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# Green Claims in Corporate Marketing - Examination and Impacts

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In recent years, there has been a growing awareness and concern about the impact of human activities on the environment. This has led to an increasing demand from consumers for businesses to adopt sustainable practices and uphold environmental values. As a result, many companies have jumped on the 'green' bandwagon, making claims about their eco-friendly initiatives and products. However, not all of these claims are genuine, and this is where the issue of greenwashing comes into play.

This research paper emphasizes the importance of businesses being held accountable for their environmental values and practices in the face of the increasing consumer demand for sustainability. It highlights the issue of greenwashing and provides guidance for businesses to ensure their green claims are truthful and genuine. The paper also examines the legal implications of greenwashing and the need for environmental transparency in the business world. Ultimately, the goal is to help businesses communicate honestly and transparently about their green practices and enable consumers to make informed choices.

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# **1 Introduction**

In the current era of consumerism, more and more people are demanding businesses to be more accountable for their environmental values and sustainable practices. Unfortunately, some companies have taken advantage of this and have used deceptive marketing tactics to make false green claims, a phenomenon commonly referred to as greenwashing. As consumers, it is important to be aware of this issue and understand how to determine if a company is truly committed to environmental sustainability.

This thesis aims to review sustainability reporting in general and discuss the obligations that companies have towards it. It will also dive into the concept of false green claims that are prevalent in today's corporate world. The purpose of this work is to provide companies with an accurate understanding of sustainability reporting and the challenges that they may face. It also aims to create awareness about greenwashing and ways in which companies can avoid it.

## **1.1 Background**

The topic of green claims in corporate marketing is highly relevant in today's business world, especially in the field of international business. As companies become more globalized and interconnected, their marketing strategies and messages reach a wider audience, making it crucial for them to accurately communicate their sustainability efforts. With the growing trend of consumers demanding environmentally friendly products, companies are using green claims as a marketing tool to gain a competitive advantage. However, the lack of regulations and guidelines for green claims has led to a rise in false or misleading claims, which can harm a company's reputation and lead to consumer scepticism. Therefore, it is essential to examine this issue and develop a better understanding of the use and impact of green claims in corporate marketing.

## 1.2 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the aim of the thesis. The second chapter reviews the research methods used in the thesis. The third chapter focuses on the 17 sustainable development goals and their targets, examining progress and challenges faced by countries and companies. It will also analyze the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and Finland's policies and initiatives to meet the SDGs, including its National Agenda 2030. This chapter will also discuss the role of the private sector and government policies in promoting sustainable development in Finland, as well as potential solutions to challenges faced by the country. The fourth chapter of the thesis highlights the importance of the EU Corporate Responsibility Reporting Directive in promoting transparency, accountability, and sustainability in the corporate sector. This chapter will include recommendations such as obtaining certifications from reliable third-party organizations, providing clear and detailed information about their green initiatives, and investing in green research and development. The fifth chapter will highlight the need for environmental transparency in today's business world. With the growing trend of 'greenwashing,' where companies make false or misleading claims about their environmental performance, it is essential to promote transparency and accountability. The chapter will discuss the various forms of greenwashing and their implications, as well as the regulations in place to protect consumers from false green claims. The sixth chapter reviews ways in which companies and consumers can avoid greenwashing and the use of false green claims. The chapter also helps companies better understand how greenwashing can happen. The seventh and final chapter provides a conclusion that contains a summary of key findings and the study results. For this thesis, artificial intelligence Quillbot has been used to ensure that text is grammatically correct.

## 2 Research methods

This chapter will introduce the chosen research method as well as outline the data collection and data analysis approaches used in this thesis research. As previously mentioned, the goal of the study was to gain a better understanding of the nature of green claims in corporate marketing.

The chosen research method in this study is a literature review. The author of the thesis ended up using the literature review research method because it offered the best way to extensively research material related to the topic. The literature review research method is a systematic and critical review of literature and studies related to the topic. It enables extensive treatment of the topic and comparisons of different sources. A literature review is an essential part of any research project. It synthesizes the research and provides a summary of the current knowledge on the topic. The literature review allows the researcher to establish an understanding of the body of work on the topic and thereby provide a basis for the current research. (University of Delaware 2023.)

The purpose of a literature review is to analyze and evaluate the existing research on a topic, identify gaps in the research, and determine the implications of the current research for future research (University of Southern California 2023a). It is important to note that a literature review is not a summary or description of the literature, but rather is an analysis and evaluation of the literature. When conducting a literature review, the researcher identifies, evaluates, and synthesizes the relevant literature on the topic. This includes articles, theses, reports, websites, studies, and writings of professionals in the field (Sheppard 2023). The literature review should provide an in-depth exploration of the topic, including an examination of the current research, how it has been conducted, the findings, and the implications for future research. (University of Southern California 2023.)

In conclusion, a literature review is an essential component of any research project. It allows the researcher to establish an understanding of the body of work on the topic and provide a basis for the current research. It should provide an in-

depth exploration of the topic, identify gaps in the literature, and provide evidence to support the author's argument. It should be organized in a logical order and provide a clear and concise description of the research, its findings, and its implications for future research. (University of Southern California 2023.)

This thesis uses the literature review as a research method, as it uses various sources such as articles, books, legal texts, theses, reports, websites, studies, and writings of professionals in the field. This method helps to gather and analyze existing research data on a specific subject area, which in this case is green claims. With the help of these sources, one can gain a deeper understanding of the research topic and support one's own research results. The literature review can also be used to identify gaps in current research and suggest guidelines for further support. Overall, the thesis shows that the literature review research method is a useful tool for researching multidimensional and wide-ranging topics.

