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**BECOMING RIGHTFULLY GREEN: HOW INDUSTRIAL COMPANIES LEGITIMATE
THEIR GREEN BRANDS FOR THEIR CUSTOMERS**

Master's Thesis

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Abstract			
<p>Industrial companies are heavily tied together with environmental sustainability, whether they wanted it or not. Manufacturers and suppliers are both required to adapt for changing environmental regulations that affect their operations. Becoming more sustainable, and meeting environmental legislative minimum requirements is a requirement for staying operational. When most of the companies are forced to slowly become more sustainable, the challenge is trying to stand out from them. While avoiding the stigma of a greenwasher, how can these industrial companies' brands become rightfully green?</p> <p>Purpose of this study is to find ways how industrial suppliers can legitimate their green brands for their B2B customers. Sustainability issues that are important for consumers, might not be similarly viewed in industrial business-to-business relationships. That is why studying industrial companies in their own ecosystems is important, rather than comparing them directly to consumer markets. In addition, this study aims to integrate literature from sustainable industrial branding, and literature from legitimacy and legitimation which have been scarcely combined with B2B branding.</p> <p>Empirical data of this study was collected from 19 theme interviews. An engine manufacturer was selected as the focal company for this study, and two of its forest machine manufacturer customers were selected representing the customer's viewpoint. Individual persons were interviewed from multiple roles and departments of these companies varying between product developers, account managers and purchasers, managers, and persons in director roles. From their own industries, studied companies gave a good representation of brands in a journey towards greenness.</p> <p>Based on this study, several physical, non-physical, and mixture of physical and non-physical sources of green brand legitimacy were found. Especially unique findings were elements of nature such as facilities constructed out of wood, and sense of pureness and cleanliness of production facilities. In addition, nine strategies for justifying green brands were identified. These nine strategies were named as the following: rhetoric sustainability, nature elements, mimicking, external validation, certification, project participation, internal acceptance, pureness, and supervision. Findings of this study are relevant for industrial suppliers in their journey of justifying their green brands for their customers.</p>			
Keywords Domesticated market, sustainable branding, industrial branding, green legitimation, B2B brand legitimacy			
Additional information			

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the topic

This master's thesis is carried out as part of University of Oulu's GREEF project. The goal for this thesis is to help industrial companies utilize environmental sustainability and branding in ways which improve their brand and competitiveness in the market. Companies are facing growing pressure from stakeholders such as customers, competitors, and legislators to improve their environmental performance. This manifests in several ways such as new environmental laws being established and stakeholders demanding new types of information from companies (Mousa & Hassan, 2015). Carbon neutrality has been on the center stage in discussion all over the world in recent years. Carbon footprints and climate change are society's major challenges that corporate responsibility tries to resolve (Hrasky, 2012). Responding to this increasing public pressure for environmental sustainability issues (Alrazi et al., 2015), there is a growing trend of companies signaling their commitments to these issues by incorporating ISO 14001 sustainability certificates to their operations (To & Lee, 2014). Another common method for providing information to the public is providing voluntary corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports (Reverte, 2012), but Markovic et al. (2018) emphasize that corporate brands need to use more authentic ways of communicating about CSR activities than just traditional reports.

Even if companies would have sustainability certificates and regular sustainability reports, stakeholders are facing challenges evaluating environmental actions of companies, because they often lack necessary information to do so (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011). Because of this information asymmetry, stakeholders must search for clues that deliver information about company's current and future environmental commitments (Berrone et al., 2017). Without proper information, there is a likelihood of misinterpretation and unharnessed competitive advantage. If there is a possibility to proactively improve the corporate brand with environmental sustainability, gain competitive advantage and avoid negative publicity – why more companies do not take advantage of those benefits?

Because perception of something being justified, also known as being legitimate, is a dynamic process (Suddaby et al., 2017), practices that once were seen justified can be currently viewed as unsustainable, and not legitimate anymore. If organizations are not doing what is considered 'right', society can withdraw organization's mandate to operate because society has given the right to exist for organizations in the first place. This leads to the situation where every organization is accountable for society, and they must constantly demonstrate justification for their existence. (Woodward, Edwards & Birkin, 1996.)

Changing to a green corporate brand does not happen by itself. It requires time, effort, and cooperation from multiple parties internally and externally. Because of initial investments required (Li et al., 2018), changing to a green brand might require internal approval and justification for the process. When organizations go through fundamental changes like these, legitimation is required (Erkama & Vaara, 2010). If industrial suppliers have a history of being detrimental to the environment, they might face problems trying to justify their new green brand. In those situations, openly communicating about environmental actions might be even detrimental to the brand, if those environmental actions are not significant enough (Berrone, Fosfuri & Gelabert, 2017). However, companies must start somewhere, even if the first actions would not be highly expensive environmental investments or patents.

This study examines a case company which is a subsidiary of a large multinational corporation. This case company mainly operates within the corporation's boundaries, conducting business transactions among its other subsidiaries. This market situation between subsidiaries of a same corporation is referred to as a domesticated market (Arndt, 1979). Both the case company and the corporation operate in industries with business-to-business customers. Because the case company is trying to gain new customers outside of the domesticated market, differentiation and competitive advantage building factors of branding and sustainability are studied in this master's thesis. This research focuses on two areas. First, justification for the case company's green brand in industrial B2B relationships. Second, learning about the importance of the green brand outside of the domesticated market.

1.2 Prior research and motivation for the study

B2B branding has slowly evolved from branding being seen as irrelevant in 1972-1991, to some acknowledged benefits being recognized in 1992-2006, to modern day where the focus has been on subjects of brand equity and buyer-supplier relationships in industrial firms (Seyedghorban, Matanda & LaPlaca, 2016). Because the viewpoint has been mainly focusing on organizational buyers, Scandeliu and Cohen (2016a) suggest that more branding research on broader stakeholder perspectives is required.

A good foundation of research exists already on branding activities in B2B networks (Mäläskä, Saraniemi & Tähtinen, 2011; Merz, He & Vargo, 2009; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018), corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Carroll, 2016; Hur et al., 2014; Perez-Batres et al., 2012; Scandeliu & Cohen, 2016b), and generally on the development of branding (Merz et al., 2009; Veloutsou & Guzmán, 2017). Some specific genres of B2B branding, such as industrial branding (Webster & Keller, 2004) and corporate branding (Hatch & Schultz, 2003) are researched much more compared to branding being combined with sustainability (Kumar & Christodoulopoulou, 2014) such as green and conscious branding (Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Wang, 2019).

Even if combining sustainability to corporate branding is a popular phenomenon, systematic study of it has been scarce compared to the wide spread of it (Lahtinen & Närvänen, 2020). The need for more research combining ethics and corporate brands is also supported by Iglesias et al. (2019) and Sierra et al. (2017). There is also ambiguity for what kind of companies, industries (Brower & Mahajan, 2013), or brands (Iglesias et al., 2019) benefit the most from CSR or ethical practices. Currently, there is at least evidence that implementing CSR to large companies with focus on the corporate brand has positive effects (Brower & Mahajan, 2013). However, companies have struggled to integrate marketing and operations to create environmental sustainability, which Kumar and Christodoulopoulou (2014) believe is achieved using branding. Vesal et al. (2021) point out that even though B2B manufacturers have invested massively to environmental sustainability, studies have trouble estimating their impact on the brand.

Brands and branding have been previously linked to legitimacy (e.g. Guo et al., 2017; Hakala et al., 2017; Kates, 2004; Rentschler et al., 2021), but for most studies conducted, the focus has been purely on B2C brands or brands that have both B2C and B2B customers, such as the energy sector (Guo et al., 2018). Recently Gustafson and Pomirleanu (2021) studied industrial B2B brands and legitimacy in their research paper, strongly suggesting that the topic receives further attention. Companies wanting to be seen as legitimate face a problem: being justified cannot be simply demanded. Instead, this status needs to be built by influencing society's perception of the company. (Woodward et al., 1996.) The literature is currently insufficient in the topic of building B2B brand legitimacy from individual level to groups, communities, and larger networks (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021). According to Debenedetti et al. (2021) this justification is a widely examined topic in different fields, but studies have mainly focused on legitimation strategies in new markets instead of mature markets. To conclude, constructing B2B brand legitimacy is an ecosystem wide and understudied process (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021), which this study aims to further examine.

When subsidiaries are making business transactions to each other within the same corporation, or to the corporation itself, this referred as a domesticated market (Arndt, 1979). Other terms such as brand ecosystem (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018), brand network (Hawkins, 2017), or internal market (Birkinshaw, 2000) could also be used to describe the context within the corporation. However, domesticated market is the most fitting term for describing that situation, and it is used to describe it in this study.

According to Kapitan et al. (2019) B2B brands are unsure of their positioning about sustainability issues. Certificates and standards are becoming even more common (Ikram et al., 2021; Richards et al., 2017), and that is why they alone cannot provide enough differentiation from other B2B brands having the same merits. This affects especially B2B buyers, who have problems clearly distinguishing brands that are 'greenwashing' and brands that really are superior in sustainability issues (Kapitan et al., 2019). Ensuring an interesting, understandable, and transparent communication of sustainability issues is needed for the general improvement of not only industrial brands, but for the environment and other stakeholders as well. That is why this study

takes a holistic perspective on branding, and theme interviews are conducted for participants from various departments.

During this study, the term ‘sustainable industrial branding (Kampman, 2021), is chosen to describe sustainability focused branding that is practiced by industrial companies. In the headline and several sections of the study, the term ‘green brand’ is used to refer to ‘sustainable industrial brand’. This choice was made for clarification and simplifying purposes. In some instances, environmental sustainability is used to highlight environmental aspects that are examined. To conclude, in the scope of this study, the focus is on the environmental dimension of sustainability.

1.3 Research objectives and questions

Problems integrating sustainability to companies’ daily operations are widely present (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014), and they manifest in multiple forms from individual’s bad choices to company level greenwashing (Guo et al., 2018). Justifying brand’s existence and courses of action that make it greener require strategies for doing that. This is especially relevant for industrial companies in pollution-intensive fields, which face growing pressure to be environmentally sustainable. This change is a challenge which requires cooperation from multiple parties internally and outside of the industrial companies. Overall, the study aims to explore two continuous processes of sustainable industrial branding and legitimation that industrial companies can use to make their brands rightfully greener towards their customers. Therefore, the main research question is the following:

How do suppliers legitimate their green brands for their B2B customers?

Understanding what legitimation is in the context of branding requires both thorough examination of prior literature and empirical data gathered in this study. To fully answer the main research question three sub-questions are formed. They narrow the focus to the context of this study’s case company and provide distinct goals that empirical part aims to fulfil. SQ1 tries to find existing ways that industrial companies are doing for legitimating their green brands. These could be planned or unplanned courses of action that companies are doing. SQ2 searches for concrete sources that

create legitimacy. Many legitimacy creating actions or constructions such as websites or contracts can be applied in numerous contexts, but in the context of sustainable B2B brands, more specific data is needed. Making this more interesting, sources of physical and non-physical legitimacy might be unexpected and even accidentally created. SQ3 aims to gain clarity for the justification process towards brands' customers in the context of sustainable industrial branding. These three sub-questions are the following:

SQ1: How do industrial companies legitimate their green brands?

