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Firms' exploitation of greenwashing in food packaging

Tactics and drivers of greenwashing in the food industry

International Business

Bachelor's thesis

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The awareness of unsustainable consumption patterns and environmental challenges has led to an increased interest in environmentally sustainable purchasing decisions and green lifestyle. Nowadays, numerous firms aspire to spread an image of environmental friendliness and ecological consciousness to consumers in order to gain a competitive edge. This thesis focuses on the food industry, specifically the role of greenwashing in food packaging, as packaging is one of the major harmful forms of waste. The dissertation aims to understand the motivations behind consumers' intention to buy green products, the drivers of firms' engagement in greenwashing, and the different tactics of greenwashing in food packaging. The main research question of this thesis is: "Why and how do firms practice greenwashing in food packaging?" To address this question, the thesis explores subquestions related to consumer behavior, motivations behind firms' engagement in greenwashing, and the tactics and strategies used by firms to exploit greenwashing.

The findings of the thesis indicate that consumers are driven by values, environmental knowledge and concern, perceived quality as well as trust in farmers and firms when it comes to green food purchasing. Also, consumers buy green food out of habit and are influenced by green marketing. This ability to influence consumer behavior as well as competitive pressure motivates firms to appear green for consumers in order to leverage the growing green market. Firms are able to engage in greenwashing due to specific organizational and individual characteristics as well as lack of regulation. Firms exploit greenwashing through a variety of tactics. This thesis categorizes them into three: visual, verbal and labeling tactics. By addressing these topics, this thesis aims to offer valuable implications for firms, consumers, and policymakers, ultimately contributing to the discourse on sustainability and ethical business practices in the food industry.

Keywords: greenwashing, green food packaging, green advertising, green consumer behavior

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Kasvava tietoisuus kestävämmistä kulutustottumuksista ja ympäristöhaasteista on lisännyt kuluttajien kiinnostusta ympäristöystävällisiin ostopäätöksiin ja vihreään elämäntapaan. Nykyään lukuisat yritykset pyrkivät luomaan ympäristöystävällistä ja ekologista imagoa kuluttajille saavuttaakseen kilpailuetua. Tämä kandidaatin tutkielma keskittyy elintarviketeollisuuteen, erityisesti viherpesun rooliin elintarvikepakkausissa, sillä pakkaukset ovat yksi merkittävimmistä haitallisista jätteistä. Tutkielman tavoitteena on ymmärtää kuluttajien motiiveja ostaa vihreitä tuotteita, yritysten motiiveja viherpesuun sekä erilaisia viherpesutaktiikoita elintarvikepakkausissa. Tämän tutkielman tutkimuskysymys on: "Miksi ja miten yritykset harjoittavat viherpesua elintarvikepakkausissa?" Tutkimuskysymyksen tueksi käsitellään myös alakysymyksiä, jotka liittyvät kuluttajakäyttäytymiseen, yritysten viherpesun motiiveihin sekä yritysten käyttämiin viherpesun taktiikoihin ja strategioihin.

Tutkielman johtopäätöksenä on, että kuluttajia ohjaavat vihreiden tuotteiden ostopäätöksissä arvot, ympäristötietoisuus, huoli ympäristöstä, koettu laatu sekä luottamus viljelijöihin ja yrityksiin. Lisäksi kuluttajat ostavat vihreitä elintarvikkeita tottumuksesta, ja heidän kuluttajakäyttäytymiseensä vaikuttaa vihreä markkinointi. Tämä kyky vaikuttaa kuluttajakäyttäytymiseen sekä kilpailupaineet motivoivat yrityksiä näyttämään ekologisena kuluttajille. Yritykset voivat harjoittaa viherpesua tiettyjen organisaatio- ja yksilökohtaisten ominaisuuksien avulla sekä lakisääntelyn puutteen vuoksi. Yritykset hyödyntävät viherpesua monin eri tavoin. Tämä tutkielma luokittelee ne kolmeen ryhmään: visuaalisiin, verbaalisiin ja sertifikaattitaktiikoihin. Tutkielma pyrkii tarjoamaan hyödyllisiä havaintoja ja johtopäätöksiä yrityksille, kuluttajille ja päättäjille, edistäen kestävyuden ja eettisten liiketoimintakäytäntöjen keskustelua elintarvikealalla.

Avainsanat: viherpesu, vihreä elintarvikepakkaus, vihreä mainonta, vihreä kuluttajakäyttäytyminen

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	7
	1.1 Background	7
	1.2 Aim of the study	9
2	Drivers of greenwashing	11
	2.1 Consumer motivation behind the purchase of green products	11
	2.2 Motives behind firms practicing greenwashing	13
3	Tactics in greenwashing	17
	3.1 Visual techniques	17
	3.2 Verbal techniques	19
	3.3 Sustainability labels and certifications	20
4	Conclusions	23
	References	26
	Appendix	32

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Main motives behind firms' engagement in greenwashing in food packaging 15

Figure 2: Main tactics of greenwashing utilized in food packaging. 22

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Food packages are needed not only to protect and preserve food but also to act as a way to make food look good on the shelf, communicate brand identity, and express information about its content. In most cases, packaging aims at making the product desirable for consumers. Firms can communicate messages through different packaging attributes and appear more appealing to consumers. (Wagner 2015, 193-197.)