The main research problem of this thesis relates to false green claims in the business world. The research question for this thesis is: how can companies take into account and put into practice the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive? This question is important as it addresses the need for companies to understand and comply with the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive in order to meet the expectations of stakeholders and contribute to sustainable development.

This research examines the potential risks of green claims, and the strategies companies can use to ensure they are held accountable for their green marketing activities. By exploring the research question of how companies can consider and put into practice CSRD, this research aims to provide insight into how companies can effectively address the potential risks of green claims and ensure that green marketing activities are held to a high standard. This additionally guarantees that the company is aware of upcoming laws and understands how to properly prepare for them.

## **3 Sustainable Development**

### **3.1 Sustainability**

Sustainability is crucial for the continued thriving of our society, as it involves our ability to thrive and progress without exhausting the vital resources needed for future survival. Sustainable development plays a vital role in achieving this long-term goal by implementing effective systems, frameworks, and support from global, national, and local entities. The fundamental principle of sustainability is based on the understanding that resources on our planet are limited, making it essential to promote sustainable practices that maintain a harmonious balance between the environment, economy, and social equity. This movement towards sustainability is crucial in ensuring that the earth remains a livable place while also effectively managing and decreasing the reduction of resources. (Coursera Staff 2023.)

### **3.2 Sustainable Development Goals**

Sustainable development can be defined as economic development without the use of natural resources or compromising future generations basically making sure that the decisions people make today will not hurt people tomorrow (Sustainable Development Summit 2023.)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global goals (Figure 1) established by the United Nations in 2015 to tackle the world's most pressing challenges in the areas of poverty, climate change, inequality, and sustainability. The SDGs are planned to be achieved by 2030. The SDGs represent a global understanding of the need to achieve sustainable development and to create a better future for all. The establishment of the SDGs was a complex and multi-faceted process, involving multiple stakeholders from different sectors. (United Nations 2023.) These are, for example:



- Public sector branches like governments, authorities, and international organizations
- Private companies and businesses
- Civil society organizations, including NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and citizen activists.
- Research and academic sectors such as researchers, universities, and other educational institutions.

All these sectors play crucial roles in promoting and implementing sustainable development goals. The public sector can promote SDGs. The private sector can contribute to achieving SDGs through sustainable business practices, responsible production, and environmentally friendly technologies. NGOs and citizen activists can influence the promotion of SDGs through communications, campaigns, and advocacy work. Research and academic sectors like universities and other educational institutions can provide knowledge, research, and expertise to support the achievement of sustainable development goals. (United Nations 2023.)



Figure 1. 2030 Agenda – Sustainable Development Goals / United Nations.

These goals cover a range of issues such as economic growth (SDG 8), access to quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), and climate action (SDG 13). The EU has taken a leading role in the agenda's implementation, committing to the overarching goal of leaving no one behind in achieving the SDGs. (European Commission 2023a.)

It is important for the EU to continue progressing towards the SDGs and collaborating with partner countries and civil society. The EU's representation in high-level international forums, such as the UN's high-level political forum on sustainable development, is crucial. This helps promote the EU's commitment to sustainable development, strengthen its leadership in this field, and address the global impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. (European Commission 2023a.)

The EU has established several initiatives and programs to support the agenda's goals. These include the European Commission's European Green Deal, which aims to achieve climate neutrality in the EU by 2050, and the European Fund for Sustainable Development, which provides financing for projects in developing countries. The EU is also working to ensure that its internal policies are in line with the SDGs. It has committed to mainstreaming the agenda into its regulations, budgets, and policies. Additionally, the EU is actively engaging with stakeholders at all levels, including civil society, businesses, and governments, to ensure that its policies are informed by their expertise and input. (Eur-Lex 2019.)

However, at the halfway point (2023) of the 2030 Agenda, it is clear that the world is not on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030. This can be affirmed by overviewing the Global Sustainable Development 2023 Report (Figure 2), which shows the current state of progress. The 2023 report shows that only 15% of the program's goals have been achieved. Forty-eight percent of the goals are moderately or severely off track, and 37% are stagnated or regressed. This lack of progress is due to a number of factors, including wars, the climate crisis, the rather gloomy global economic outlook, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have caused a jump in poverty and hunger rates, particularly among vulnerable populations. At the same time, there has been progress in certain areas, such as the availability

of clean energy and healthcare, specifically concerning child mortality. (Global Sustainable Development Report 2023.)