SQ2: What are the sources of green brand legitimacy?

SQ3: How industrial companies integrate green brand legitimation into sustainable industrial branding?

1.4 Key concepts

Brand

Brands are “complex multidimensional constructs with varying degrees of meaning, independence, co-creation and scope. Brands are semiotic marketing systems that generate value for direct and indirect participants, society, and the broader environment, through the exchange of co-created meaning” (Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015, p. 11). It needs to be noted that there is a difference between a product brand and the company's corporate brand. Product brands are aimed mainly towards customers. Corporate brands are significantly meaningful for also other stakeholders, as they are the one aiming towards long-lasting relationships with different stakeholders. (Balmer, 2012.)

Brand equity

Brand equity is determined as the added value that branded offerings get from the brand (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). In other words, it can be the brand's added value compared to unbranded alternatives which manifests in price premium and positive attitudes.

Brand image

Persson (2010) defines brand image being of any associations that customers have about a brand, whether they would be physical or non-physical and based on real life experiences or not. Iglesias et al. (2020) widen the definition about a corporate brand image, which is seen as the perceptions about the brand that both internal and external stakeholders have. In that sense, employees can have their own brand image about the company's brand, and brand image can be in the mind of B2B customers, local residents, shareholders, or any other stakeholders.

Brand identity

Traditionally, purpose of brand identity was being a managerial tool which aimed to position and differentiate the brand based on its fundamental attributes and characteristics (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). Brand identity is a driving factor for brands desired positioning, personality, and relationships with stakeholders (de Chernatony, 1999). In other words, brand identity tells the core characteristic, wants and goals of a brand from a managerial point of view. However, recent published research has increasingly challenged the assumption that corporate brand identity would be merely an internal creation (Kristal et al., 2020). Iglesias et al. (2020) further examine corporate brand identity co-creation in B2B context. At the beginning of corporate brand identity co-creation process, corporate brand identity is largely built upon the values of its founder(s). When ongoing co-creation process continues, interactions with internal and external stakeholders further evolve the corporate brand identity. To conclude, corporate brand identity changes over time and in that sense, it is the temporary and ongoing outcome of the co-creation process. (Iglesias et al., 2020.)

Branding

Webster and Keller (2004) state that branding is a fundamental marketing activity that means managing the brand. Perhaps a polarizing opinion from Iglesias and Ind (2020) is the idea that managerial control over brand is merely an illusion, but if left unmanaged as a strategic asset brand will end up being aimlessly managed by

customers (Webster & Keller, 2004). Even if total control could not be gained Keller and Lehmann (2006) argue branding being a top management priority because brand's role as being one of the companies most valuable intangible assets. Corporate branding can be defined as managing and aligning three important elements that are vision (managers), culture (employees) and image (stakeholders), and the gaps (image-vision, vision-culture, image-culture) that are between the three elements. Vision is about the management's goals for the company, culture is about individual's behaviors, attitudes and organization's values, and image is about the overall perception of the company for all stakeholders. (Hatch & Schultz, 2001.)

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a complex, multileveled, social phenomenon (Suddaby et al., 2017), which can be defined as a "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Being socially constructed refers to legitimacy objects (e.g. organizations or brands) acting according to mutually agreed and shared beliefs and understandings of a social group (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021).

Legitimation

Instead of viewing legitimacy as a static state that an entity either has or not, legitimation can be seen as the process which builds legitimacy (Suddaby et al., 2017).

Reputation

Reputation is a perception or a belief that a single person or a group of people have about someone or something (Merlo, Lukas, and Whitwell, 2012). This belief is socially constructed (Rao, 1994), meaning that reputation is a generated from combined views of multiple people (Merlo et al., 2012). Objects of reputation can have general awareness and visibility (*being known*), or they can have specific qualities that generate awareness and visibility (*being known for something*). Overall, reputation

leads to outcome of generalized favorability which determines the general perception of good, attractiveness and properness. (Lange, Lee & Dai, 2011.)

1.5 Research structure

In chapters 2-4, theoretical framework for the thesis is presented. Chapter 2 focuses on mature B2B industrial ecosystem, chapter 3 focuses on sustainable industrial branding, and chapter 4 focuses on green brand legitimation.

Chapter 5 describes in detail the methodology used and provides justification for the chosen methods. Empirical data is collected using 19 theme interviews from the case company, its customers and two other parties from the industry. Selection criteria for customers was that they had to be external customers and not part of the corporation. In addition, they were all selected within the same field of forest machine manufacturers. Customers from other fields were not included in this study.

Chapter 6 presents the empirical findings and conclusion for these empirical findings. In addition, strategies identified based on the empirical data are compared to prior literature. Chapter 7 presents the conclusion of the study, managerial implications, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

2 MATURE B2B INDUSTRIAL ECOSYSTEM

2.1 Industrial markets and industrial companies

According to Webster and Keller (2004) industrial markets have distinctive type of customers who are profit-motivated and budget-constrained. Products or services itself are not the distinctive factor of a market being industrial or not. What defines an industrial market are the buying process, size of customers purchases, concentration of their buying power and lastly the relationship customers demand from their suppliers. (Webster & Keller, 2004.) Even if products would not be the defining factor, Mudambi et al. (1997, p. 435) define industrial products as “products used in manufacturing that are not marketed to the general consuming public”, and state that same principle is valid towards industrial services. Ohnemus (2009) describes industrial goods being often complex, having a substantial amount of product specifications, lines, and variations. Main challenge for industrial marketers is to translate quality to perceived quality, because only making quality products is not enough for improving the brand (Bendixen et al., 2004).

To clarify, industrial products are not limited to being only end products used by the end user. During the manufacturing process, some industrial products, might be consumed during the process (such as industrial filters and abrasives) or they can act as ingredients for the final product (such as a coating or a bearing) (Mcdowell et al., 1997). Almost iconic example is microprocessor manufacturer Intel’s products (microprocessors) that were only a single component inside other brands finalized products with the branding ‘Intel Inside’ (Desai & Keller, 2002; Vaidyanathan & Aggarwal, 2000).

Traditionally B2B exchange focuses on the buyer-seller exchange. Currently, these exchanges can be viewed from an ecosystem perspective rather than the dyadic traditional way. Ecosystems are formed of all the individuals, groups, and communities who are socially hyperconnected. B2B brands must start utilizing new emerging ways to help them gain legitimacy in the brand ecosystem. (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021.)

According to Lambert, Knemeyer and Gardner (2004) the success of companies is heavily derived from relationships with its business partners; therefore, partnerships are vital in supply chain ecosystems. Another benefit of improving relationships with members of the supply chain, is collectively improving the perception stakeholders have about those members' brands (Davis et al., 2009). Overall, in industrial markets where differentiation is becoming even more challenging based on price or quality of products, branding plays a major role (Mudambi et al., 1997). Mudambi (2002) further suggest that branding is important especially towards buyers who are large and complex, and who are responsible for conducting important and high-risk purchases.

2.2 Brand relevance in the B2B purchasing process

High transparency, personal contact, and interaction between customers and suppliers are key distinctions of the B2B marketplace (Baumgarth, 2010). Industrial buying process typically occurs on a long-time span and goes through a sequence of different decision stages involving multiple different actors (Webster & Keller, 2004). The decision process is often formal, and number of customers is lower compared to B2C markets (Baumgarth, 2010). According to Lynch and de Chernatony (2004) in B2B context it is essential to understand that industrial buyers are all influenced by emotional and functional brand attributes which should be communicated both externally and internally. Companies should acknowledge the structures of buyers decision-making units and adapt their strategies according to them (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004). This is a challenge, because industrial customers intentionally avoid revealing to the supplier who are responsible for really making the purchase decision (Bendixen et al., 2004).

Members of the decision-making unit or DMU can have individually different perceptions what they see as important product or service attributes, such as price or technical specifications (Mudambi et al., 1997). Generally in B2B decision-making process, brand is seen less important compared to delivery, price, or technology, but overall its relevance is still significant in the process (Bendixen et al., 2004). Because DMUs might involve people from different roles and units from the company, each of them can have a specific functional specification in mind that matters to them (Brown et al., 2007). Lynch and de Chernatony (2007) suggests that in order to succeed,

industrial B2B brands should try to factor in the various perspectives and needs of the members of the DMU, and communicate also other than the functional values to them, because even industrial buyers are influenced by emotional motivations and not just the rational ones. For example, according to Mudambi (2002) purchasing a well-known brand might provide additional comfort for the buyer seemingly making the right choice, or the buyer can use the purchase as a tool to state something about themselves or their company. Lastly, Davis et al. (2008) point out that buyers are also making decisions based on their personal goals of achieving rewards and recognition.

Webster and Keller (2004) define six roles that the members of a dmU (sometimes referred as a buying centre) can have. Initiators are the ones who start the buying process and define the buying situation. Users are the users of a product or service. Buyers have the authorization rights for the company to spend money. Deciders are the ones choosing among potential candidates. Influencers can either add information or constraints to the buying process. Gatekeepers are able to control the flow of information into the buying process. These six roles can be occupied by multiple individuals, even inside the same role or having multiple roles at the same time. Members of the dmU consists typically between minimum of five to six persons to dozens of members. It is often possible that members outside of the target customer organization such as government officials, members of the marketing channel, or technical advisors take part in the decision-making. (Webster & Keller, 2004.)

Purchase situations can be categorized into three types: new purchase, pure repurchase, or a modified repurchase (Gomes et al., 2016). The modified repurchase is a situation where the buyer wants for any reasons to buy an alternative offering from the same seller compared to the previous purchase (Zablah et al., 2010). Over time, new purchases evolve into pure repurchases as they become routine. Brands have different roles depending on the purchase situation. In new purchase situations brands mainly establish trust, and in repurchases they act as a driver for customer loyalty. (Webster & Keller, 2004.) Brown et al. (2011) found that brand sensitivity, which can be defined as brand having active consideration in buying process, was present in dmUs when perceived risks were relatively low (e.g. repurchases) and high (e.g. new purchases). Therefore, brands can help minimizing risks by choosing a well-known and respected brand in a new purchase situation or they can simplify the decision-making process in

low-risk situation by choosing the obvious choice (Brown et al., 2011). According to Backhaus, Steiner and Lügger (2011) brands have the highest relevance in large investment buying situations, where the brand lowers risk and reduces information search costs. If buyers are accountable or monitored for their purchases, such as in public setting, ethical benefits can improve selection preference (Peloza et al., 2013). Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014) suggest that the same holds largely true also in organizational buying.

According to Webster and Keller (2004) a strong brand becomes more valuable when the buying process becomes more complex. Factors influencing the complexity are the procurement problem at hand, size, and scope of the dmU and time required for the process. The process is constructed from different decision stages which itself can be characterized in multiple different ways, for example including sub-steps or additional steps in the process. A simplified process could be defined as having at least the following stages: 1. Problem recognition, 2. Specification development, 3. Identifying and evaluating of candidates, 4. Choosing to include one or more vendors, 5. Negotiation of buying terms, 6. Performance evaluation, 7. Managing ongoing relationship. (Webster & Keller, 2004.)

