants would show reservations to comment directly on whether their firms do greenwash. Hence the possibility of bias.

In addition, the method of data analysis, grounded theory, involves iterative coding, categorization, and interpretation of data to develop theoretical insights. The process of interpretation is argued to be subjective and influenced by the researcher's perspectives,

assumptions, and prior knowledge (Charmaz, 2006). This subjectivity introduces a potential for researcher bias, potentially impacting the objectivity and reliability of the study's findings. Furthermore, this qualitative study solely relying on open-ended surveys lacks quantitative data, such as specific numerical numbers or statistical analysis. This limitation restricts quantifying greenwashing practices' prevalence, extent, or impact in the B2B context. Quantitative data can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Lastly, time and resources constrain. This study, particularly the use of grounded theory analysis, was time-consuming. The researcher had to carefully manage time to ensure the depth and rigour of the analysis. The iterative nature of data analysis required significant effort and expertise to code and categorize the data, potentially limiting the scope of the study.

This study was conducted broadly; further research on the topic could contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and help develop more effective strategies to mitigate greenwashing practices. However, as mentioned earlier, the limitations provide grounds for further studies. Investigating variations in the types of greenwashing strategies used, their motivations, and the effectiveness of mitigation measures can help identify sector-specific challenges and develop targeted solutions to combat greenwashing in B2B relationships. Thus, the same topic could be explored to compare greenwashing practices across different industries or sectors within the B2B context.

The results revealed that there are both positive and negative benefits associated with greenwashing in B2B. Hence firms and stakeholders should be transparent and genuine in their sustainability practices to promote genuine sustainability for the benefit of the environment and stakeholders that are more environmentally conscious. Future research could focus on a longitudinal study to examine the prevalence, trends, and changes in greenwashing practices in B2B relationships over time. This could provide insights into the evolution of greenwashing strategies, the effectiveness of regulatory measures and the impact of sustainability initiatives on reducing greenwashing in B2B.

The stakeholder theory discussed in this study emphasizes the importance of stakeholders in business. In addition, the results revealed how stakeholder relations can affect business success in terms of winning contracts and gaining business and market share. Thus, further research could also focus on supplier-buyer relationships. That is investigating the dynamics of greenwashing within supplier-buyer relationships in B2B contexts. For example, examine how power dynamics, contractual arrangements, and information asymmetry

influence greenwashing practices. This research can shed light on the role of transparency, trust, and collaboration in preventing greenwashing and promoting sustainable practices in supplier-buyer relationships.

Finally, one proposal is the study which focuses on regulatory frameworks and policy interventions. That is, evaluate the effectiveness of existing regulatory frameworks and policy interventions in addressing greenwashing in B2B relationships. Assess the gaps, challenges, and potential improvements in regulations related to environmental claims, labelling standards, and disclosure requirements. This research can inform policymakers, industry associations, and regulatory bodies in developing robust frameworks to deter and penalize greenwashing practices. By exploring these research avenues, scholars can contribute to advancing knowledge on greenwashing in B2B contexts and provide practical insights for businesses, policymakers, and stakeholders to develop effective strategies to combat greenwashing and promote genuine sustainability practices.

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APPENDIX

Data responses and analysis link:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/72f5b1tfe1fbjga1qgcz8/B2B_Greenwashing_-Responses.xlsx?dl=0&rlkey=v42zgpyx595pl3kkxayu3yels

DISCUSSION PAPER:

UNIVERSITETET I AGDER

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LAW

MASTER THESIS IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Discussion Paper: International

BY

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Submitted: June 1, 2023

Master thesis topic: Understanding greenwashing in the Business-to-Business context

Keywords: International, Greenwashing, Business to Business (B2B)

INTRODUCTION

This discussion paper aims to discuss the concept of international concerning the researcher's study thesis titled Greenwashing in a B2B context. Greenwashing is defined as a deceptive practice in which companies make false or misleading claims about the environmental benefits of their products or services, presenting themselves as more environmentally friendly than they genuinely are (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Garriga & Mele, 2013; Newell, 2019). Understanding its origins and how it has travelled is vital in global business discussions and developments. Thus, the focus of this paper:

The researcher will utilize the knowledge and understanding of the "travelling theory" to understand this discussion. This process is by which ideas, theories and intellectual frameworks are transmitted and adopted across different contexts, cultures, and disciplines. It suggests that theories and concepts developed in one social or cultural context can be applied and adapted in another, often influencing academic and intellectual debates beyond the original context (Said E.W, 1978). The origins of greenwashing can be traced back to the increasing environmental consciousness and the emergence of the environmental movement in the late 20th century. As public awareness and concern for environmental issues grew, businesses began to recognize the potential benefits of presenting themselves as environmentally friendly. However, greenwashing is rooted in the tension between the desire for profit and the need for sustainability.

SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

Greenwashing, a deceitful practice involving falsified environmental declarations by businesses, was the focus of the study. The master thesis focused on providing an in-depth analysis of greenwashing tactics within B2B interactions. The researcher utilized stakeholder theory for the literature review, capitalizing on a web-based, open-ended questionnaire to collect substantive qualitative data from a diverse group of B2B stakeholders. The study employed grounded theory as the cornerstone of its data examination, thus enabling the creation of theoretical structures directly rooted in the data.

The research sought to understand the motives, risks, prevalence and mitigation strategies of greenwashing within B2B relations. It delves into the fundamental motivations and

expectations that compel companies to partake in greenwashing and scrutinizes the problems they encounter. The study spotlighted major hurdles pertaining to transparency, trustworthiness, information disparity, and stakeholder anticipations within the B2B realm.

Upon evaluating the survey responses, the research unveiled critical revelations concerning greenwashing within B2B engagements. It brought to light varied motivations behind greenwashing, such as brand managrmrnt, gain market share, financial benefits and compliance with industry standards. The results underscore businesses' hardships during greenwashing and offer potential solutions for bypassing or mitigating these issues.
The research arguments were existing knowledge by expanding comprehension of the operations of greenwashing within a B2B framework. It offered theoretical advancements using grounded theory to create theoretical structures derived from qualitative data. The real-world ramifications of the study proposed tactics for businesses to cultivate transparency, establish verification protocols, involve stakeholders, and advance legitimate sustainability practices within B2B associations.

By procuring a comprehensive comprehension of greenwashing in B2B scenarios, this study can offer valuable insights to businesses, policy implementers, and stakeholders about the intricacies and repercussions of greenwashing practices. The outcomes can guide initiatives to endorse responsible and transparent sustainability practices, reduce greenwashing, and ultimately foster more sustainable and ethical B2B exchanges.

THE ORIGINS OF GREENWASHING

Greenwashing originated as a marketing strategy businesses use to portray a positive environmental image without substantially changing their environmental practices. It involves the deceptive communication of environmental claims, leading consumers and stakeholders to believe that a company's products or activities are more sustainable than they are (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Greenwashing allows companies to capitalize on the demand for sustainable products and services while avoiding the costs and efforts associated with genuine environmental improvements. The term "greenwashing" itself was coined in the mid-1980s by environmentalist Jay Westerveld, who used it to describe the practice of hotels encouraging guests to reuse towels for environmental reasons while ignoring more significant environmental impacts (Westerveld, 2006). Since then, the concept of greenwashing has gained prominence and has been widely discussed in academia, business, and public discourse

The origins of greenwashing can be attributed to a combination of factors, including increasing consumer demand for sustainable products, corporate desire for enhanced reputation and market positioning, and the absence of standardized guidelines for evaluating environmental claims (Cho et al., 2019). As a result, companies have found opportunities to exploit the need for more transparency and accountability in conveying their environmental initiatives.

However, the concept of international concerning greenwashing in the business-to-business (B2B) context refers to the global dimensions and cross-border implications of greenwashing practices by B2B firms. It recognizes that greenwashing is not limited to specific countries or regions but occurs in international business transactions. Understanding why and how B2B firms engage in greenwashing in an international setting requires considering factors such as global market dynamics, cultural differences, regulatory variations, and the influence of travelling theories. The concept has been transmitted and adopted across cultures and disciplines through various channels, including academic research, media coverage, international business practices, and consumer awareness. This dissemination has contributed to a broader understanding of greenwashing and its implications in different contexts.

FACTORS THAT SHAPE GREENWASHING

The motivations behind greenwashing in the international B2B context are multifaceted. B2B firms may engage in greenwashing to align their environmental claims with the sustainability expectations of international customers and stakeholders (Cho et al., 2019). They seek to present a positive image and appeal to the growing demand for environmentally responsible products and services in global markets. Greenwashing enables firms to create the perception of being environmentally friendly and socially responsible, enhancing their competitiveness and market positioning.