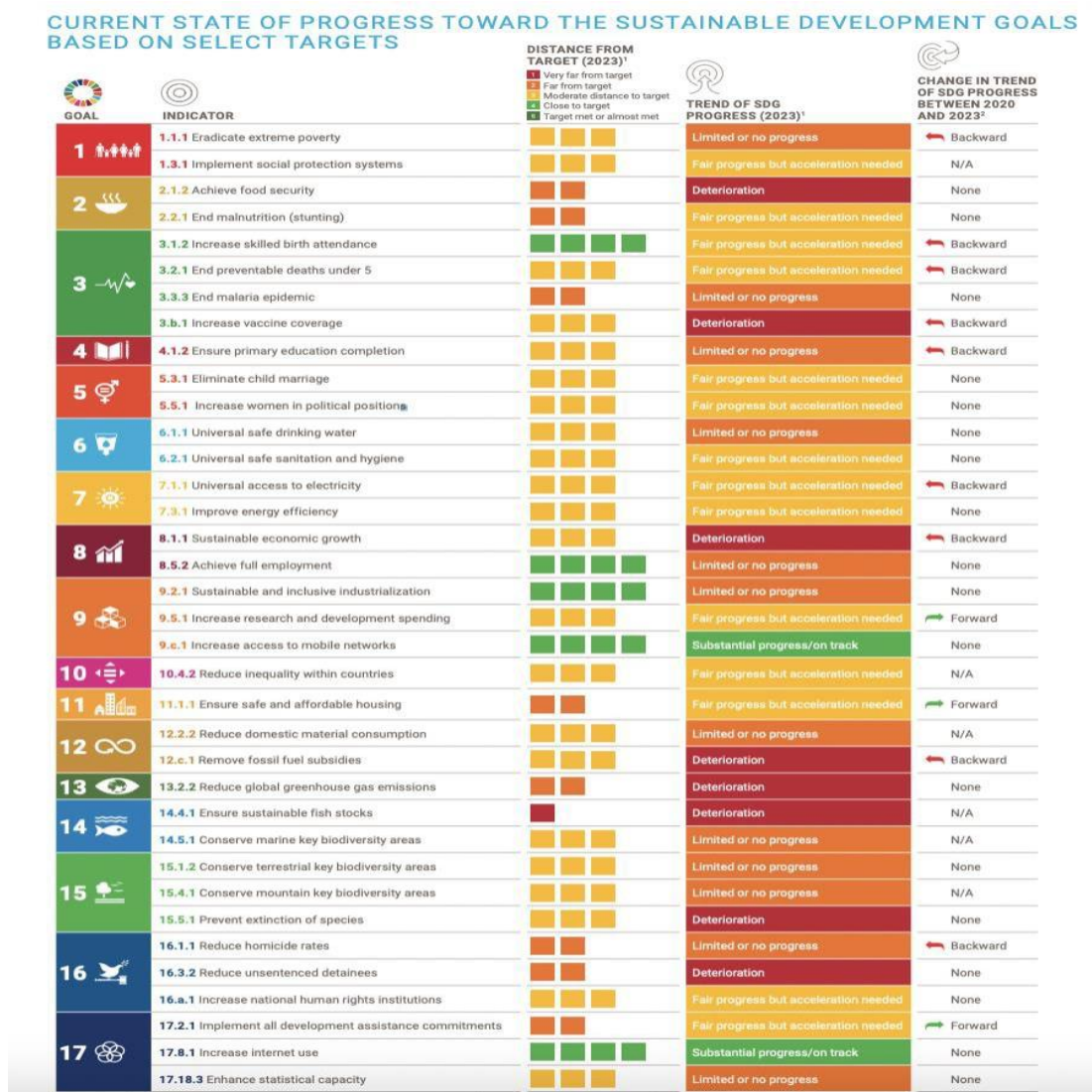


Figure 2. The current state of progress towards the Sustainable development goals (Report 2023 Sustainable Development Goals).

It is worth mentioning that the role of businesses in promoting the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is critical, as businesses have the potential to be a major driving force in achieving the SDGs by 2030. Companies have a unique responsibility to ensure that their operations, products, and services are sustainable and that they contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. They can influence other actors in society, such as governments and consumers, and to develop innovative solutions to address global challenges. Therefore, companies should use the SDGs as a framework to guide their

sustainability strategies. The SDGs can be used as a framework for developing strategies that address the environmental, social, and economic impacts of their operations and products. Companies should also make sure that their sustainability strategies are aligned with their business goals and that they are taking into account the full range of economic, social, and environmental impacts of their operations. (IEC Editorial team 2022.)

### **3.3 Finland's sustainable development progress**

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (2023), Finland is committed to meeting the United Nations' SDGs and has an important role to play in achieving them. Finland has agreed to reduce inequality, promote sustainable economic growth, and protect the environment. This is in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Finnish Government has taken a number of steps to help achieve the SDGs. It has invested in renewable energy sources, improved access to public services, and taken measures to protect biodiversity. The government has also implemented policies to reduce poverty, improve education, and promote gender equality. Finland has also joined forces with other countries to take action on climate change and promote sustainable consumption.

In addition, Finland has been a leader in supporting the UN SDGs and has established a national strategy for achieving them. This strategy includes initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen the circular economy, and promote sustainable development. Finland also has a strong commitment to international cooperation to ensure the success of the SDGs. Finland is a member of the European Union and is also actively involved in many international initiatives, such as the G20 and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). As a result, Finland is well-placed to contribute to the success of the SDGs and make a real difference in the global effort to achieve them. (European Commission 2023b.)

2023 sustainable development report reviews progress made each year on the Sustainable Development Goals since their adoption by the 193 UN member states in 2015. Countries are ranked based on their overall score. The overall score measures overall progress towards achieving all 17 SDGs. This score can be interpreted as the percentage of SDGs achieved, so a score of 100 means that all SDGs have been achieved. (United Nations 2023.) According to the UN Sustainable Development Report (2023), Finland is ranked number one ahead of Sweden, Denmark, and Germany in terms of its implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Finland's overall score is 86.76/100. This is a positive result, as it demonstrates that Finland has made significant progress in the direction of sustainable development. Finland's success in this regard can be attributed to its high level of technological know-how, which has enabled it to develop innovative solutions for problems such as climate change, poverty, and inequality. However, technology alone is not enough to address the complex challenges posed by SDGs. For Finland to continue to lead in this area, it must also focus on changing people's behavior and attitudes. This includes encouraging people to adopt more sustainable lifestyles, such as reducing their consumption and waste and promoting cooperation and equality between people (United Nations 2023). Furthermore, it is important to ensure that the financial and legislative obstacles that can block the transition to more sustainable practices are removed. If Finland can successfully address these issues, it will maintain its position as a leader in sustainable development. (SDG Report 2023.)