2.3 Domesticated markets

The marketing literature has evolved tremendously from the 1970s. Varying collection of different concepts and ideas that emerged from the late 1970s generated the umbrella term of relationship marketing (O'Malley, 2014), where among others Johan Arndt can be seen as one of the pioneers of it (Ehret & Haase, 2012). According to Arndt (1979) a market can be described as domesticated when transactions are moved inside a company or when transactions are moved inside the boundaries of a group of companies that are subject to long-term commitments with each other (Arndt, 1979).

MNCs and subsidiaries can operate in three different markets: the local market which includes competitors, suppliers, customers and regulatory bodies of a host country, the internal market which includes the parent company, headquarters and every corporate controlled affiliates around the world, and the global market which includes competitors, customers and suppliers that are outside of the bounds of local and

internal markets. Every internal market is deeply rooted into an external market, where it transfers value both ways. Individual units, such as subsidiaries, are allowed to make decisions for themselves about what actions to pursue, and what suppliers and customers to develop relationships with. For internal market to work, there needs to be a rewarding incentive system which top management cannot overlook. However, the incentive system should involve both 'hard' and 'soft' components. In the end, subsidiary managers should make the most of their subsidiary's performance, according to the established incentives. It needs to be remembered that internal market system is not a normative model, but a theoretical lens to view MNCs and their subsidiaries. Because of that, internal market approach might be relevant for MNCs who would still want to restrict internal markets in some situations. For example, efficiency is greatly improved by internal markets and becomes the responsibility of subsidiary managers, when as effectiveness does not improve in the same sense. Effectiveness is top management's responsibility, and they must define an incentive system that is guiding those efficient subsidiaries. (Birkinshaw, 2000, p. 21, 115-117.) In other words, in internal markets, subsidiaries are fast at achieving anything (desired or not desired results), but they need help from top management to know the direction towards the desired results.

Autonomous subsidiaries have the freedom to decide most of their value-chain activities relatively independently from the parent company and other subsidiaries (Jarillo & Martínez, 1990). In other words, Ambos, Andersson, and Birkinshaw (2010) define autonomy as the scope which dictates what decisions subsidiary managers can make without head offices' involvement. Increased autonomy can help subsidiaries differentiate themselves from the parent company and improve legitimacy in their local environment (Wang et al., 2014). In addition, there is a positive association between subsidiary autonomy and subsidiary initiatives (Chatzopoulou et al., 2021), which is further affected by parent company's willingness to give autonomy and subsidiary's willingness to take initiative.

To conclude, B2B industrial ecosystem is formed from multiple complex interorganizational relationships with parent company and its subsidiaries, and from external relationships (Cerrato, 2006). Subsidiaries can have different roles that are affected by various factors such as their autonomy, geographical location, strategic

importance and functions they provide to the parent company as a whole (Birkinshaw, 2000; Birkinshaw & Morrison, 1995; Jarillo & Martínez, 1990; Lee et al., 2020; Nair et al., 2015). Some of these subsidiaries want to improve their autonomy and extend their influence inside the B2B industrial ecosystem, and both can be achieved through initiatives that manage to capture the attention of the head office (Ambos et al., 2010). These successful initiatives can eventually turn out to be an important source of competitive advantage not only for the subsidiary, but for the whole corporation (Dimitratos et al., 2014; Palmié et al., 2014).

3 SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIAL BRANDING

Branding is a creative and holistic process (Chung & Byrom, 2021), which means managing the brand (Webster & Keller, 2004). In our current hyperconnected world there is an abundance of different varieties of brands such as products, services, organizations, companies, persons, places, platforms, and ideas (Swaminathan et al., 2020). Successful branding provides unique and unrivaled value, encourages innovation, and keeps the brand relevant (Keller, 2021). In this thesis, the focus will be on companies and their offerings as brands. Before examining different sub-genres of branding and what sustainable industrial branding is, basic elements of brands and branding are presented. Planning, building, and eventually transferring the brand outside of the company through personal communication and marketing channels, requires understanding what the brand stands for and how it is properly communicated internally and externally. Once established, brands require reinforcing and adapting to surrounding environment. Because today's hyperconnected world requires brands to be dynamic and flexible (Keller, 2021), managing the brand is more important than ever, especially when rapidly evolving sustainability issues are introduced to the mix.

3.1 Sustainability

Environmental sustainability and branding are practices that can be practiced separately or intertwined with each other. However, sustainability and CSR are concepts in marketing and branding literature that have a variety of different definitions and their accurate measurement is limited (Scandellius & Cohen, 2016b). Often sustainability is mentioned but not necessarily described in the context of that specific publication. Widely used definitions of sustainability are Elkington's (1998) Triple Bottom line which focuses on companies' commitment and measurement of their economic, environmental, and societal impact, and the Brundtland Commission (1987, p. 24) definition "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." In this study, the terms green, sustainability, and environmental sustainability refer to the two beforementioned definitions of sustainability.

Corporate social responsibility or CSR is also often used with sustainability or instead of it. In this thesis, CSR is seen through the well-known Carroll's Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility which has four distinctive parts. Companies have four responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. These should be practiced simultaneously and not in any specific order, even though CSR practices should be built upon economically sound and sustainable business. Companies should aim to be profitable (economic responsibilities), obey laws and regulations (legal responsibilities), avoid harm, and do what is just and fair (ethical responsibilities) and give back to society by being a good corporate citizen (philanthropic responsibilities). (Carroll, 2016.)

The terms of sustainability, triple bottom line (people, planet, profit), CSR (corporate social responsibility), ESG (environmental, social and governance), and EGSEE (economic, governance, social, ethical, and environmental) are often interchangeably used in literature by academic scholars (Rezaee, 2016). Before wider acceptance of the term ESG, it was often defined as CSR or 'responsible investment' where it originated from. Even though the concept is still developing and waiting for clearer unifying, it simply represents company's practice and performance in environmental, social, and governance issues. (Li et al., 2021.) ESG disclosures such as sustainability reports are often voluntary, but also mandatory in some jurisdictions (Alsayegh, Rahman & Hodayoun, 2020; D'Apice, Ferri & Intonti, 2021; Li et al., 2021). With growing use of global guidelines developed by organizations such as Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC), and the Sustainability Accounting Standard Board (SASB), sustainability reports are becoming more standardized, comparable, and relevant for all stakeholders (D'Apice et al., 2021; Rezaee, 2016). However, the usefulness of these reports can be questioned for reducing information asymmetries since many overly persuasive strategies are commonly used even in reports conducted within GRI guidelines (Hahn & Lülfs, 2014).

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs are 17 internationally agreed goals towards sustainable future by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Achieving these goals is easier said than done. When companies apply SDGs in their actions tension is most likely built between societal development and business strategy

(Vildåsen, 2018). Because sustainability impacts all stakeholders (Lunde, 2018), companies cannot operate in a vacuum anymore.

Lunde (2018, p. 94) presents a comprehensive description of sustainable marketing based on his systematic review of the literature as: “the strategic creation, communication, delivery, and exchange of offerings that produce value through consumption behaviors, business practices, and the marketplace, while lowering harm to the environment and ethically increasing the quality of life (QOL) and well-being of consumers and global stakeholders, presently and for future generations.”. In this thesis sustainable branding is mostly viewed through the same lens as Lunde (2018) views sustainable marketing.

3.2 Relationship of brand identity and brand image

Brand identity and brand image are essentially two sides of the same coin (Chung & Byrom, 2021), where brand identity is the inside-out view (people who manage it) of brand’s enduring and distinguishing features (da Silveira et al., 2013; Törmälä & Gyrð-Jones, 2017), and brand image is the outside-in perception that internal and external stakeholders have of the brand (Chung & Byrom, 2021; da Silveira et al., 2013). Because these concepts are so intertwined, specific definitions and causality between them have varied across different studies. Recent studies acknowledge that stakeholders can directly and indirectly affect both brand identity and brand image (Mäläskä et al., 2011; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018), brand identity is not only a managerial creation, but a result of co-creation with stakeholders (Chung & Byrom, 2021; da Silveira et al., 2013; Iglesias et al., 2020), and brand image is an interpretation of perceived brand identity (Chung & Byrom, 2021; Iglesias, 2020; Pareek & Harrison, 2020). Differing from brand image, reputation is earned over time as a sum of multiple different people’s evaluations. That is why reputation can be seen as the longer time outcome of brand image which is harder to change over a short period of time. (Chung & Byrom, 2021; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009.)

Brand image being the perceptions that customers have about the brand (Keller, 1993), can be based on tangible or intangible elements, and it does not have to be even built on to real experiences or expectations (Persson, 2010). Vesal et al. (2021) made an

interesting discovery of B2B customers' own attitudes towards environmental sustainability affecting how they perceive other companies' brand images. If B2B customer's primary decision-makers' attitudes towards environmental sustainability are leaning to the positive side, they are more likely to purchase from companies that have a strong sustainability-based brand image. Another interesting finding of theirs was, that in B2B relationships, good customer relationship management is complimentary towards the relationship between sustainability practices and brand image. Transparency and closer relationships allow companies to provide more information and a better look of their practices, and in these relationships, customers are better able to really understand what they are observing. (Vesal et al., 2021.)

Zhang et al. (2020) suggest that company's green brand image does not automatically lead to a positive response from customers. Frontline employees are associated representing the whole corporate brand, and if their behaviors are not aligned with company's green brand image, negative perceptions are formed and transferred to the evaluation of the brand (Zhang et al., 2020).

Corporate reputation of a firm can be improved with environmental criteria-based supply chain management. If a buyer chooses a supplier whose environmental reputation is good, it improves buyer's reputation by only being associated to the supplier. Post-selection supervision of suppliers using audits and collecting reports also improves buyer's reputation. If there is a situation where a selected supplier would not anymore meet buyer's environmental standards, intention of termination and termination of the relationship would improve buyer's reputation. (Quintana-García et al., 2021.)

3.3 Corporate branding

Corporate branding goes beyond products or services to focusing on the whole company and its relationships with external and internal stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Corporate brand is essentially a promise of what the brand's values are and what they stand for (Balmer & Gray, 2003), and with enough strength, signifies quality, trustworthiness, and distinctiveness (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018). Aspara and Tikkanen (2008) suggest that in B2B context, corporate brand is more important than

company's product and service brands, even though they are not insignificant. A strong corporate brand aids the supplier company in the buying process because it can help communicate a positive image of the brand to multiple stakeholders and decision makers (Bendixen et al., 2004). Customers attach their trust, commitment and affect in B2B relationships likely to the corporate brand, instead of only the product brand. Successful corporate branding can lead to repeated purchases and increased referrals to new customers. (Aspara & Tikkanen, 2008.) Customers can also gain value by being associated towards a positively perceived corporate brand (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011).