In recent years, the subject of current unsustainable consumption patterns, ecological challenges, and depletion of natural resources has gained attention among consumers and governments (Mahmoud et al. 2022). Making environmentally sustainable or "green" purchasing decisions in everyday consumer behavior presents an opportunity to mitigate the environmental impact by replacing less environmentally friendly products with greener alternatives (Moser 2015). Consumers buy green products, because they care for the environment and imitate their environmental beliefs in purchasing behavior (Moser 2015).

Packaging has been labeled as a major source of harmful non-biodegradable garbage. When consumer awareness of the impact of packaging on the environment increases, firms are pressured to increase recyclability and reduce waste (Mahmoud et al. 2022). Today, many firms want to appear environmentally and ecologically conscious to consumers. Firms strive to present their environmental efforts in order to gain a competitive advantage through green marketing strategies. (Szabo & Webster 2020, 719.) Companies associated with green image achieve higher customer satisfaction, profitability, market shares, overall performance (Moser 2015), and greater levels of employee commitment (Maignan and Ferrell, 2001, 45-46). Green product and distribution initiatives additionally have a positive impact on companies' overall product-market performance, while implementing green pricing and promotional strategies directly correlates with increased return on assets for companies. (Leonidou et al. 2013, 166.)

So, there are multiple drivers for firms to spread a green image of their brand or products. However, some green marketing efforts don't accurately correspond with the firm's actual environmental acts. (Szabo & Webster 2020, 719.) Many green advertisements

lack important and concrete information on the real environmental impacts that their products cause. The misuse of environmental claims and deceptive advertising has resulted in a phenomenon called greenwashing. (Baum 2012, 423.)

Greenwashing is the act of deceiving consumers either about the environmental practices of a firm or about the environmental benefits of a product. On the product level, greenwashing occurs when firms deliberately advertise the environmental features of a product in an untruthful way. Usually, a greenwashing firm engages in two concurrent behaviors: poor environmental performance alongside positive communication regarding its environmental efforts. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 66-67.)

As an example, arguably the most dominant player in the soft drink industry the Coca-Cola Company has faced accusations of greenwashing and misleading claims about its product packages' environmental attributes. They marketed their plastic water bottles as '100 % recycled'. Environmental groups Client Earth and ECOS claimed that plastic bottles can never be made wholly of recycled materials, and also end up often in landfills due to limited recycling capacity. They issued a legal complaint to the European Commission, which backed the environmental groups and declared the claims misleading. (BBC 7.11.2023.) Coca-Cola has been labeled as the biggest plastic polluter in the world (Greenpeace 1.5.2023). Therefore, Coca-Cola's attempts to seem more environmentally friendly in advertising are quickly questioned and viewed as greenwashing.

There are many ways for a firm to falsely spread a greener image of their products. In product packaging, visual and verbal tactics as well as product certifications and eco-labels are common. However, not all marketing techniques are allowed, especially if they are considered deceiving. For example, under the rules of the European Union, businesses are required to provide truthful information to consumers. Firms are prohibited from misleading consumers in order to influence their decisions and profiting off of unfair commercial practices. (European Commission 22.2.2024.) So, it is crucial for businesses to prioritize ethics and transparency in their marketing efforts, ensuring that environmental claims accurately reflect their practices.

1.2 Aim of the study

This thesis will discuss the motivation behind firms practicing greenwashing as well as tactics and strategies that firms use in order to exploit it in the food industry. The focus will be on firms' strategizing and decision-making in advertising ecological food packaging. Also, the motivation behind consumers' intention to buy green products and green consumer behavior is discussed as well. This dissertation will also address the ethical aspects and dilemmas of greenwashing. The main research question is:

- Why and how do firms practice greenwashing in the food industry?

To answer the main research question, this thesis will also discuss these subquestions:

1. Why do consumers buy green food?

This question will explain the key motives behind consumer purchase intention and consumer behavior when it comes to buying green food products. Understanding the factors influencing consumers' decisions to purchase green food is crucial in understanding consumer behavior and preferences in the context of sustainability within the food industry. Addressing this question will also help us understand the drivers of the phenomenon of greenwashing. Therefore, the second subquestion is:

2. Why do firms engage in greenwashing?

Understanding the motivation behind firms' engagement in greenwashing is critical in understanding the phenomenon of greenwashing. By exploring the motives behind firms' engagement in greenwashing, this study aims to uncover the factors driving such behavior. Lastly, the third subquestion is:

3. What tactics and strategies firms use to exploit greenwashing?

This question will elaborate the different strategies of greenwashing dividing the tactics into three different categories: visual tactics, verbal tactics as well as the utilization of eco-labels and certifications. Addressing this question will help us understand the deceptive marketing practices used in food packaging.