#### **4 EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive**

The European Union has always been at the forefront of promoting sustainability and corporate responsibility. In line with this commitment, the EU has introduced the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). The CSRD is a part of the European Commission's Action Plan for Sustainable Finance. The directive is an update to the existing Non-Financial Reporting Directive (NFRD) implemented in 2014. The NFRD needed an update because, in the open consultation procedure held by the EU Commission in 2020, the voluntary NFRD

regulation was considered insufficient to unify the reporting practice and obtain sufficient relevant information. (Eur-Lex 2022a.)

The accountability deficit created by the inability of NGOs, social partners, and communities affected by the undertakings' activities, and other stakeholders to hold undertakings accountable for their impacts on people and the environment could lead to lower levels of citizen trust in businesses, resulting in negative impacts on the efficient functioning of the social market economy. Additionally, the lack of generally accepted metrics and methods for measuring, valuing, and managing sustainability-related risks, as well as the lack of sustainability information provided by undertakings, limits the ability of stakeholders, including civil society actors, trade unions and workers' representatives, to enter into dialogue with undertakings on sustainability matters. (European Commission 2023b.)

On 5 January 2023, CSRD came into force. The purpose of the directive is to modernize and strengthen the rules surrounding the social and environmental information that companies are now obligated to report. A larger selection of large companies and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are listed will have to provide sustainability reports (Eur-Lex 2023). This will ensure that investors and other stakeholders have access to the data they need to evaluate the influence of companies on the environment and people, as well as for investors to measure financial risks and potentials caused by climate change and other sustainability matters. Furthermore, reporting costs for companies in the medium to long term will be reduced due to the harmonization of the information that needs to be supplied. The first companies to comply with the new rules will be in the financial year of 2024 for reports to be released in 2025. (United Nation 2023.)

## 4.1 Reporting obligation

The CSRD directive requires companies to disclose information on their environmental, social, and governance performance in an annual report. The reporting requirements are intended to improve transparency and accountability and encourage companies to take greater action to protect the environment, support social welfare, and create good governance practices. The CSRD will be implemented in phases to allow companies to adapt to the new reporting requirements gradually. The company is required to report under the CSRD if the following conditions are met (Eur-Lex 2022a):

- From January 2024, companies that meet the criteria of the Non-Financial Reporting Directive with more than 500 employees are obliged to prepare and publish a sustainability report according to the EU taxonomy. Unlisted and listed companies that meet at least two of the criteria mentioned below must do the same.
- January 2025: more than 250 employees, a turnover of more than EUR 40 million, or a balance sheet of more than EUR 20 million.
- Listed SMEs are obligated to do the same from January 2026.
- Starting in January 2028, CSRD will expand its reach to include third-country companies that have a net turnover above 150 million in the EU and possess at least one subsidiary or branch in the EU that surpasses specific criteria.

The companies must include information on their policies, strategies, processes, and performance related to their environmental, social, and governance impacts, as well as their risks and opportunities relating to sustainability. The report must also include a statement from the company's board of directors which confirms the accuracy of the information provided (Gibson 2022). The directive also requires companies to obtain an external assurance report from a third-party assurance provider regarding the accuracy and reliability of the information reported. This is intended to provide an additional layer of assurance and help ensure that the information is accurate and complete. The new CSRD will help companies to become more transparent and accountable, and to demonstrate

their commitment to sustainability to their stakeholders. It will also help to promote sustainable practices and create a level playing field for businesses across the EU. (Eur-Lex 2023.)

## 4.2 European Sustainability Reporting Standards

One of the key features of the CSRD is the establishment of European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). The ESRS standards are a framework for companies' sustainability reporting, and they specify how to implement CSRD in EU countries. ESRS defines the information that a company must disclose about its material impacts, risks, and opportunities in terms of environmental, social, and governance sustainability. The standards' goal is to increase the reliability of information and standardize companies' sustainability reporting so that sustainability data can be compared. (European Commission 2023c.)

Group	Number	Subject
Cross-cutting	ESRS 1	General Requirements
Cross-cutting	ESRS 2	General Disclosures
Environment	ESRS E1	Climate
Environment	ESRS E2	Pollution
Environment	ESRS E3	Water and marine resources
Environment	ESRS E4	Biodiversity and ecosystems
Environment	ESRS E5	Resource use and circular economy
Social	ESRS S1	Own workforce
Social	ESRS S2	Workers in the value chain
Social	ESRS S3	Affected communities
Social	ESRS S4	Consumers and end users
Governance	ESRS G1	Business conduct

Figure 3. European Sustainability Reporting Standards (European Commission 2023).



As of the writing of this thesis, there are a total of 12 ESRs that are covered in Figure 3. These are general requirements, general disclosures, climate, pollution, water and marine resources, biodiversity and ecosystems, resource use and the circular economy, own workforce, workers in the value chain, affected communities, consumers and end users, and business conduct.