Employees are communicating the corporate brand outwards, but in B2B setting their personal brand(s) can compete with the corporate brand like Sheikh and Lim (2011) found out in their study of engineering consultants' perception of corporate branding. According to Balmer and Greyser (2002) managing multiple identities is a severe challenge for companies, and Sheikh and Lim (2011) support this with their finding of engineering consultants' personal brands competing with the corporate brand, and possible tension stirring between different levels of the corporation. Hatch and Schultz (2003) emphasize the need for successful dialogue between members of the organizational culture, top management, and external stakeholders for properly managing corporate brands. Recent literature suggests that corporate brands are not created only inside the company, but they are directly and indirectly created in collaboration with external and internal stakeholders or members of the ecosystem (Mäläskä et al., 2011; Merz et al., 2009; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018).

The whole organization should be included in corporate branding, or at the minimum level, it should be a combined effort of top management led human resources and marketing and communication departments (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Employees are expressing the meaning of a corporate brand and are the key to building relationships with stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2001). Sheikh and Lim (2011) pointed out that excessive top-down approach to branding might lead to the employees (engineers in this case) being eventually disengaged with branding activities because of an absence of local relevance and resonance. Traditional corporate brand management literature suggests that corporate brands are built and controlled from an inside-out and top-down approach by managers. Recent research however supports a different,

stakeholder-driven perspective. Even if the core of the corporate brand is influenced by managers, other internal and external stakeholders imprint and share their own interpretations about the brand. (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020.)

3.4 Multinational corporate brand

A corporation is considered domestic if its operations take place inside a single regulatory or industrial system (Luo & Tant, 1998), or more specifically within a single country (Bae et al., 2001). Domestic corporation (DC) and domestic corporate brands (DCBs) can become multinational corporations (MNCs) and multinational corporate brands (MCBs) upon entering a new country (Khojastehpour & Johns, 2015). Therefore, MNC's operations take place across national country borders, and they have subsidiaries operating from host countries (Bae et al., 2001; Luo & Tant, 1998).

Subsidiary can be defined as any business unit that is operating from outside of the home country and is controlled by the MNC. There can be any number of subsidiaries in a host country. (Birkinshaw et al., 1998.) It is possible that subsidiaries might find new business opportunities either from inside the corporation or outside of it. In both instances initiative for taking them is recommended, even if resistance from parent company, other divisions, or units is commonly encountered. These subsidiary initiatives are entrepreneurial activities, that are specifically executed by the subsidiaries. (Birkinshaw & Ridderstråle, 1999.) Even if various advantages could be gained, numerous subsidiaries show no initiative at all. This is mainly a result of two factors: negative reception from head office management, and lack of competence or desire from subsidiary's management. (Birkinshaw et al., 1998.)

From the perception of MNC, subsidiaries can have different roles and activities they fulfill (Dörrenbächer & Gammelgaard, 2006). Variance can be seen in the subsidiary's main functional role within the MNC, or the scope of its activities ranging between local to global activities (Mudambi et al., 2014).

When subsidiary's initiative does lead to a new business activity, resource allocation, market approval and organizational legitimacy must be achieved. The importance and

sequence of those outcomes varies according to the initiative, structure of organization and the industrial environment. (Birkinshaw & Ridderstråle, 1999.)

3.5 Brand architecture

While it is possible for a company to have only a single brand, in most cases companies own multiple different brands and/or different versions of one brand (Brexendorf & Keller, 2017). Examining multiple brands and their relationships to each other in the case of a single company is no easy task, but when examining a multinational corporation or its subsidiary, understanding the concept of brand architecture is essential. Even if brand architecture has been present in branding literature for multiple decades, the concept has had many different synonyms and varying definitions across studies. Recent literature review conducted by Harish (2020) examined thoroughly the concept and its usage. To simplify, terms brand structure, branding strategy, brand hierarchy, brand system and brand portfolio strategy are all synonyms for brand architecture (Harish, 2020). In this study, the term brand architecture is used to describe the concept.

When companies have multiple different brands and/or different version of a single brand, brand architecture is the hierarchal structure to manage them. In addition to outlining the relations and levels of different brands related to each other, it can help recognizing how different associations are transferred from the corporate brand to any sub-brands, products, or services the company has. (Brexendorf & Keller, 2017.) Santos (2018) supports the view that brand architecture is the structure that identifies roles and nature of relationships between brands and sub-brands.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) used a brand relationship spectrum to illustrate four different types of brand architectures which are: branded house, house of brands, sub-brands, and endorsed brands. Other possible types are identified in several other studies, but overall, the general approach and description of typologies are similar around this subject (Harish, 2020).

Branded house is heavily focused on the corporate brand and often its sub-brands are nothing more than product names. With a limited number of products, this architecture

is useful. (Harish, 2020.) Branded houses can be seen as master brand umbrellas under their business operations and sub-brand's function (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

Sub-brands are a combination of the master brand and the product brand, and they can be either led by the master brand or together by both (Harish, 2020). Main goal for sub-brands is extending the master brand to a new customer segment. What differentiates sub-brands from endorsed brands is the link between sub-brands and master (endorser) brands. Sub-brands have a closer link with them compared to endorsed brands. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000.)

Endorsed brands are independent brands that use the master brand in a supporting role. Three variations of this endorsement are identified based on the use and importance of the master brand. Product and company names can be linked, for example McNugget which includes the parent company name McDonalds in addition to the product name. Based on the strength and popularity of the master brand, it can be a token endorser where it is better known than the endorsed brand, or the product can be clearly seen as more important and in the driver's seat with just a strong endorsement from the master brand. (Harish, 2020.)

House of brands establish separate brands that differ from the parent (company) brand and other brands associated to it. Sub-brands can either have no connection to the parent brand, or they can have a loose connection to it when the term shadow endorsing is used. The idea behind house of brands is to help brands avoiding association of values that are connected to either the parent brand or other sub-brands. (Harish, 2020.) Operating in multiple niches is viable with house of brands (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

Choosing the best strategy in the brand relationship spectrum is hard to generalize and that is why knowing which end of the spectrum would be beneficial. If the master brand can be strengthened by associating with the new offering, then it would be wise to lean toward a branded house strategy. But if the business can truly support a new brand name, then leaning toward a house of brands would be preferred (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000.) Endorsed brands and sub-brands are in between of these two far ends, and lines between them can be blurry. Uggla and Filipson (2008) have

criticized the brand relationship spectrum for being static and not providing clear directions how brands can transform from one category to another, but for the purposes of this thesis it is suitable for being a widely spread typology.

3.6 Industrial branding

Industrial branding can be defined as the brand building and management activities for industrial companies. Similarly, to industrial markets, industrial branding can also be characterized from the industrial buyer's standpoint since the industrial products or services are not aimed towards general consumers. (Mudambi et al., 1997.) According to Rahman, Melewar and Sharif (2014) partnerships can help industrial companies establish their industrial branding for mutual benefit. For example, trying to maintain a sustainable supply chain between different partners requires trust and cooperation, and especially cooperation with customers can help achieving higher market share and market growth in competitive marketplaces (Chan et al., 2012).

In the digital era, industrial branding requires strong internal communication, continuous external communication, and courage to engage in topical conversations as the brand (Lipiäinen & Karjaluo, 2015). According to Baumgarth (2010) branding has become more relevant in today's business-to-business markets because digital communication has decreased personal customer relationships, products and services are increasingly complex, rising prices create pressure, and product quality is increasingly homogenic which might be partly a result of product imitation. Bendixen et al. (2004) suggest that industrial companies should focus on enhancing their corporate brand which is in line with Lipiäinen & Karjaluo (2015) who state that in the digital age, brand should be treated as a foundation for all company's activities and that is why understanding what the company is about is more important than before.

Various benefits can be gained because of industrial branding. Starting with products and services offered, their perceived quality is improved (Cretu & Brodie, 2007), products are seen as more unique (Michell et al., 2001), and they can command a price premium (Low & Blois, 2002; Michell et al., 2001). Overall, industrial branding can lead to a sustainable competitive advantage for companies using it. Strong brand attracts B2B customers because it reduces their risk of decision making, it weakens

competitors market entry capabilities, improves information efficiency, and helps to gain distribution power. (Ohnemus, 2009.)

Bendixen, Bukasa and Abratt (2004) found additional benefits for industrial branding that are especially desirable in B2B markets. DMU members form an individual sentimental relationship to the industrial brands offerings, even for interchangeable or standard products and the goodwill gained is often transferred to other products or product lines. Particularly, technical specialists were discovered to give brand the highest price premium possibility among the study's DMUs. Because of that and their relevant power in the decision-making process, is why in industrial setting, they should be specifically targeted during the buying process. Finally, a strong brand can build referrals from its customers to potential new ones. (Bendixen et al., 2004.)

Leek and Christodoulides (2011) state that regardless of the multiple benefits possibly gained from industrial branding, many industrial companies simply do not utilize it. This a result of many factors such as perceiving it as gimmicky (Mudambi et al., 1997), impracticalness regarding industrial products (Bendixen et al., 2004), uncertainty of financial rewards (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011), deeming emotional qualities meaningless compared to functional ones in decision-making (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012), and failing to make a long term commitment towards the brand at the cost of short term profitability (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011).

Industrial customer's brand value consists of four parts: product performance, distribution performance, company performance and support services. All these factors have both tangible and intangible attributes. Tangible value is gained for example from company's profits and shares, and intangible value is gained from its (brand) image and reputation (Mudambi et al., 1997).

Scarce research is found regarding brands of factories or factory brands. One of the few studies found was conducted by Ruaõ et al. (2016) where they examined a German multinational automobile component manufacturer, found that a factory brand can be identified by the local population differing from the multinational brand. However, their major finding was that the previous factory brand (of a separate company) that had not been active for nearly two decades, was still associated to the current

company's factory brand. They called this phenomenon 'ghost awareness' which could be described as the collective memories accumulated for the public's mind without a real match. (Ruaõ et al., 2016.)

According to Ruaõ et al. (2016) drivers that improved awareness of the plant being in the city, were employment, activities for the community and company's relationship with the media. They provided two recommendations to enhance brand awareness of the factory: 1. shaping the factory brand to a more identifiable entity and vanishing the memories of previous brands that resided in the plant, 2. Establishing affective relationships with the local community. (Ruaõ et al., 2016.)

Another closely related branding genre to industrial branding is ingredient branding. In ingredient branding, company who owns a brand, such as a component or a mechanical part, sells its offering to another company who then uses and displays both brands (the ingredient brand and product brand) in their end product (Vaidyanathan & Aggarwal, 2000). Ingredient branding is a commonly used strategic marketing tool to include key attributes of one brand to a host brand (Desai & Keller, 2002). There are various benefits that can be gained from ingredient branding, such as increased product differentiation and greater market share (Swaminathan et al., 2012), attitudes spillovering from either brand to the other (Simonin & Ruth, 1998), and improving profits, products, and images of the brands (Moon & Sprott, 2016). Even with the benefits possibly achieved, there needs to be a fit between the host and its one or more ingredient brands to have a successful strategic partnership (Swaminathan et al., 2012).