In an international context, cultural differences significantly shape greenwashing practices (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011). B2B firms may tailor their greenwashing strategies to appeal to different regions' cultural values and beliefs. For example, a study by Delmas and Burbano (2011) found that multinational corporations use greenwashing more in countries with weaker environmental regulations and higher cultural emphasis on corporate social responsibility.

Moreover, diverse regulatory frameworks across countries create opportunities for greenwashing. International firms may strategically select jurisdictions with less stringent regulations to engage in greenwashing practices, taking advantage of the lack of standardized criteria for evaluating environmental performance.

B2B firms may exploit gaps or variations in environmental regulations to make unsubstantiated or exaggerated environmental claims (Gulzar et al., 2020).

A comprehensive approach is required to mitigate greenwashing in the international B2B context. It involves harmonizing international regulations and standards, enhancing transparency in supply chains, and promoting stakeholder engagement (Gulzar et al., 2020). Cross-border collaboration among governments, industry associations, and non-governmental organizations can facilitate the exchange of best practices and the development of consistent guidelines for evaluating environmental claims in B2B transactions.

RELEVANCE OF THE THESIS FINDINGS TO GREENWASHING TRENDS INTERNATIONALLY

The findings of the researchers' thesis, greenwashing in the B2B context, can influence international discourses on sustainability, corporate responsibility, and environmental practices (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Research studies highlighting specific cases or patterns of greenwashing practices can draw attention to the need for improved transparency, accountability, and ethical standards in B2B relationships (Cho et al., 2019). This awareness can stimulate discussions among policymakers, industry associations, and international organizations about the development of regulations and guidelines to combat greenwashing on a global scale.

Understanding the tactics and motivations behind greenwashing in an international context can inform the creation of more rigorous criteria for assessing and verifying environmental performance (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). This can lead to establishing globally recognized certifications, reporting frameworks, or industry-specific guidelines that promote genuine sustainability efforts and discourage greenwashing. Stakeholders, including investors, customers, and NGOs, may become more cautious and critical when evaluating environmental commitments and initiatives presented by B2B firms (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). This increased scrutiny can drive demand for greater transparency, independent verification, and responsible business practices, fostering a culture of accountability and integrity in international business relationships.

The findings of greenwashing in B2B can shape international discourses by raising awareness, stimulating discussions, and promoting actions to combat deceptive environmental claims (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). These findings could drive the development of global standards, enhance transparency, and foster responsible business practices, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and trustworthy international business environment. As the awareness of greenwashing practices increases, there may be a shift towards more stringent requirements and scrutiny regarding environmental claims in business transactions (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Governments and international organizations may respond to deceptive practices by introducing or strengthening regulations related to environmental claims, advertising, and labelling (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

As consumers become more informed and vigilant about greenwashing practices, they may demand greater transparency, independent verification, and credible certifications when purchasing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). This can drive companies to adopt more responsible practices and provide accurate information to meet consumer expectations. Investors may consider the risks associated with greenwashing when evaluating companies' environmental performance and credibility (Cho et al., 2019).

Lastly, it can foster cross-sector collaboration and partnerships. Businesses, NGOs, and governments may join forces to address greenwashing practices and develop shared solutions (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). This can include collaborative initiatives such as industry-wide sustainability standards, information-sharing platforms, and joint advocacy efforts to promote responsible practices in B2B interactions. These international trends, influenced by the findings of greenwashing in B2B, reflect a growing emphasis on transparency, accountability, and sustainability across various sectors.Furthermore, international collaborations and industry-wide standards can play a vital role in mitigating greenwashing risks. Aligning with globally recognized sustainability frameworks, certifications, and guidelines provides companies with a common language and set of expectations, facilitating transparency and reducing the potential for greenwashing (Jansson et al., 2021).

In summary, the international dimension of greenwashing in the B2B context highlights the global nature of deceptive environmental claims made by businesses. International market dynamics, cultural differences, and regulatory variations influence motivations for greenwashing. Travelling theories contribute to the spread and replication of greenwashing practices across borders. Addressing greenwashing requires international collaboration, regulation standardization, and increased supply chain transparency

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