These 12 ESRs are divided into three categories as follows:

- Cross-cutting standards
- Topical standards (environmental, social, and governance standards)
- Sector-specific standards

Cross-cutting standards are used to provide a comprehensive overview of the organization's sustainability performance and to provide a basis for comparison with other organizations. The topical standards are divided into environmental, social, and governance standards. These standards provide detailed information about the organization's practices and efforts to meet sustainability goals. Lastly, the sector-specific standards are tailored for each industry and provide direction on how to accurately report sustainability progress. (European Commission 2023c.)

## **5 Green claims in corporate marketing**

### **5.1 The term greenwashing**

In 1986 Jay Westerveld, an environmentalist, coined the term "greenwashing" in his article in which he criticized the irony of the "save the towel" movement at hotels at the time. He noticed the massive amount of waste he had encountered throughout the rest of the hotel, where there were no obvious signs of attempts to become more sustainable. He claimed that the hotel was simply attempting to cut costs by not having to wash as many towels while marketing itself as eco-friendly. (Nakamura 2023.)

Greenwashing is a misleading marketing practice in which companies falsely claim to be environmentally friendly or sustainable. By using terms like “more sustainable,” “eco-friendly”, “ethical” and “greener” companies create the perception that their products or policies align with environmental values.

This can lead consumers to make purchasing decisions based on false information, ultimately undermining the efforts of legitimate environmentally conscious companies.

To give an example, in a recent investigation by the Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet reporters revealed that H&M’s “let’s close the loop” initiative is not as green as it seems to be (Lindberg 2023). This initiative was established back in 2013 in an attempt to foster a circular fashion model by allowing their consumers to hand in old garments into their recycling boxes in the store. H&M promises that these garments will be either recycled or repaired (H&M 2023). However, the recent investigation shows quite a contrasting reality. The authors hid Apple Air tags on some H&M garments purchased from a thrift store and then returned to H&M for recycling. The clothes were returned to the H&M store in Stockholm and were supposed to be sorted at a facility outside of Berlin.

However, after 5 months of tracking, it was discovered that the clothes were sold to commercial companies in Germany that sort, and export used clothing. These businesses compress the clothes into large bales, which are then shipped to West Africa, and discarded in a landfill. H&M’s response to this accusation was a denial. The CEO of H&M answered that H&M has a traceability system that is much more reliable than those made independently by these two journalists. According to the research conducted by the journalist, this is an evident instance and a prime illustration of companies participating in greenwashing. (Lindberg 2023.)

Another example is the coffee giant Starbucks. In 2020, Starbucks made a bold move to reduce the amount of plastic waste by discontinuing the use of plastic straws in its locations and replacing them with sippable lids (Warnick 2019). While this may have seemed like a logical choice to reduce plastic waste, it resulted in

an increase in the amount of plastic used as the new lids and straws combined require more plastic than the original straws and lids combined. (Robinson 2022.)

This raises the question of whether Starbucks' decision to replace their plastic straws and lids was in its best interests or the environment's best interests. Starbucks is concerned with its environmental impact, as evidenced by the decision to switch to sippable lids. However, it is also clear that the company did not take into account the amount of plastic used in the new lids.

This means that, while the intentions may have been good, the actual result of the decision was not beneficial to the environment. This caused a lot of discussion and concern among consumers. The topic was also widely covered, and many articles were written which gave negative publicity to Starbucks as a brand.

## **5.2 Green claim awareness**

In recent years, the concept of sustainability and environmental responsibility has gained significant attention from not only consumers but also shareholders, stakeholders, and employees. As the planet faces various environmental challenges, the need for companies to adopt sustainable practices has become more pressing than ever. In response to this growing demand, many businesses have started to make green claims, showcasing their commitment to environmental conservation. In this part of the study, we will review some new faces of green claims and their impact on the industry. (Emmert 2021.)

The rising awareness among consumers about the impact of their purchasing decisions on the environment has driven the demand for sustainable products. According to a survey conducted by Nielsen (2019), 73% of global consumers are willing to change their consumption habits to reduce their environmental impact. This shift in consumer behavior has pushed companies to make environmental sustainability a part of their brand identity. As a result, we have seen an increase in the number of businesses making green claims about their products and services.

One of the new faces of the green claims is the rise of eco-friendly packaging. With the increasing concern over plastic pollution, companies are now focusing on sustainable packaging solutions to reduce their carbon footprints. Many companies have started using biodegradable or recyclable materials for their packaging, and some have even gone a step further by introducing packaging-free options. This trend has not only attracted environmentally conscious consumers but has also helped companies save costs in the long run. (Sustridge 2023.)

Another aspect of green claims is the rise of renewable energy. As the world moves towards a low-carbon future, more companies are investing in renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydropower. In fact, according to a report by the International Renewable Energy Agency (2023), businesses accounted for nearly 70% of global renewable energy consumption in 2018. By using renewable energy sources, companies not only reduce their carbon footprints but also save on energy costs, making it a win-win situation for both the environment and their bottom lines.

Apart from consumers, shareholders and other stakeholders are also becoming more conscious of a company's environmental impact. Many investors are now looking for sustainable and socially responsible companies to invest in. In response to this, businesses are making green claims not just to attract customers but also to secure investments and partnerships. Companies that are transparent and can demonstrate their commitment to environmental sustainability are more likely to gain the trust of investors and stakeholders.