3.7 Sustainable branding

There is only limited number of definitions and literature concerning sustainable branding, or sustainability branding as it is sometimes referred to. Books written by Ottman (2011), and Foroudi and Palazzo (2020) do examine sustainable branding, but with a B2C focus, which is typical for branding literature. Foroudi and Palazzo (2020) recommend that for a brand to be labelled as a sustainable brand, environmental, social, and economic issues should be integrated to the whole company's business operations. Sustainable marketing, sustainable branding, green marketing, or different variations of these are used somewhat as synonyms in the book by Ottman (2011).

Kumar and Christodoulopoulou (2014) try to integrate branding and sustainability in their study, and use terms such as sustainability-oriented brand, sustainable brand, and sustainability branding functions. No clear definition or distinction is given between them, but the main idea is that sustainability needs to become part of the company's strategy, operations, and marketing to be successfully implemented into branding and eventually leading to improved firm performance (Kumar & Christodoulopoulou, 2014).

According to Sheth and Sinha (2015) the path towards a sustainable brand will likely be challenging and time consuming, where the biggest transformation is moving from short term quarterly profits to a stakeholder orientation for creating competitive advantage. Ferrel et al. (2010) points out that this shift from market orientation to stakeholder orientation allows companies to approach the issue of sustainability among other matters. Another difficulty for implementing sustainability to branding is measuring company's success on not only profits, but also on social and environmental matters (Sheth & Sinha, 2015).

Many companies are having difficulties understanding how to operationalize the integration of marketing and operations for becoming sustainable. Marketing should take a role that promotes and supports sustainability-oriented activities and doing that helps to associate sustainability to the brand. Integrating sustainability and marketing can be achieved through (sustainable) branding. (Kumar & Christodoulopoulou, 2014.) For branding to be called 'sustainable branding', it needs to be built on genuinely sustainable practices, but apart of having sustainability as a core value in the branding, sustainable branding is not considerably different from other types of branding (Kampman, 2021). Webster and Keller (2004) give a loose definition for branding activities being practically anything that try to improve relationship between the buyer and the seller. Sustainability practices can include: green supply chain, collaboration in ecosystems, resource-constrained product development, green product innovation, remanufacturing, green logistics, reducing emissions of own production and reducing product's environmental footprint (Kampman, 2021). More possible sustainability practices can be identified and with technology evolving, even more are created, such as 3D printing (Isasi-Sanchez et al., 2020) in additive manufacturing.

Even if sustainable brands would be authentic and genuine about their practices, they have to clearly differentiate themselves from brands that utilize greenwashing (Iglesias, et al., 2020). If companies want to successfully implement sustainability to their business practices, substantial changes are required in all departments and units of the company, including research-and-development, production, finance, and marketing (Kotler, 2011). In addition, cooperation is required with them to achieve synergistic effects and maximize returns (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014).

Sustainability initiatives and programs can act as a steppingstone towards building a strong corporate brand within and outside the company, because they can have a far-reaching positive impact on both the environment and society, and not just the company (Biedenbach & Manzhynski, 2016; Miller & Merrilees, 2013; Sheth & Sinha, 2015). It is easier to integrate sustainability practices to the corporate brand of a company compared to individual product brands. This is because sustainability practices should be conducted at a company-wide level instead of only in a singular product line or business unit. Integration to more complex branding strategies, like house-of-brands, is still possible but less synergy benefits should be expected between different brands. (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014.)

4 GREEN BRAND LEGITIMATION

4.1 Legitimacy

Based on the systematic review of Suddaby et al. (2017), legitimacy is a popular and widely used construct in organizational studies and related disciplines, but that has led to various meanings, uses and misuses of the phenomenon. Commonly described as a “generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574), it occurs simultaneously at individual and collective levels (Haack & Sieweke, 2018), and it is a sum of individual and collective perceptions (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Haack et al., 2021). Types or dimensions of legitimacy are conceptualized ranging from two dimensions such as cognitive and sociopolitical legitimacy (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994), to three dimensions such as pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) or instrumental, relational, and moral legitimacy (Tost, 2011), to even four-dimensional constructs such as pragmatic, moral, cognitive, and regulative legitimacy (Walker et al., 2014) or cognitive, normative, relational and regulative legitimacy (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021). These different dimensions are typically some combination of dimensions that previous scholars have used in their works. In addition to the dimensions, some studies examine context-reliant and idiosyncratic terms of legitimacy such as environmental legitimacy (Bansal & Clelland, 2004) or managerial legitimacy (Ruef & Scott, 1998).

Regulatory legitimacy means obeying laws, regulations, rules, or standards (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Other terms such as organizational legitimacy, internal legitimacy, managerial legitimacy, or technical legitimacy are also used in previous literature (Suddaby et al., 2017). However, one of the most used typologies was created by Suchman (1995), who identifies three types of legitimacies: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy. Pragmatic legitimacy is about organizations fulfilling self-interested needs of their external audiences such as being able to offer a product that satisfies those needs. Moral legitimacy defines if organizations’ actions are socially accepted or ‘the right thing to do’. Lastly, cognitive legitimacy defines if organizations are seen as necessary or inevitable, and if they are as a result accepted and even taken for granted. (Suchman, 1995.)

To clarify the construct of legitimacy, Suddaby et al. (2017) present three ways legitimacy is currently understood in literature. These are: legitimacy as property, legitimacy as process, and legitimacy as perception. When it is viewed as a property, an asset, or a thing, it means that legitimacy is viewed as something that can be owned, exchanged, or even transferred between organizations. (Suddaby et al., 2017.) According to Mudambi (2002) legitimacy can be gained and transferred to company's own goods by using components made by a well-respected supplier, which supports the idea of legitimacy spillover (Kostova & Zaheer, 1999) to other organizations. In this property-based view, legitimacy occurs between the legitimacy object, such as the organization, and its external environment. It occurs because of compatibility between external audiences' expectations and the attributes of an organization. (Suddaby et al., 2017.)

Legitimacy as process views it as an interactive process between multiple social actors, who aims to construct and maintain legitimacy over time. Therefore, it is not seen as a stable condition. It occurs especially between those actors who are either seeking change or opposing change (Suddaby et al., 2017.) This process, or legitimation can be defined as "a structured set or sets of formal or emergent activities that describe how an actor acquires affiliation with an existing social order or category" (Suddaby et al., 2017, p. 462). Because legitimation involves multiple actors and phases, legitimacy cannot be gained only by the efforts of a single actor. However, legitimacy as process highlights too much the importance of 'official' actors, and neglects the importance of collective actors, also known as audiences. In fact, these audiences can have a strong impact in the process of legitimation. (Suddaby et al., 2017.)

Legitimacy as perception views legitimacy as a social judgement or evaluation between both individual evaluators (individuals) and collective evaluators (groups of people, organizations, society). Collective judgement affects legitimacy perceptions of individuals because it is believed to be shared by a recognized authority and/or majority of people. Lastly, individual's belief of collective judgements validity also affects their own judgement. (Suddaby et al., 2017.) An example of recognized authority affecting collective judgement would be propaganda practiced by authoritarian governments. In the short term, propaganda can help maintaining regime stability with the cost of losing legitimacy in the long term when practicing propaganda

backfires and citizens' opinions towards the government weaken (Huang, 2018). This kind of discursive legitimation should not be treated lightly, because in the end legitimation is amplifying preferred voices and interests while simultaneously silencing others through subtle textual strategies (Vaara & Tienari, 2008), or using extreme methods such as governmental propaganda (Huang, 2018).

The process of losing legitimacy is called delegitimation. However, it requires already established levels of legitimacy that can be then reduced. (Berger et al., 1998.) In other words, objects without legitimacy cannot be delegitimated. The decline (delegitimation) of previously valid legitimacy object can allow for alternative objects to gain legitimacy, for example in the case of institutional change, where a new institution takes the place of another one while becoming itself legitimate (Haack et al., 2021). It is important to note that delegitimation is not the same as illegitimation, even if some level of illegitimacy would be gained during the process as Suddaby et al. (2017) note. Illegitimacy is seen as negative form of legitimacy, which is referred to when the subject of legitimacy fails to meet expectations or standards of being legitimate (Suddaby et al., 2017). Both being perceived illegitimate and truly being illegitimate can lead to sanctions and penalties (Zuckerman, 1999). In addition, illegitimacy can stigmatize its target (Suddaby et al., 2017). Much like legitimacy can be viewed as a property, process, or perception, construct of illegitimacy can also be examined in different ways, where the process of it would be referred as illegitimation. It can be viewed as a separate entity from legitimacy (Hudson, 2008), which can exist simultaneously with legitimacy (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). Another view is that illegitimacy and legitimacy are opposing states within a same scale of attributes which determine is something highly legitimate (e.g. positively taken for granted), highly illegitimate (e.g. stigmatized), or something between them (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Suddaby et al., 2017). To conclude: *legitimation* is the process of building and maintaining legitimacy, *delegitimation* is the process of losing already established legitimacy where there is a possibility of gaining illegitimacy, and *illegitimation* is the process of gaining harmful and negative form of legitimacy also known as illegitimacy.

Much like positive legitimacy spillovering to other legitimacy objects, there is a possibility of illegitimacy spreading outside of the original legitimacy object (Desai,

2011; Haack et al., 2014; Kostova & Zaheer, 1999). Similarly, brands can be the subject to both positive and negative effects of co-creative activities (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013), and brands can be both unintentionally and intentionally damaged or improved by business partners (Mäläskä et al., 2011; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018). Shi, Wajda and Aguilera (2022) also suggest that both legitimacy and reputation can spillover and they can lead to positive and negative outcomes. However, they point out that if an organization's legitimacy is harmed, that can create an opportunity for its competitors to utilize (Shi et al., 2022).

According to Haack et al. (2021) legitimacy consists of three components of propriety, validity, and consensus. It is important to note that these are not the same as dimensions of legitimacy (such as pragmatic, moral, and cognitive) that were previously examined. Each dimension identified is constructed from these three components, no matter the specific naming of them. *Propriety* is legitimacy at the individual evaluator level also referred as micro level. It is strongly affected by the following collective views of legitimacy, even to the point of individuals pretending to have different evaluations of the legitimacy object than they really do. *Validity* is legitimacy at the general collective level also referred as macro level. When something has enough validity, it exists as a social fact mainly independently from individual evaluators beliefs. (Haack et al., 2021.) Powerful sources of validity are media, government, juridical system, authority figures, and spokespersons of the common man such as politicians (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Vaara, 2014). Between propriety (individual level) and validity (collective societal level), there is a meso level of *consensus* which determines the amount of agreement between members of groups, teams, organizations, industries, and parts of society regarding the legitimacy of something. Low consensus is a sign of disputed judgements and high consensus indicates that the legitimacy judgements are shared among most of these members. Consensus affecting validity requires communication and collective actions between the individual members of these groups. (Haack et al., 2021). Without them, legitimacy object can remain its validity, even if no one personally sees it as legitimate. This is the outcome of most individuals assuming that everyone else judges the legitimacy object just and acceptable, and therefore concealing their true belief or pretending to have this collective belief. (Correll et al., 2017; Haack et al., 2021; Suddaby et al., 2017.) However, when consensus is high,

using communication and collective actions it is possible to change the validity of legitimacy objects (Haack et al., 2021).