The dissertation will adhere to the following structure. Chapter two will cover subquestions one and two explaining the consumer motivation behind green food purchasing as well as the key motives behind firms' engagement in greenwashing.

Chapter three answers the third subquestion, covering different tactics in food packaging greenwashing. Finally, chapter four will conclude the dissertation, summarize the mentioned topics, and include future implications.

2 Drivers of greenwashing

2.1 Consumer motivation behind the purchase of green products

Today's environmental challenges have attracted the interest of various stakeholders in environmental matters. Over the past few decades, environmentally aware consumers have become more involved in environmental protection efforts, and their consciousness and knowledge have significantly increased. There's a growing emphasis among consumers on environmental concerns, directly influencing their personal behaviors and values. With an increased awareness of environmental issues, many consumers recognize the impact of their purchasing habits on the environment. As a result, they're changing their lifestyles and shopping habits, increasingly favoring eco-friendly products. (Kong et al. 2014, 936.)

Consumers are typically motivated by values, frequently considering the advantages and usefulness they receive from purchasing products. When consumers recognize the value of green products to both themselves and the environment, they are more inclined to make green purchases. (Zhuang et al. 2021, 10-11.) Additionally, the degree to which consumers value a green lifestyle and pay attention to the environment has an impact on the intention to buy green products (De Moura et al., 2012, 458). Making environmentally sustainable or green purchasing decisions in everyday consumer behavior presents an opportunity to mitigate environmental impact by replacing less environmentally friendly products with greener alternatives (Moser 2015). Consumers who are more attentive to the ecological environment and possess relevant knowledge are more likely to opt for green products. Therefore, environmental concern and environmental knowledge play a significant role in shaping consumers' purchase intentions. (Zhuang et al. 2021, 10-11.)

When it comes to food, quality is one of the most important factors for consumers (Zhang & Dong 2020, 5). For example, popular green products in the food industry are pesticide-free, organic, low-processed, or naturally grown products (Thøgersen et al. 2010; Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen 2017). Consumers purchasing green food perceive it as being higher quality, healthier, more nutritious, having better taste, and being more environmentally friendly, for example by demonstrating greater animal welfare.

Also, trust has a crucial role as a factor in food purchasing decisions. Trust has the ability to influence both consumers' intentions and actual purchases. (Pivato et al. 2008, 8-9.)

Since even certified products may be misleading (Torelli et al. 2020, 409), consumers can have presumptions about the reliability of standards and certifications (Carfora et al. 2019, 2). Consumers might also be overwhelmed by the vast amount of information they receive while shopping for food, which is why trust can represent a shortcut for consumers to tackle the information overflow, especially if individuals are not very involved in a green lifestyle or possess a lot of knowledge about products and standards (Hobbs & Goddard 2015; Atkinson & Rosenthal 2014). Trust has been found to be significantly important in the organic food market (Cavallo et al. 2018, 1596). Carfora et al. (2019) studied the importance of trust when buying organic milk and found trust toward farmers to be a major factor in their purchasing behavior.

A lot of studies on the motivation behind organic food purchasing intention and consumer behavior concentrate on the consumers' personal attributes (Aertsens et al. 2009). While many studies show the effect of personal factors, such as values, knowledge, environmental concern, and perceived quality on purchase intention, there are also mixed findings regarding the correlation between consumers' personal attributes and their purchase behavior of green food (Aschemann-Witzel & Niebuhr Aagaard 2014). While several studies indicate that consumers' positive attitudes towards green food significantly increase their purchase intentions and behavior, it's notable that many consumers, despite holding favorable attitudes, do not actually purchase green food (Pearson et al. 2011, Shepherd et al. 2005). For example, Aschemann-Witzel and Niebuhr Aagaard (2014) found that while young consumers have favorable attitudes toward organic food, their actual purchases of organic food remain low. This phenomenon could be explained by the complexity of human decision-making processes, the diverse motives and barriers with different types of green food (Padel & Foster), marketing factors, and consumer habits (Vermeir & Verbeke 2006).

Consumers buy green products simply because of a habit. If an individual doesn't have strong values or willingness to spend time and effort when it comes to food shopping, therefore having low involvement, they might opt for the product that was previously a satisfactory choice. (Thøgersen et al. 2012, 187.) There's a common assumption that consumer involvement tends to be higher when purchasing green products compared to conventional everyday items (Zanoli & Naspetti 2002). However, green consumers do not necessarily invest more time and effort than other consumers when purchasing food. Green consumers want to minimize time and effort during the purchasing process, so they

easily learn to identify green products. In the case of a first-time choice of a green product, however, choosing a green product would likely involve more consideration. (Thøgersen et al. 2012, 194-195.)