Moreover, employees are also becoming increasingly aware and concerned about the environmental practices of their employers. A study by Cone Communications (2016) found that 64% of millennials in the United States consider a company's social and environmental commitments when deciding where to work. This 64% will not take a job if a company does not have strong CSR values. This has led to a rise in employee demand for eco-friendly

workplaces, and companies are now making green claims to attract and retain top talent also in Finland.

Even suppliers and service providers are now looking to collaborate with environmentally responsible companies. They want to be associated with businesses that share their values and are committed to sustainable practices. This has created a ripple effect, with companies encouraging their suppliers and service providers to adopt sustainable practices as well.

In conclusion, the rise of green claims in the business world is a reflection of the growing environmental awareness among consumers, shareholders, stakeholders, employees, and even suppliers and service providers. Companies are realizing that being environmentally responsible is not just a moral obligation, but that it also brings various benefits such as cost savings, a positive brand image, and stakeholder attraction. However, it is crucial for companies to back up their green claims with concrete actions and transparent reporting following new directive instructions to avoid accusations of greenwashing.

### **5.3 Unmasking greenwashing tactics**

As greenwashing has been a buzzword in the sustainability community in recent years and a new EU law against greenwashing and misleading consumers is coming into force, it has been established that greenwashing has evolved and changed its format to avoid all the claims and to pull the wool over our eyes. Therefore, it is important for consumers and business makers to be aware of new tactics to spot the six green claim forms that Planet Tracker (2023), a financial think tank, released in its latest report. These claim forms are listed below.

1. Green shifting is a marketing tactic that places the responsibility for environmental problems on consumers rather than on companies or industries. This happens so often when leading fossil fuel producers, shift the blame onto consumers. A classic example of this is when BP, the oil giant, launched the “Know Your Carbon Footprint” campaign and

encouraged individuals to take actions to reduce their own carbon footprints to help stop climate change. This implied that individuals are to blame for the climate crisis rather than fossil fuel producers. (Planet tracker 2023a.)

2. Green rinsing refers to a company consistently changing its sets of standards measuring its impact on society, the environment, and its transparency and accountability targets before they are achieved. By changing their targets before they are met, the companies are not held accountable to reach these targets. When companies miss, reduce, or delay these environmental targets, it raises suspicion as to whether they are genuinely trying to reach them or simply using them as marketing ploys. (Planet tracker 2023a.)
3. Green labeling or ecolabelling involves the use of labels or symbols on products that indicate their environmental impact, such as whether they are made from recycled materials, are biodegradable, or have been produced using renewable energy sources. This type of labeling not only informs consumers about the environmental qualifications of a product but also encourages companies to be more transparent about their sustainability efforts. By choosing products with green labels, consumers can make more informed and responsible purchasing decisions, supporting companies that are committed to reducing their carbon footprints and promoting a more sustainable future. Green labeling also has the potential to create a domino effect, as companies strive to obtain these labels and improve their environmental performance in order to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers. Furthermore, green labeling can also drive innovation, as companies are challenged to find new and more sustainable ways to produce their products and meet the criteria for these labels. (Ecological Certification Institute 2023.)

However, with the rise of green labeling, there has also been an increase in fake labeling. Companies make false or exaggerated environmental claims for the purpose of deceiving consumers into thinking that a

product or company is more environmentally friendly than it is (Agor-Wood 2022). This can be done by directly printing a label from Google Images and placing it on the products. Figure 4 shows a different kind of fake eco-friendly label without an organization that authorized and controlled the use of those labels.



Figure 4. Pick Ethical. Examples of fake eco labels. <https://www.pick-ethical.com/truth-about-eco-friendly-labels/>



Figure 5. Cien body lotion. Nordic Swan Ecolabel. Other labels related to green claims. Picture by author.

Joutsenmerkki » Tuotteet ja palvelut » Hygienia ja kosmetiikka » Ihonhoito » Ihovoiteet »

## Cien Sensitive Bodylotion, 275 ml

Joutsenmerkitty kosmetiikka on käyttäjälleen turvallista ja valmistettu ympäristöä säästäen.

- ✓ Täyttää tiukat vaatimukset biohajoavuudesta ja biokertyvyydestä, ei mikromuoveja
- ✓ Terveydelle haitalliset kemikaalit minimoitu
- ✓ Tehokkaat ja kierrätettävät pakkaukset

Yritys	<a href="#">NOPA Nordic A/S</a>
Yrityksen verkkosivut	<a href="https://nopanordic.com">nopanordic.com</a>
Tuotemerkki	
Lupanumero	5090 0080

Figure 6. Swan symbol. Ympäristömerkintä Suomi Oy.

Figure 5 shows the Cien brand body lotion, with multiple eco labels on the packaging. One of the labels is the Nordic Swan Ecolabel, which is



the official ecolabel of the Nordic countries. The Nordic Swan Ecolabel envisions a sustainable society in which future generations can enjoy the same conditions and opportunities current generations do (Joutsenmerkki 2023.) Figure 6 shows Nordic Swan's website and how consumers can search for a product and verify the authenticity of the eco label. This is a good example of a reliable eco label and how it can be verified.