4.2 Manifestations of legitimacy

According to Suddaby et al. (2017) depending on the viewpoint of legitimacy as a property, process, or perception, it can be seen manifested and constructed in different ways. They identify three actors that are present in all these viewpoints and have varying roles and importance depending on the viewpoint. First, there is an *object of legitimacy*, which ‘owns’ or ‘possesses’ the evaluated legitimacy. (Suddaby et al., 2017.) These objects could be something physical such as a contracts or products, something non-physical such as practices or processes, persons such as decision makers or politicians, abstract constructs such as categories, innovations, or environmental contexts, or entities such as brands, organizations, or governments (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Haack et al., 2021; Huang, 2018; Suchman, 2003; Suddaby et al., 2017). In this sense, anything could be the object of legitimacy. According to Suddaby et al. (2017) the object of legitimacy is most prominent in legitimacy-as-a-property viewpoint.

Second actor in legitimacy is a *change agent* whose goal is to alter relevant audience’s evaluation of the object of legitimacy (Suddaby et al., 2017). Examples of change agents could be a public relations team of a politician, the opposing party of that politician, supporters, and protesters. These change agents are trying to legitimate, delegitimize, or even illegitimate the object of legitimacy. Suddaby et al. (2017) point out that the change agent is most prominent in legitimacy-as-a-process viewpoint. Third actor of legitimacy is called an *evaluator*, who evaluate and make judgements of the object of legitimacy. Evaluators make individual judgements and collective judgements as a larger audience. Change agents are trying to change the judgement or perception of these evaluators. Evaluators are most prominent in legitimacy-as-a-perception viewpoint. (Suddaby et al., 2017.) Examples of evaluators could be customers, the jury in courtroom, or voters at elections.

As a result of these viewpoints and actors, legitimacy is seen occurring in three ways. It occurs as: a static result of interaction between the object of legitimacy and its

environment (property-view), during interactive consensus between multiple actors in the social environment (process-view), between individuals, collective evaluators, and larger collectives, such as the society, creating a social judgement (perception-view). (Suddaby et al., 2017.) Because these different viewpoints and streams of research, there are multiple terms that are used when studying legitimacy and where it occurs. Commonly used terms to pinpoint targets and embodiments of legitimacy are legitimacy objects, sources of legitimacy, symbols, and artifacts (Haack et al., 2021; Kraft & Wolf, 2018; Perez-Batres et al., 2012; Suchman, 2003; Suddaby et al., 2017; Wang, 2018). However, without clarification these terms focus heavily on treating legitimacy mainly as a property, and sources of legitimacy only material. For example, artifacts are defined as the following: “an artifact is a discrete *material object*, consciously produced or transformed by human activity, under the influence of the physical and/or cultural environment” (Suchman, 2003, p. 98). This definition clearly leaves out any non-material sources of legitimacy, and therefore it is lacking when studying non-material sources that do not necessarily possess their own autonomous identity separate from their creators, like artifacts (Suchman, 2003) do. The term legitimacy object focuses on the owner of legitimacy who is being judged (Haack et al., 2021; Suddaby et al., 2017), but not on the details or individual components that are part of forming its legitimacy. Symbol of legitimacy is more abstract and allowing, but it must represent and symbolize something (in this case legitimacy) (Suchman, 2003; Wang, 2018). Because of these complications and lack of a better term, *source of legitimacy* is used in this study when referring to individual non-material or material ways that affect legitimacy object’s legitimacy. This is important because corporate brands are judged from multiple sources of legitimacy that together sum up the judgement of the brand’s legitimacy. If these sources would be evaluated individually and separate from the brand, then they could be referred as legitimacy objects.

Since legitimacy is a required element for companies (Castelló & Lozano, 2011; Czinkota et al., 2014), there must be a minimum amount of legitimacy that corporate B2B brands require to operate. There should be some sort of brand identifier such as a name, logo, or other way of identifying the brand (Petty, 2012). Depending on the legal requirements of the country, some sort of juridical identifier or permit such as a business number can be required for legally conducting business. However, brand identifiers might not be enough because of misuse, imitation, or tampering (Ertekin et

al., 2018), and they need to be legally protected with trademarks, registered trademarks, technical trademarks, labels, copyrights, patents, or design patents to name a few options (Petty, 2012). To conclude, a minimum legitimacy requirement for B2B corporate brands would be a brand identifier (company name), possible legal protection for it, and a permit to practice business (depending on the country). Because legitimacy is evaluated and constantly re-evaluated in its current environment taking influence from social beliefs and cultural values (Suddaby et al., 2017), it is evaluated differently depending on the environment, which may have for example different laws or religions.

4.3 Legitimation strategies

Because legitimacy is evaluated and constantly re-evaluated in its current environment taking influence from social beliefs and cultural values (Suddaby et al., 2017), it can be evaluated differently in other environments which have for example different laws or religions. Similarly, legitimation process differs in new markets, mature markets, and contested mature markets (Debenedetti et al., 2021). New markets are still in formation process (Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004), and the market is influenced by needs, products, services, and technologies that are not yet widely understood or established (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983; Humphreys, 2010). Mature markets have become stable and even predictable with widely accepted technologies, products, and services (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983; Humphreys, 2010; King & Pearce, 2010; Maguire et al., 2004). When mature markets become contested, it transforms to a third phase where organizations and the market as a whole are challenged by important issues which organizations must recognize and adapt accordingly. Some issues might be important only in certain markets, but recent issues like data protection and environmentalism have a significant effect on multiple different markets. (Debenedetti et al., 2021.)

The undifferentiated and differentiated discourses, also known as framing strategies, are ways that organizations shape audiences' perceptions and understanding, and build legitimacy. In undifferentiated discourses, organizations use similar collective ways of achieving legitimacy. Therefore, differentiated discourses do the opposite and try to separate and stand out from other competitors. In new markets, organizations use

undifferentiated discourses between all actors, because the uncertainty of new markets requires building collective legitimacy for the whole market. When markets mature, organizations start to practice differentiated discourses between organizations to stand out from actors of the market. However, discursive strategies between stakeholders are still undifferentiated. Only when mature market becomes contested with key issues, differentiation is required between different targets such as stakeholders. Responding to shared issues in the market leads to organizations tackle the same problem (undifferentiated discourse), but with their own ways. (Debenedetti et al., 2021.)

Contested mature markets are essentially re-structured around key issues which organizations must recognize and find differentiated ways to address them for their stakeholders. When markets transform to the third, legitimation is no longer centered around products, services, or technologies, but rather around the key issues that affect and re-structure the market. Tackling key issues requires similar communication across all organizations to show common understanding of the issue, but still being different enough to stand out. Competitive advantage and reputation are both affected by organizations actions towards these issues. Using differentiated discourses should be consistent and use shared core elements that are then tailored for specific stakeholders. In addition, multiple discourses should be used per stakeholder instead of relying only on single one because this use of differentiated framing is a significant way of achieving legitimacy. (Debenedetti et al., 2021.)

Legitimacy is a requirement for having a central role within an ecosystem. As a process, it starts from the individual level and expands to groups, communities, and networks. Individuals are the ones consuming and distributing brand texts (e.g. reports, videos, and social media content), and through conversations in different levels, they are transformed into stories, narratives, and discourses. Stories in this context are the storytellers view of brand texts, actions, and sequence of events. When multiple stories, actions, events, actors, and other elements are bound together, they form an interpretation around this specific topic, and this conclusion is known as narrative. Discourse is combination of multiple widely accepted statements that act as foundation for a certain topic. Stories and narratives are therefore built on top of the general

discourse. That is why a favorable and wide discourse will end up legitimizing the B2B brand. (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021.)

According to Gustafson and Pomirleanu (2021) general suggestions for B2B brand texts and stories can be identified. They should be widely usable and relevant for actors of the ecosystem, and they should be clear enough to avoid different interpretations inside purchasing groups. These brand texts are aimed for both internal and external actors in the brand ecosystem with a purpose of building and maintaining brand's legitimacy. High levels of legitimacy can be achieved with favorable discourses towards the brand. However, not all brand texts are equal in their ability to influence discourse, and not all brand texts can be central to the discourse. The ability to influence discourse depends on two factors: brand text's characteristics (i.e., understandability, usefulness, and connection or separation to already existing discourses), and actor's characteristics (e.g. famousness, importance, authority). Stories, narratives, and discourses should be imbued with three rhetoric elements (pathos, logos, and ethos) that can attract actors of the ecosystem. Pathos is about individual's emotion, passion, and excitement. Logos on the other hand, appeals to individual's logical side and need for efficiency. Differing from these two, ethos is does not focus solely on individual, but to a collective wellbeing of a social group. It is about social norms and ultimately what is considered right and wrong. Ethos imbued stories, narratives, and discourses are slowest of these three to have effect, because they require time consuming evaluation from individual's side. Nevertheless, they are most enduring of the three once they have been successfully established an accepted. (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021.)

Gustafson and Pomirleanu (2021) suggest that B2B brands can build high levels of legitimacy by using three rhetoric elements in their brand texts. Order to do so should be sequenced starting from pathos to logos to ethos because B2B brand interaction characteristics, such as the buying process, require a long-time horizon. When legitimacy is achieved, it can lead to positive benefits such as increase in brands reputation, awareness, and credibility. (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021.) Even if legitimacy would be once gained, it must be constantly rebuilt and reinforced because it faces daily challenging and contesting in online (Hakala, Niemi, & Kohtamäki, 2017) and offline environments (Kates, 2004).

Research examining B2B brand legitimacy is rare, but Gustafson and Pomirleanu (2021) examined the subject in their recent study. Four different conversation levels of individual, group, community, and network lead to B2B brand legitimacy which creates benefits of brand credibility, brand awareness, and brand reputation. Their framework is not tested in their research paper, but it is the most recent one illustrating the subject at hand. Gustafson and Pomirleanu (2021) have a similar view of all touchpoints between a brand and its stakeholders affecting brand narrative and discourses, like Davis et al. (2008) have on all interactions between a brand and its stakeholders affecting brand image. Brand image is about individual's own associations towards the brand (Keller, 1993), and narratives and discourses are a sum of multiple viewpoints of different actors (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021).

Organizations can have several motivations for green legitimization. These include: 1. signaling compliance with governments, institutions, companies, and their regulations, 2. signaling compliance with other stakeholders and public pressure, 3. confirming the legitimacy of their operations 3. marketing benefits, 3. differentiation, 4. improved image and reputation from 'doing the right thing', 5. managing stakeholder perceptions, 6. attracting funding or other financial benefit, 7. winning sustainability awards (Deegan, 2002; Farache & Perks, 2010; Mousa & Hassan, 2015).