Lastly, it is worth noting how green marketing practices affect consumer behavior. Food stores' green marketing can improve both product image and brand reputation, motivate consumers to buy green food, and increase purchasing frequency. (Mohd Suki 2018; Verhoef 2006.) Developing a positive product image through green marketing could influence customers in their final decision-making process (Mohd Suki 2018, 405). The effects of green marketing practices on consumer purchase intention and behavior are discussed more specifically in Chapter 3.

2.2 Motives behind firms practicing greenwashing

Since there is a demand for green products, an increasing number of firms engage in communication about the greenness of their products, aiming at capitalizing on the opportunities in the green product markets (TerraChoice 2009). Green marketing has emerged as an effective way for businesses to gain a competitive edge (Zhang et al. 2018), as it can influence customers purchasing behavior (Mohd Suki 2018, 405). Some firms try to capitalize on the demand for green products by greenwashing their products (Ende et al. 2023).

The phenomenon of greenwashing can pose risks to consumer trust in environmentally friendly products, potentially even reducing the demand for green products (Furlow 2009, 22-25). Green consumers can become more skeptical about green advertising, which can lead to a decline in the demand for green products (Delmas & Blass 2010) and a loss of consumer trust among retailers (Guyader et al. 2017, 324). Similarly, greenwashing can also negatively impact investors' confidence in firms promoting themselves environmentally friendly. So, as greenwashing can diminish consumer demand, it can also weaken the capital market for socially responsible investing. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 65-72.) In addition, practicing greenwashing can also damage the greenwashing company if the firm faces lawsuits or fines for false advertising (Lane 2010). Therefore, it is important to examine what drives firms to use greenwashing despite the risks.

One of the key drivers of greenwashing is the lack and uncertainty of regulation. In different regions, there is significant variation in regulation. For example, in the US,

regulation of greenwashing is notably limited, and the enforcement of these few regulations is extremely uncertain. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 69-70.) In the US, it is prohibited to advertise deceptively or unfairly (Federal Trade Commission 20.12.2022), but the enforcement is less strict than in the EU, which recently accepted a new law prohibiting misleading product information and greenwashing (European Parliament 17.1.2024), making greenwashing even more difficult in the EU. So, if a region has little regulation on greenwashing or very few mandatory disclosures of environmental impacts, it makes it easier to get away with greenwashing, since stakeholders are not able to acquire reliable information about the firm's environmental actions. So, voluntary disclosure is largely ineffective in preventing greenwashing. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 69-70.)

Another driver for greenwashing is consumer and investor demand for green products as well as competitive pressure (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 66-72). These so-called market-related drivers play a crucial role in explaining why firms resort to greenwashing. Firms experience pressure to portray themselves as environmentally responsible or environmentally friendly, especially if there are few legal consequences for greenwashing actions. Generally, the stronger the perceived demand from consumers and investors for eco-friendly practices, the more inclined a firm is to engage in greenwashing. (Vos 2009.) Also, the competitive environment influences the choice of whether to promote environmental performance positively. Firms often model themselves after others in their industry that they view as more legitimate or successful, which extends to the adoption of green practices as well. (Delmas & Toffel 2008.)

Drivers for greenwashing can also stem from organizational characteristics. The characteristics of a firm, such as size, industry, and profitability, significantly influence the possible strategies a firm can choose, the costs and benefits of its actions, and the level of external pressures. For example, firms that are large and public or offer consumer products face more pressure to appear green than small, private service firms. However, large profitable firms can withstand pressure, media scrutiny, reputation damage, as well as costs of being sued or fined more easily than less profitable firms. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 66-73.)

Organizational characteristics also include ethical standards, which can motivate greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 66-73). The ethical standards or ethical climate

of a firm refers to the shared perceptions or beliefs of a firm that determine the norms for decision-making (Cullen et al. 2003). Greenwashing occurs more likely when firms don't have specific pre-determined ethics codes and clear standards, which emphasize the importance of honest communication (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 74).

The drivers of greenwashing can also be examined on an individual level. On an individual level, narrow decision-making, prioritizing short-term gains, and being overly optimistic can contribute to greenwashing. Leaders and managers have an important role when deciding environmental communication tactics. They can for example over-estimate the positive effects of greenwashing and under-estimate the negative consequences, which can impact the likelihood of choosing to greenwash. Under uncertain and limited regulatory rules, these tendencies can become stronger and influence the firms' decision-making when it comes to greenwashing. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 66-77.)



Figure 1: Main motives behind firms' engagement in greenwashing in food packaging

Figure 1 illustrates the main drivers of greenwashing in the food packaging industry. The key motives include lack of regulation, ability to influence consumer behavior through

green marketing, competitive pressure deriving from consumer and investor demand, organizational characteristics, such as ethical standards, profitability, industry, and size of the organization as well as individual characteristics, such as managers' decision-making tendencies. These motives influence firms' engagement in greenwashing in food packaging.