4. Green hushing, also known as green silence, refers to the practice of deliberately withholding or downplaying negative environmental information or impacts. This is when companies or organizations avoid discussing their unsustainable practices or environmental harms. An example of green hushing could be a company that fails to disclose the negative environmental impacts of its manufacturing processes, or the pollution caused by its products. By keeping this information hidden, the company creates a false impression of being environmentally friendly. Companies using green hushing might imply that they are making a positive impact without sharing it publicly. (Todd Lucy 2023.)
5. Green crowding, it is similar to green hushing, but the difference is that it occurs when brands remain hidden within the crowd in order to avoid being exposed to their unsustainable practices. According to Planet Tracker (2023), these businesses are frequently the "slow movers" when it comes to developing environmentally friendly policies.
6. Greenlighting is when a company spotlights a particularly green feature of its operations or products. This tactic aims to divert attention away from environmentally damaging activities.

It is particularly common in the car industry and the fast fashion industry. For example, a company like Toyota may highlight the benefits of its electric car to divert people from focusing on the damage caused by the production of their other vehicles. (Todd 2023.)

It is vital for both consumers and businesses to be aware of these forms of greenwashing, as they will play critical roles with the new EU directive. One of the key aspects of this new EU directive is the requirement for companies to provide evidence to back up environmental claims. This means that companies will no longer be able to simply slap a 'green' label on their products without any proof or justification. They will have to provide solid data and information to support their claims. While this is a positive step towards a greener future, it will undoubtedly be an expensive change for many businesses. Some companies may even struggle to adapt and may face financial challenges as a result.

In conclusion, as the sustainability movement continues to gain momentum, so does the need for companies to genuinely commit to reducing their environmental impacts. The new EU law against greenwashing and the identification of these new tactics by Planet Tracker will help in creating a more transparent and accountable system. It is up to both consumers and businesses to stay informed and make responsible choices to protect the planet.

#### **5.4 Drivers of unjustified green claims**

The causes of greenwashing can be attributed to a variety of factors, including a lack of consistent industry standards, a lack of consumer knowledge or awareness, and the desire for companies to boost profits while avoiding costly investments in energy efficiency and other green initiatives. (Perks 2023.)

For example, the current practice in Finland is that the penalties for misleading marketing are relatively small and they therefore do not serve as strong deterrents for companies. The penalties are usually in the form of fines, the amount of which is determined based on the company's turnover and the nature of the illegal activity. This means that the more significant the company's operations, the higher the penalty fee, but the amount is still a mere fraction of the profits. As a result, many companies may see these fines as just a cost of doing business and continue with their misleading marketing practices. (Kuluttajaliitto 2023.)

Companies may engage in greenwashing in order to boost their profits while avoiding costly investments in energy efficiency and other green initiatives. Investing in energy efficiency and other green initiatives can be expensive and may not be feasible for many small businesses. As a result, companies may opt (make a choice from a range of possibilities) to engage in greenwashing in order to appear “greener” without incurring the costs associated with making actual improvements. (Perks 2023.)

Overall, the causes of greenwashing are complex and varied, but can generally be attributed to a lack of consistent industry standards, a lack of consumer knowledge or awareness, and a desire for companies to increase their profits while avoiding costly investments in energy efficiency and other green initiatives. Given the potential adverse impacts of greenwashing, it is important for companies to be aware of the causes and take measures to ensure that their green initiatives are genuine and beneficial.

## **6 How to avoid greenwashing**

### **6.1 Understand and spot greenwashing**

In 2022, the Federation of Municipalities of Finland conducted a survey on consumer attitudes and trust in environmental claims and labels, with ecology and environmental friendliness in the spotlight. The survey reached 1001 respondents. Kuluttajaliitto and Kantas Public collaborated on the research questions. Participants in the study were asked how easy they thought it was to tell the difference between official and unofficial environmental labels. According to the findings, only 23% believed it is easy, while 69% believed it is difficult. Nine percent of those polled could not say. (Kuluttajaliitto 2022.) These results prove that nowadays it is difficult for consumers to determine the real sustainable situation of the products because, for example, there are too many labels without

a factual basis. According to a report by the European Commission (2020), 53% of various environmental claims in the EU market are either vague, poorly substantiated, or misleading, and 40 percent are unsubstantiated.

To understand and spot greenwashing, it is important to be aware of the tactics used by companies to make their products or services appear more environmentally friendly than they are. Companies often make exaggerated claims about the environmental benefits of their products or services, or they might use misleading language to make it sound as if their products are better for the environment. Other common greenwashing tactics include using images of nature or animals to suggest that a product is more sustainable than it is or using terms like “eco-friendly” or “natural” without providing any evidence to back up these claims.

In addition to being aware of the common greenwashing tactics, it is also important to research a company’s products and services to ensure that it is making a positive contribution towards the environment. It is important to look for genuine environmental certifications and ratings, such as those provided by consumer protection acts, the international basic rules of advertising, and competition legislation, which can help to ensure that a company is doing something to reduce its environmental impact. (Suomi.fi 2023.)

Consumer protection laws are a set of rules and regulations put in place to safeguard the rights and interests of consumers in their interactions with businesses. These laws aim to ensure that companies do not engage in deceptive or unfair practices that may harm consumers’ interests. However, navigating through these laws can be a daunting task for both companies and consumers. This is where consumer Ombudsmen come in to play a vital role. The Consumer Ombudsman supervises compliance with several laws and regulations that protect the consumer. The consumer protection authority can intervene in misleading advertising with supervision and sanctions. Companies and consumers can therefore turn to the consumer representative if they need advice regarding consumer protection laws. (Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority 2023.)