Two wider legitimization strategies of *symbolic legitimization* (also known as rhetoric legitimization, symbolism, or impression management) and *behavioral legitimization* (also known as substantive legitimization, that uses concrete actions and changes in operations which conform to social values) (Hrasky, 2012; Kim et al., 2007; Richardson, 1985; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) are categories that comprise most of other specific legitimization strategies. Much like specific legitimization strategies can overlap with each other inside either one of those two larger strategies, specific strategies can overlap between symbolic legitimization and behavioral legitimization strategies. For example, actions that improve regulative legitimacy (e.g. changing operations according to new regulations) can be identified inside both strategies. Symbolic strategies are easier and cheaper on the short term, and they can 'buy' time for implementing behavioral strategies that take a longer time to execute (Bansal & Clelland, 2004; Kim et al., 2007). Ethical concerns about symbolic strategies and their rhetoric and even manipulative actions still do not negate benefits gained from them.

However, behavioral strategies are more effective at building positive reputation and financial performance even if they are more challenging to carry through. Reputation gained mainly from rhetoric strategies has much less influence on profitability compared to behavioral strategies and reputation gained from them. (Kim et al., 2007.) This concerns especially environmental sustainability, where concrete proactive behavioral actions build environmental legitimacy and enhance reputation and financial performance (Alrazi et al., 2015; Bansal & Clelland, 2004; Kim et al., 2007).

Legitimation strategies can be established for building certain types of legitimacy such as pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy. Communication that is symbolic and pragmatic is a strategy that mainly builds pragmatic legitimacy. This kind of strategy has been used especially in less carbon-intensive fields. On the other hand, carbon-intensive fields have started using behavioral strategies to build moral legitimacy. This includes highlighting reports of actions and accomplishments that reduce the carbon footprint of the company and its stakeholders. It needs to be noted that the behavioral strategy can act as a disguise for the symbolic strategy if the behaviors have no substantive impact on company's operations. Also, if the behaviors target only 'low hanging fruits', further actions are needed in the long-term. (Hrasky, 2012.)

Several legitimation strategies have been identified in prior literature. Two popular and widely cited papers are from Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) and Lindblom (1994). According to Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) these legitimation strategies include: 1. changing organizations own actions to better reflect current definitions of legitimacy, 2. trying to transform the current view of social legitimacy to better reflect organizations actions, and 3. communicating organizations associations with already legitimized symbols, values, or institutions. According to Lindblom's (1994) conference paper (as cited in Yongvanich & Guthrie, 2007, p. 160) these legitimation strategies include: 1. communicating improvement intentions of the organization to its stakeholders, 2. altering stakeholders' perception of events or about the company, 3. redirecting attention away from the issue at hand, and 4. altering stakeholder expectations of the organization.

Legitimation strategies used in response to environmental disaster were studied by Cho (2009), who merged similar strategies of Dowling and Pfeffer (1975), Lindblom

(1994), and O'Donovan (2002) and named them the following: image enhancement strategy, avoidance/deflection strategy, and disclaimer strategy. *Image enhancement strategy* focuses on connecting the organization to positive social values with self-praising material to support it. These can be environmental commitments and accomplishments of the organization. *Avoidance/deflection strategy* focuses on misdirection where the issue at hand (e.g. environmental concern) is either avoided or attention concerning it is redirected to other matters. These two first strategies can be used simultaneously. *Disclaimer strategy* focuses on denying responsibilities or associations to negative issues or events.

Cambridge Dictionary (2022) defines rhetoric as “speech or writing that is effective and persuasive” or “the study of the ways of using language effectively”. Several scholars (Castelló & Lozano, 2011; Creed et al., 2002; Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Hoefler & Green, 2016; Patala et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2004; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Vaara et al., 2006) have examined this role of language known as rhetoric in the context of legitimacy or legitimation. Rhetoric legitimation therefore is about communication. Same issue, event, or outcome can be presented, or ‘framed’ in various ways with the same underlying information. For example, 90 % employment rate vs. 10 % unemployment rate, superhero or vigilante, deletion of content from social media sites such as hate speech vs. censoring freedom of speech, and lastly a recent example of special military operation vs. war. Even a controversial topic of censorship is often legitimated on the grounds of national security, public order, or democratic equality (Cook & Heilmann, 2013). However, if brands do end up in the middle of controversies, that can negatively affect brand’s moral legitimacy (Rentschler et al., 2021). Whatever the issue, framing of it can lead to both advancing or hindering the desired legitimacy of that issue (Creed et al., 2002). Even if framing can be used for both good and bad purposes (Chong & Druckman, 2007), impression management is still an essential part of legitimation (Bansal & Clelland, 2004; Creed et al., 2002), that often uses persuasive rhetoric that both promotes the interests of legitimacy actors and protects their power (Brown & Jones, 2000; Elsbach, 1994; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992). For framing to be successful, receivers of it must be able to understand key concepts and arguments of presented message and connect them to other discourses (Erkama & Vaara, 2010).

Rhetoric legitimation strategies can be roughly divided into two categories: strategies of classic rhetoric and New Rhetoric. Classic rhetoric legitimation strategies include *pathos* (emotion-based arguments), *logos* (logic-based arguments), and *ethos* (authority-based arguments). (Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005.) New Rhetoric strategies are more reliant on context, less studied, and their definitions and naming can slightly vary from study to study. Notable strategies from new rhetoric include: *autopoiesis* (narratives of purpose and identity) (Erkama & Vaara, 2010), *ontological* (matters that can or cannot co-exist), *historical* (arguments emerging from tradition and history), *teleological* (arguments based on grand vision, and possibly a divine purpose and divine existence), *cosmological* also referred as *cosmos* (arguments of unavoidability and inevitability such as globalization), and *value-based* (reliance of values and a wider belief system, for example what is considered good or evil) (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005).

In addition to the previous strategies, Vaara and Tienari (2008) have examined other general strategies that are usable in various environments. Drawing on the works of van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999), Vaara and Tienari (2008) identified five rhetoric legitimation strategies in the context of MNCs: normalization, authorization, rationalization, moralization, and narrativization. *Normalization* is a strategy that tries to make certain actions inside the organization seem as ‘normal’ or ‘natural’. *Authorization* uses associations to customs, traditions, laws, and persons of authority to appear legitimate. *Rationalization* highlights the utility and relevance of actions. *Moralization* bases the building of legitimacy on value systems that determine the moral basis of actions. *Narrativization*, also referred as *mythopoesis*, uses narratives that tie together past, present and future actions to build legitimacy. (Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Vaara & Tienari, 2008; van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999.)

Efforts of rhetoric legitimation can backfire and decrease legitimacy if stakeholders perceive the company ‘overacting’ by exaggerating positive issues and downplaying negative issues (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). In addition, pursuing only rhetoric legitimation and neglecting to address the actual issue such as toxic emissions can be more expensive in the long run (Kim et al., 2007). That is why rhetoric legitimation strategies should be complimentary to behavioral strategies in environmental sustainability related industries and not the other way around (Hrasky, 2012; Kim et

al., 2007). This is especially important for brands and their stakeholders, because building brand legitimacy requires understanding the right connection between sayings and doings of the brand (Michel & Zeitoun, 2022).

According to Hahn and Lülfs (2014), symbolic legitimation strategies are dominant in sustainability reports. Their study focused on communication about ‘negative aspects’ in sustainability reports. Strategies used for these were either proactive (the company itself disclosed information about negative incident), or reactive (the negative incident had already happened). Being proactive, even regarding negative incidents, is seen as the better alternative because it signals honesty, transparency, and better trustworthiness of sustainability reports. In addition, if no negative or improvement requiring matters are not reported at all, stakeholders can question the truthfulness of reports even risking associating them to greenwashing. (Hahn & Lülfs, 2014.)

A total of six legitimation strategies for disclosing negative aspects were discovered by Hahn and Lülfs (2014) from a sample of GRI-oriented sustainability reports from companies listed on the US Dow Jones Industrial Average Index and on the German DAX Index. Four of these strategies were symbolic, one was substantial (behavioral), and one was something between symbolic and substantial strategies. Symbolic strategies are: *marginalization* (where negative aspects are framed as unimportant, non-relevant, or the company neglects the issue), *abstraction* (where problems are generalized concerning the whole industry or most important actors within the field), *indicating facts* (mentioning purely the existence of negative facts that are often numeral and without emotion, but not taking any stance how the company perceives them), *rationalization* (highlighting necessity of negative aspects and often connecting them to already legitimate practices, or deeming negative aspects as unavoidable side effects of life or, for example being necessary for economic growth), and *authorization* (where negative aspects are associated to legitimate authorities such as persons or practices). The strategy of *indicating facts* (mentioning purely the existence of negative facts that are often numeral and without emotion, but not taking any stance how the company perceives them), cannot really be indicated belonging to only inside symbolic or behavioral strategies. The only behavioral strategy was *corrective action* (providing either unprecise information of corrective actions that are conducted and that will be conducted, or providing concrete information, such as numbers and

accurate descriptions of sequences of corrective actions), but it must be also executed after the release of sustainability report, and the public must approve those actions. (Hahn & Lülfs, 2014.)

4.4 Green brand legitimation

In previous literature the term green brand legitimacy has been used in studies conducted by Guo et al. (2017, 2018), including the word ‘green’ and referring mainly to the three dimensions of pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). Hakala et al. (2017) use a process view of brand legitimacy, where it is defined as a collective routine where brand, its practices, customers, judgements and overall perceptions lead to legitimacy and practice of legitimation. To the best of my knowledge, no such term of ‘environmental brand legitimacy’ or ‘sustainable brand legitimacy’ have been used in the literature. Terms of green legitimacy (Baah et al., 2021, 2022; Ng, 2018) and environmental legitimacy (Alrazi et al., 2015; Bansal & Clelland, 2004; Berrone et al., 2017; Hashem, 2021; Li et al., 2018) have both been used meaning generally the same thing. For the purposes of this study, the word green is selected for the illustration of green/sustainable/environmental brand legitimation that is presented in Figure 1. below. When looking into insights from different studies examining environmental sustainability in legitimacy, the scholars are mostly referring to the same thing, no matter their choice of words of either green or environmental.

Theoretical framework of the study in Figure 1. is constructed based on prior research from relevant literature. Green brand legitimation is seen as a continues process, much like branding and legitimation separately are. First, green brand legitimation requires some sort of strategies that guide the process. In the theoretical framework, these are divided simply into symbolic strategies and behavioral strategies (Hrasky, 2012; Kim et al., 2007; Richardson, 1985; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Within these categories, individual and specific strategies can be further examined.