In conclusion, environmental concerns have caught the attention of multiple stakeholders, including environmentally conscious consumers whose awareness and knowledge have significantly expanded over recent decades. This increased awareness is reflected in consumer behavior, influencing purchasing habits and consumer behavior towards an eco-friendlier lifestyle. Consumers buy green food due to their personal values, environmental knowledge and concern, perceived quality as well as trust in farmers and firms. Consumers also purchase green food out of habit and are influenced by green marketing. The increasing demand for green products and the ability to influence consumer behavior have motivated many companies to communicate the environmental attributes of their products. However, some firms resort to greenwashing to leverage the green market. Lack of ethical standards within the organization and uncertain regulation of greenwashing drive firms to greenwash as well as competitive pressure and individual decision-making tendencies of managers.

3 Tactics in greenwashing

3.1 Visual techniques

Advertisement is a common mechanism to communicate green messages. Marketers try to utilize environmentally conscious consumers' concerns by falsely claiming environmental conduct in advertising (Shrum et al. 1995, 71). Green ads typically focus on the connection between a product and the natural environment, advocate for an environmentally responsible lifestyle, and emphasize a corporate environmental image or responsibility (Banerjee et al. 1995).

Visual elements play a crucial role in every aspect of a company's strategy, operations, and communication (Bell et al. 2014, 1-16). A firm may use visual techniques to generate a greener brand image. Using nature-evoking elements in advertising artificially persuades or even misleads consumers to have a better ecological image of a firm. (Parguel et al. 2015, 107.) Images in advertising that mimic pleasant nature scenery can arouse emotions similar to those experienced in an actual nature setting. This emotional response often leads to more favorable attitudes towards the brand being advertised. Pictures of nature in advertisements can change how people see a brand's environmental efforts. (Hartmann et al. 2009; 2013.)

Visual cues generate meanings and influence individuals' thoughts and emotions. When a firm uses visual greenwashing techniques, they use nature-evoking elements to mislead consumers into associating a brand or a product with environmentally friendly attributes. (Parguel 2015, 107.) This nature-evoking imaginary has an impact on consumer's attention attraction and purchase intentions (Schmuck et al. 2018a, 423-424). The elements can be colors, pictures, or icons for example. Consumers often link these elements to have actual information about the environmental characteristics of a product, much like they do with labels that accurately and transparently convey information about a product's eco-friendly qualities. (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibanez 2009.)

Colors convey meanings inherently and have the ability to influence consumers' perceptions. The color green is usually associated with nature and safety and is used to signal an eco-friendly product to consumers. Green is an effective color when the goal is to link a product to environmental friendliness, enhance consumer attitudes, and boost purchase intentions. (Lim et al. 2020, 557-558.) Green is found to be associated most with

positive environmental impacts, and it has evolved into a visual tool for persuasive communication utilized by companies engaging in greenwashing tactics (Seo & Scammon 2017).

Another way of visual greenwashing firms may use include the utilization of symbols and imagery (Parguel et al. 2015, 108). Through nature imagery, firms usually try to connect the firm somehow directly to nature, highlighting attributes like reduced impact. Firms may also emphasize nature as the source of the product, implying that their product is inherently of high quality or healthy. Also, firms may exploit nature imagery just to vaguely associate a product with nature. (Merten 1993, 39-40.) For example, a popular theme in packaging imagery often revolves around the origin of the food. For instance, a can of crushed tomatoes might showcase an Italian landscape, hinting at the origin of the tomatoes. (Wagner 2015.) Parguel et al. (2015, 108) categorize nature-evoking elements into three: (1) pictures of nature-evoking landscapes, such as mountains, forests, and oceans, (2) endangered animal species, such as pandas and dolphins, and (3) renewable sources of energy, such as waterfalls and windmills. With this tactic, a firm can spread a greener image of their products.

Boncinelli et al. (2023, 7) studied how the use of green packaging affects consumer purchasing preferences in chocolate bars. Their results indicated that greenwashed food packaging could potentially expand their market share compared to non-greenwashed food products. Therefore, it is clear that the use of the color green is an effective way of greenwashing and raises concerns about the effects. For example, the reputation of environmentally conscious companies can be harmed by the greenwashing practices of other firms. However, the nature of visual greenwashing, like images or colors, is implicit, making greenwashing harder for consumers to recognize in food packaging, yet effective in misleading them.

Not all studies, however, share the same results of the behavioral consequences of greenwashing. Hem et al. (2003) did not uncover any scientific studies addressing the advertising effects of specific representations of nature in their review of the relevant literature. However, some researchers (e.g. Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibanez 2009, 716) argue, that despite Hem and colleagues' (2003) research, it is reasonable to assume that consumers' exposure to nature scenes in advertising would result in distinct patterns of perceptual and behavioral outcomes.