It is important to be aware of how a company is perceived by consumers. Many consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of environmental issues and will be quick to spot any greenwashing practices. Companies should be sure to provide accurate information about their products and services and avoid making exaggerated or unsubstantiated claims about their environmental friendliness.

Finally, companies should be open to feedback from their customers and strive to be transparent about their environmental practices. Companies should be willing to answer questions about their practices and willing to make changes if needed. Companies should also be open to engage in conversations with their customers about environmental issues and ready to make changes to their practices if their customers suggest them.

Greenwashing is a deceptive marketing practice that can be damaging to a company's reputation and have a negative impact on its bottom line. As a company, it is important to be aware of greenwashing practices and to take steps to ensure that misleading claims are not being made about products or services. By taking steps to reduce company's environmental impact, providing accurate information about companies' products and services, and being open to feedback from customers, companies can help ensure that company is not engaging in greenwashing.

## **6.2 Avoid false green claims and take CSRD into action**

Avoiding greenwashing is crucial for the protection of our planet. As consumers, people have the power to influence companies by making informed and responsible choices. Consumers must not fall for marketing tactics and do their research before buying a product or service. It is also essential for companies to take genuine steps towards sustainability rather than just using it as a marketing strategy. By avoiding greenwashing, people can promote honest and sustainable practices, leading to a healthier and greener planet for future generations.

To answer the main research question regarding how companies can take into account and put into practice CSRD, the first step is to understand the requirements of the directive and how they apply to their specific industry and operations. Companies should conduct a thorough assessment of their sustainability performance, including identifying their key sustainability impacts and risks. This will help them prioritize and focus on the most significant areas for improvement. It is also crucial for companies to engage with stakeholders, such as investors, employees, customers, and communities, to understand their expectations and concerns regarding sustainability. (European Commission 2022a.)

Once companies have a clear understanding of their sustainability performance, they can start implementing measures to improve it and meet the requirements of CSRD. This could include setting ambitious sustainability targets, developing and implementing sustainability policies and strategies, and investing in sustainable practices and technologies. Companies should also establish active monitoring and reporting systems to track their progress and communicate it to stakeholders transparently.

The benefits of implementing CSRD are numerous. Firstly, it allows companies to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and transparency, which can enhance their reputation and brand image. This, in turn, can attract socially responsible investors and customers who are increasingly looking to support companies that align with their values. Secondly, by considering and reporting on their sustainability performance, companies can identify areas for improvement and implement measures to reduce their environmental and social impact. This can lead to cost savings through increased efficiency and reduced resource consumption. Lastly, CSRD can help companies identify potential risks and opportunities related to sustainability, allowing them to make informed decisions and stay ahead of the curve in a rapidly changing business landscape. (KPMG 2023.)

The effects of CSRD on the environment are also significant. By requiring companies to report on their sustainability performance, the directive promotes

transparency and accountability, which can drive companies to reduce their environmental impacts. It also encourages companies to adopt more sustainable practices, such as reducing their carbon footprints, using renewable energy, and implementing circular economy principles. This can lead to a more sustainable uses of resources and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, which are major contributors to climate change. CSRD also encourages companies to consider their social impacts, such as promoting diversity and fair labor practices, which can have positive effects on local communities and society.

## **7 Conclusions**

To conclude, businesses must be accountable for their environmental values and practices to meet the growing demand for sustainability. Greenwashing not only deceives consumers but also has significant legal and reputational consequences. To combat this issue, businesses must prioritize environmental transparency and ensure that their green claims are truthful and genuine. By implementing third-party certifications, sustainability reports, and being open and honest about their practices, businesses can build consumer trust and contribute to a more sustainable future.

The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive is a game-changer in the world of corporate sustainability reporting. It not only promotes transparency and accountability but also drives positive change towards a more sustainable future. By requiring companies to report on their sustainability performance, the directive will help build a more sustainable and responsible business world, ultimately benefiting all stakeholders. As the directive is implemented in phases, companies must start preparing for the changes and embrace sustainability reporting as an integral part of their operations. ESRS are also a significant development in the field of sustainability reporting in Europe. By providing a common framework for reporting, the standards promote transparency, comparability, and credibility, making it easier for stakeholders to understand and analyze the sustainability performance of companies. Moreover, the focus on materiality and stakeholder

engagement ensures that the information reported is relevant and credible, while the flexibility of the standards makes them adaptable to different types of companies. Ultimately, ESRS can contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in Europe by driving improvements in sustainability performance and promoting accountability and transparency in business operations.

By implementing sustainable practices throughout their operations, companies can align their messaging with their actual impacts and build trust with consumers. Additionally, companies should consider third-party certifications or labels that verify their environmental claims. Using these certifications can provide credibility and assurance to consumers that the company's environmental claims have been independently verified. Furthermore, companies should regularly monitor and evaluate their environmental performance to ensure that their claims are accurate and up-to-date.

In conclusion, this thesis has provided a comprehensive study of green claims and greenwashing, highlighting the various forms and tactics used by companies to mislead consumers. It has also discussed the potential implications for companies and the need for them to be transparent and authentic in their environmental claims. As companies face increasing pressure to become more sustainable, they must understand the risks and take proactive measures to avoid greenwashing.

The study revealed that there is currently a high demand in business for organizations that can help companies report more transparently and comply with the new directive. Because, while the new directive clearly states who it applies to, many details are unclear, which can lead to misunderstandings.

Future research in this area could focus on the effectiveness of different interventions to reduce greenwashing and the role of consumers in holding companies accountable for their environmental claims.



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