3.2 Verbal techniques

Typography and text on packages are used to convey messages, such as brand, nutritional facts, ingredients, health warnings, stories, or slogans (Wagner 2015). Typography is sometimes filled with connotations and metaphors, and it possesses significant suggestive and evocative power (Van Leeuwen 2006, 146). Firms use language and verbal tactics to appeal to consumers. Many green vocabulary, phrases, and words are used to make false claims about the environmental attributes of a product. Through written information and textual elements, firms can overstate the environmental benefits or diminish their environmental impacts on consumers. (Schmuck et al. 2018b, 139.)

Terms such as green, eco-friendly, organic, sustainable, Earth-friendly, or all-natural are usually associated with pro-environmental products with a low impact on the environment, and the use of these terms has become more popular than ever. (Benz 2000; Baum 2012; Parguel et al. 2015.) Firms may also use rather neutral words, such as ‘origins’ in advertisements for the purpose of it being misread as ‘organic’ (Wagner 2015). With these vague verbal greenwashing claims, a firm may evoke perceptions and positively influence attitudes toward its products (Schmuck et al. 2018b, 130).

In addition to text, typography may be used by firms to appear greener than they are. Typography can include symbols, such as making a letter look like a leaf or a vine. Typography can also mimic a certain era, typically the 1970s when the environmental movement gained popularity. So, it is also notable, that single greenwashing elements can’t operate alone, and a food package may include multiple characteristics of greenwashing. For example, symbols, even though their picture-like nature, is often combined with text. Many firms want to utilize multiple signaling methods and semiotic resources when communicating a message. (Wagner 2015.)

When it comes to the effectiveness of greenwashing, utilizing visual nature-evoking imagery is often found the key method to associating products with a green image (Segev et al. 2016; Schmuck et al. 2018b). However, combining both visual and communicational techniques increases the number of arguments presented by the packaging, which significantly strengthens greenwashing perceptions, enhances how consumers assess ads, and impacts consumers’ purchase intentions (Petty & Caccioppo 1984; Magnier & Schoormans 2015; Schmuck et al. 2018b). Therefore, when false claims

are paired with appealing nature imagery, it makes the advertisement more persuasive, shapes people's attitudes towards advertisements, and changes purchase behavior.

However, the beneficial impact of an ecological verbal claim on packaging isn't straightforward. While it may enhance positive attitudes towards the package and increase purchase intent, it could also have negative consequences if individuals begin to doubt the sustainability claim. (Magnier & Schoormans 2015, 54.) Multiple studies show that people who obtain a high awareness, knowledge, and receptiveness towards environmental issues and communication, are more skeptical towards green marketing (Shrum et al. 1995; Schuhwek & Lefkoff-Hagius 1995; Schmuck et al. 2018a, Schmuck et al. 2018b). So, even combining both visual and verbal greenwashing tactics, green consumers may react skeptically to advertisements, which may affect purchase intentions negatively (Magnier & Schoormans 2015, 54).

3.3 Sustainability labels and certifications

Today, firms are under a lot of pressure to report their environmental performance to stakeholders. After sustainability in the food industry gained popularity as a topic, firms started to use product certifications to appear more environmentally conscious. However, some certifications and labels are not entirely verifiable, making a firm's environmental communication misleading to consumers. (Torelli et al. 2020, 409.) Greenwashing a product with certifications and labels refers to firms making false claims about the environmental traits of a product by using certified or uncertified labels that don't entirely coincide with the actual environmental performance. (Garrido et al. 2020, 1802). Many labels may also not be checked for authenticity by a third-party agency, making them unverified (Czarnezki et al. 2014, 37-38). In food and beverage markets, this trend has resulted in an increase in product claims related to their production processes and sourcing, such as organic and fair trade certifications (Stanton et al. 2011, 8-11).

With product certifications, firms are able to signal to consumers that the product adheres to ethical or sustainable practices. This market signal allows the company to acquire an increase in sales (Cason and Gangadharan 2002, 129), distinguish its product as well as appeal to customers and consumers who prioritize the certified practice. Also, certified products can be sold at higher prices compared to products lacking such characteristics. (Rousu & Corrigan, 2008, 53-55.) Consumers tend to favor more detailed information on green claims, and they tend to react more positively to claims that are tangible. Also,

customers are willing to pay more for products with certifications. (Manrai et al. 1997, 533.) Also, firms are able to create co-branding initiatives between the company and the certification organization through certifications, since many labels or claims also reveal details about the name of a third-party organization (Freedhoff & Hebert, 2011, 291-292). However, the process of obtaining a certification can be lengthy and costly, which is why many firms make the decision to use uncertified claims (Garrido et al. 2020, 1803).

One popular product certification that can be greenwashed is fair trade. The form of co-branding illustrates the fair trade goods market, in which there are multiple competing certification organizations, each presenting slightly varied standards and compliance procedures (DiMarcello et al. 2014.) The Fairtrade Labeling Organizations - International (FLO-I) functions as a central authority for numerous major certifiers, regulating the design and administration of fair trade core standards. However, variations exist in how standards are established, inspected, and promoted on a product-specific basis. Hence, approaches to fair trade claims are likely to vary across different markets and organizations. (Marconi et al. 2017, 161.) Also, firms label products as ‘supporting’ fair trade or claim to follow fair trade ‘practices’, which often indicates that even though the product may involve sustainable attributes, the product lacks any specific standards and there is no assurance of supply chain monitoring, transparency, guaranteed floor prices, or ethical conditions (DiMarcello et al. 2014).

Since many eco-certifications and eco-labels are self-declared or unverifiable, it creates challenges for consumers in recognizing labeling schemes by firms that lack transparency in labeling and certification (Czarnezki et al. 2014, 37-38). Since consumers cannot perfectly observe how a product is produced or directly verify green attributes, many rely on product labels and certifications (Garrido et al. 2020, 1802). Greenwashing certifications and label schemes result in confusion among consumers as well as reduce consumer trust in labels (OECD 2010). Especially in food products, that people ingest, consumers have an increased need for accurate information about their contents and origin. As a result, consumers may be more aware of claims regarding food products, which makes accurate and verified eco-labels crucial for companies. (Atkinson & Rosenthal 2014, 40-41).

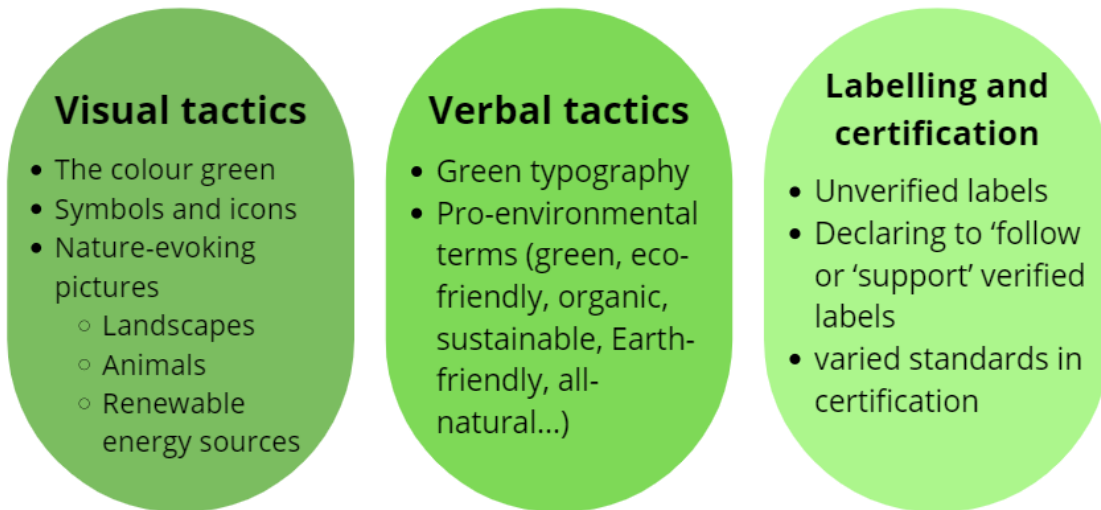


Figure 2: Main tactics of greenwashing utilized in food packaging.

Figure 2 illustrates the main tactics that firms use when exploiting greenwashing as a marketing technique in food packaging. These tactics can be divided into three categories, visual tactics, verbal tactics as well as labelling and certification. The main elements of visual tactics include the use of the color green and nature-evoking pictures: of landscapes, animals, and renewable energy sources. Main verbal tactics include the utilization of green typography and pro-environmental terms, such as green, eco-friendly, organic, sustainable, Earth-friendly, and all-natural. Labeling and certification tactics include the use of unverified and self-declared labels, declaring to 'follow' or 'support' verified labels, or utilizing labels and certifications that have varied standards in competing certification organizations.

In conclusion, as advertisement serves as a common way for firms to communicate green messages, marketers are able to exploit consumers' environmental concerns by falsely presenting products as environmentally friendly. Firms can engage in this behavior by greenwashing their products' food packaging. Key greenwashing tactics include visual and verbal tactics as well as unverified ecolabels and certifications. They play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes towards brands, influencing purchase intentions, and impacting consumer behavior, but also contribute to consumer confusion and reduced trust in labeling schemes, especially in food products where accurate information is crucial.

4 Conclusions

The rise of heightened awareness of environmental issues has led consumers to make an increasing amount of environmentally sustainable consumption decisions. The increasing awareness of environmental issues has sparked interest among various stakeholders, including environmentally conscious consumers. Over recent decades, consumers have become more engaged in environmental protection efforts, resulting in a shift in personal behaviors and values. This growing emphasis on environmental concerns has led consumers to recognize the environmental impact of their purchasing habits, encouraging them to change their lifestyles. Therefore, firms have faced more and more pressure to use green marketing strategies. Firms that seek to match consumer values and gain competitive advantage might resort to misleading consumers about their environmental practices and product benefits, thus engaging in greenwashing.

Consumers are significantly influenced by their values, environmental concerns, and knowledge. In the realm of food consumption, quality remains a vital factor for consumers, with green food products often perceived as higher quality and healthier. Trust also plays a crucial role in food purchasing decisions, and consumers rely on trust towards farmers and certifications. While consumers' personal attributes, such as values and knowledge, significantly influence their intention to purchase green food, there are complexities in translating attitudes into actual behavior. Consumers' level of involvement varies, with some opting for green products simply out of habit. In addition, green advertising by food stores can enhance product image and brand reputation, motivating consumers to purchase green food and increase purchasing frequency.

This increasing demand for green products has led more firms to communicate about the environmental attributes of their products, aiming at utilizing the opportunities in green markets. Even though greenwashing poses many risks, such as a possible decrease in trust and demand for green products among consumers and a decline in investor confidence in environmentally conscious firms as well as the risks of facing lawsuits and fines, still many firms choose to engage in greenwashing.

Regulation plays a crucial role, with varying degrees of enforcement across regions. For instance, the US has limited regulation on greenwashing compared to the EU. The lack of regulation makes it easier for firms to engage in greenwashing practices. Market-

related drivers, such as consumer and investor demand for green products, as well as competitive pressure, also encourage firms to present themselves as environmentally friendly, particularly when there are no strict legal consequences for greenwashing. Additionally, organizational characteristics, including firm size, industry, and ethical standards, influence the likelihood of greenwashing, as do individual-level factors like decision-making tendencies and managerial influence. Understanding these drivers is crucial for mitigating greenwashing and promoting genuine environmental responsibility in business practices.

Firms spread this green image of their products through advertising. Advertising serves as a common avenue for communicating green messages, with companies often leveraging environmentally conscious consumers' concerns by making false environmental claims. In this dissertation, these greenwashing advertising tactics are categorized into three groups: visual tactics, verbal tactics, and labeling.

Firstly, visual elements play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions towards green products as well as influencing purchase intention and consumer behavior. Nature-evoking imagery, such as landscapes and endangered animal species, creates an emotional connection with consumers, leading to more favorable attitudes toward brands. The color green, often associated with nature, is effectively utilized by firms to signal eco-friendly attributes. Visual cues play a significant role in greenwashing tactics, as they effectively mislead consumers into perceiving products as more environmentally friendly than they actually are. However, the implicit nature of visual greenwashing makes it challenging for consumers to recognize, highlighting the need for increased transparency and authenticity in green marketing efforts.

Secondly, verbal strategies, including the use of language and typography, are employed by firms to convey green messages and influence consumer perceptions. Terms like "green," "eco-friendly," and "organic" are commonly used when engaging in greenwashing. Typography, through the use of symbols and era-specific styles, further reinforces the green image of products. However, the effectiveness of verbal greenwashing tactics is not straightforward, as environmentally conscious consumers may react skeptically to green claims. Despite the potential positive impact on attitudes and purchase intentions, the use of vague verbal claims raises concerns about consumer trust and authenticity in green marketing.

Lastly, sustainability labels and certifications are utilized by firms to signal ethical or sustainable practices, aiming to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers. Certifications such as fair trade and organic are intended to differentiate products and improve consumer trust. However, the use of self-declared or unverifiable certifications has led to confusion among consumers and reduced trust in labels. As consumers increasingly rely on product labels and certifications to make informed purchasing decisions, the need for transparent and verified eco-labels becomes crucial, particularly in food products where accurate information about contents and origin is significantly important for consumer trust.

Ultimately, as the demand for green products continues to rise, it becomes vital for firms to adopt genuine and transparent environmental practices to build trust and credibility with consumers. Instances such as Coca-Cola's misleading claims about its plastic bottles highlight the importance of truthfulness and transparency in marketing efforts. Regulatory measures, such as those enforced by the European Union, aim to tackle greenwashing and ensure that truthful information will reach consumers and other stakeholders. Creating a regulatory framework for greenwashing has grown in popularity in the world, especially in the EU, where unfair green marketing practices will be prohibited even more strictly after recently adopting new laws about banning greenwashing. So, despite the potential benefits of green marketing, advocacy for truthfulness and transparency remains essential in fostering consumer trust as well as promoting genuine environmental sustainability.

Future research should deepen our understanding of consumer behavior in response to different greenwashing tactics. Investigating how consumer skepticism and the effectiveness of green marketing education, for example, influence the perception of greenwashing among consumers can provide valuable insights into consumer behavior and greenwashing. Also, examining the effectiveness of legislative measures targeted to tackle greenwashing could provide useful insights into how laws influence and shape the behavior of businesses. Researching recent changes in regulatory systems, such as the EU's adaptation of new laws and directives, could identify areas of improvement in legislation as well as promote genuine sustainability.

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Appendix

Artificial Intelligence (ChatGPT) was used to generate ideas for the structure of the thesis and create keywords for searching relevant articles. ChatGPT was also used to rephrase text in chapters two and three. AI (Grammarly) was also used to help correct grammar errors and perfect language in the whole text.