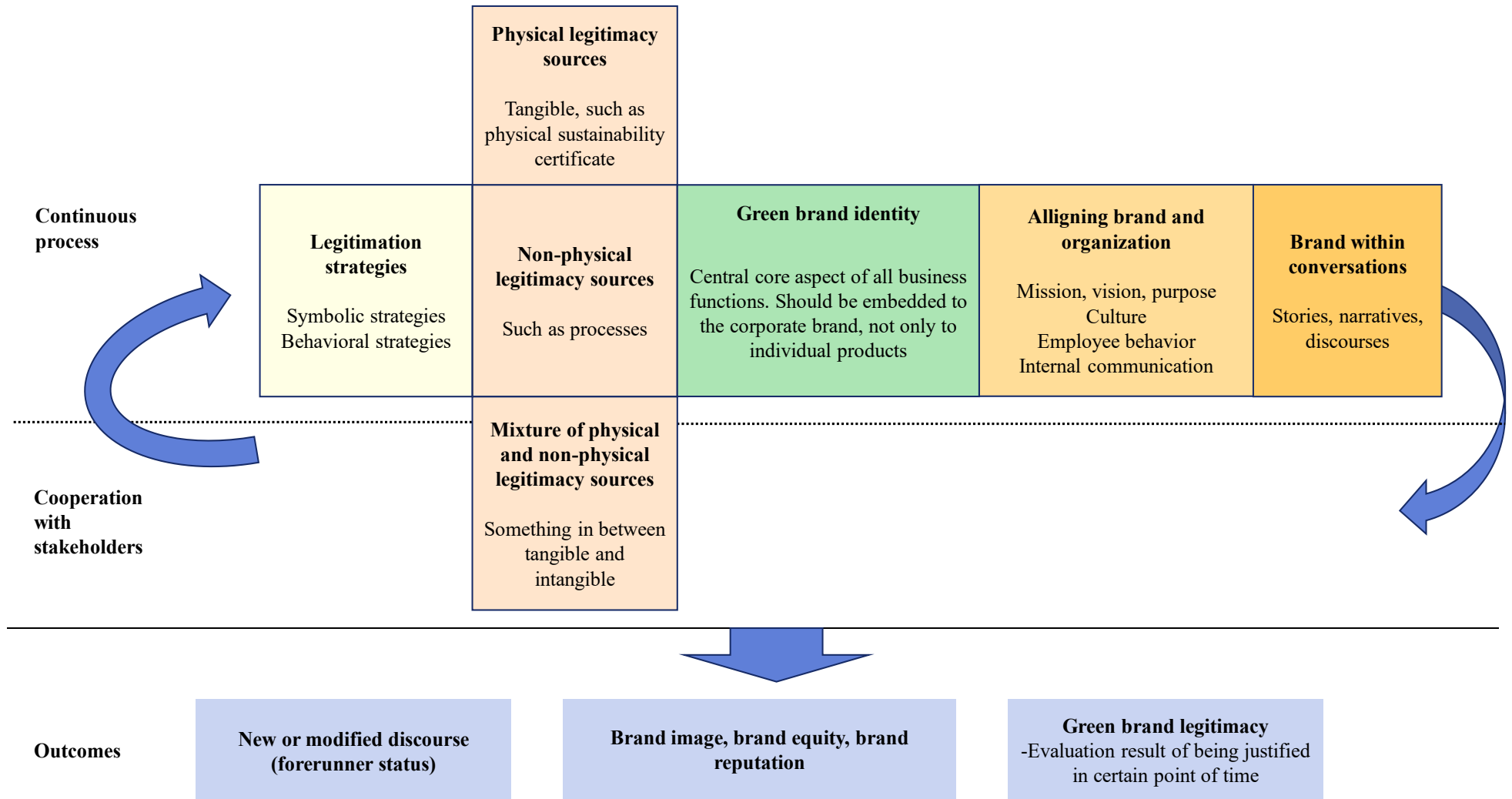


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of green brand legitimacy.

Theoretical framework of the study is constructed based on the literature review. Green brand legitimation is seen as a continuous process, much like branding and legitimation separately are. First, green brand legitimation requires some sort of strategies that guide the process. In the theoretical framework, these are divided simply into symbolic strategies and behavioral strategies (Hrasky, 2012; Kim et al., 2007; Richardson, 1985; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Within these categories, individual and specific strategies can be further examined.

Next, the individual sources of legitimacy are presented. Instead of using terms of artifacts (Suchman, 2003), legitimacy objects (Haack et al., 2021; Suddaby et al., 2017), or symbols of legitimacy (Suchman, 2003; Wang, 2018), the term source of legitimacy is used in this theoretical framework. This term allows examining not only physical, but also non-physical things instead of only the other one. In the theoretical framework, this term is divided into three categories of physical, non-physical, and mixture of physical and non-physical legitimacy sources. Later, when theoretical framework is updated from results of the empirical part, detailed sources are integrated into the model. In addition, if strategies are identified, they are also included in the updated model. However, the existence of strategies is not certain, but there will certainly be at least some sources that are identified during data analysis.

In the middle section, green brand identity is highlighted because without internal coherence of the greenness of a brand, it will not be coherently transferred externally to customers or other stakeholders. According to Kumar and Christodoulopoulou (2014) sustainability should be at the center stage of companies for successful implementation of it. Berrone et al. (2017) support this by stating that legitimacy can be effectively acquired by only genuinely green credentials. Based on these insights, green brand identity is also centered on the theoretical framework.

Moving forward, this green brand should also be aligned with the organization, possibly to official strategy, internal communication, and most importantly to employee behavior. Integration of sustainability activities throughout the company is important, and according to Kotler (2011) substantial changes are required in all departments and units of the company for achieving this. Kumar and

Christodouloupoulou (2014) also suggest that industrial brands benefit more from integrating sustainability to their whole corporate brand at the company level, rather than only focusing on individual products. Brand image that customers perceive, is influenced by all interactions they have with a brand (Davis et al., 2008), and especially from the interactions they have with employees (Iglesias & Bonet, 2012).

The brand will end up in conversations in different levels from individuals to wider public discussion (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021). In these conversations, stories, narratives, and discourses can be formed which affect the legitimacy of this green brand. From these discussions, the process circles back to the beginning through cooperation with stakeholders (Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019). This cooperation is understood as the business relationships between suppliers and manufacturers, but other parties outside of them might also participate in it. For example, all competitors could be forced to comply to new legislative regulations and cooperate doing so, even if they are not business partners. Overall, in the theoretical framework, legitimacy is viewed as a perception (Suddaby et al., 2017), which means that legitimacy is seen as a collective judgement between individuals, groups, organizations, and society. Therefore, the whole B2B industrial ecosystem affects the perception of legitimacy.

According to Czinkota et al. (2014) achieving sustainability and competitive advantage require companies to manage and combine their branding, reputation, and legitimacy in a mutually supporting way which this theoretical framework also tries to address. Outcomes of this green brand legitimation process are several. First, a new or modified discourse (Debenedetti et al., 2021; Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021) and even gaining the status of being a forerunner or opinion leader (Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Second, effects on brand image (Chung & Byrom, 2021; da Silveira et al., 2013), brand equity (Hur et al., 2014; Ishaq & di Maria, 2020), and brand reputation (Chung & Byrom, 2021; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). Third, green brand legitimacy (Guo et al., 2017, 2018). These results are expected to be positive, but if misconducts would be made in the green brand legitimation process, decreases in some subjects could be possible as well.

Lastly, green brand legitimation outcomes of legitimacy and reputation are mutually supportive actions which both themselves can result in increased competitive

advantage and social status. Reputation can increase or decrease legitimacy and vice versa. However, they are not equal constructs. Legitimacy is an essential requirement that companies cannot operate without. Reputation, on the other hand, is not essential, even though it is valuable, desirable, and synergistic to legitimacy. (Czinkota et al., 2014.) Castelló and Lozano (2011) point out that the reason for legitimacy's necessity comes from the fact that companies need legitimacy for maintaining the permission to operate, and for gaining power to expand. To conclude, improvement in green brand legitimacy is a necessary outcome of this study's theoretical framework if the company wants to stay operational. On the other hand, having a good brand reputation is a desirable outcome, but it is not a necessity.

5 METHODOLOGY

This master's thesis is a case study which examines a single subsidiary of a corporation. However, collected data is not limited to only the subsidiary, but it is also collected from the corporation and subsidiary's customers that are outside of the domesticated market. Case study is a research strategy that focuses on studying a unit, or units of interest such as companies, business units or departments, processes or functions, sequence of events, or history of an entity (Kallio & Palomäki, 2020; Koskinen, Alasuutari & Peltonen, 2005: 157). The unit of interest in this study is the subsidiary brand. It is examined from various viewpoints: within the subsidiary itself, and from its external customers. Case studies are used when research problems are holistic, in-depth, rare, or even groundbreaking in their nature (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008). Interviews and documents are typical data sources for qualitative research (Koskinen et al., 2005).

5.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is interested in understanding complex issues and describing them (Arksey & Knight, 1999). It is a practice for building improved understanding and making new meaningful distinction of any type of phenomenon that provide value for the scientific community (Aspers & Corte, 2019). It asks questions of when, why, and how (Berg, 2001), that cannot be analyzed by only statistical data (Alasuutari, 2011). Distinctively, qualitative research is based on examining individuals' subjective experiences and perceptions of the studied phenomenon (Juuti & Puusa, 2020). As a result, this provides an opportunity for locating where a phenomenon exists, what causes it, how it affects persons and entities involved, and do the studied results increase conceptual understanding of it (Williams & Moser, 2019). Even if a large part of qualitative research tries to improve understanding of pre-identified phenomenon, qualitative research can also be used for acquiring totally new information as well (Juuti & Puusa, 2020).

A research process which is based on continuous dialogue between theory and empirical data, is referred to as abductive reasoning (Puusa, 2020). This study is conducted using abductive reasoning. Practically it means that literature review,

theoretical framework, meeting notes, and interview data are assessed in a comprehensive manner, supporting each other. Based on the size of data collected, research questions were also slightly adjusted based on empirical data to narrow down the area of focus.

An interview is a suitable research method when there is a lack of prior studies addressing the phenomenon, there is a need for expanding the knowledge around the phenomenon, and there is a valid assumption that the study will produce multifaceted data leading to multiple directions. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008.) Sustainable industrial branding and brand legitimation are both understudied topics, and in this master's thesis they are combined with a subsidiary brand that is trying to expand outside of its domesticated market. While targeting new customers, it is on a journey towards building a greener brand. Overall, the topic and case setting are quite unique and uncharted territories. Therefore, the selection of interview is suitable for studying this phenomenon in this setting.

5.2 Theme interview

With qualitative methods, investigation can be made of phenomenon's meaning during and after it has occurred (Williams & Moser, 2019). For example, examining a company when they are in the process of legitimating their green brand for their customers, and examining this company again in the future, when their brand has already become legitimate. Various interview types exist including structured, semi-structured, theme, open, deep, reflexive, and group interviews. Interviews can be conducted face-to-face, using a phone, or through electronic channels. There might be slight variation of the definitions of these research methods, notably semi-structured and theme interviews having overlapping elements. (Juuti & Puusa, 2020.) Mainly the same terms for interview methods are used regardless of the field, but those terms might have different meanings depending on individual studies and fields. There is no singular accepted definition for the method of semi-structured interview, which is often in Finland referred as a theme interview. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008.) Theme interview is one of the most used methods for conducting qualitative research in business economics and social sciences (Koskinen, Alasuutari & Peltonen, 2005: 105).

Since both can mean the same thing, the term selected for this study is *theme interview*. Below the selected interview method is described in detail.

Semi-structured interviews can include both closed and open-ended questions (Arksey & Knight, 1999), some parts of the interview are pre-determined but not all (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008), and the interviewer can alter the sequence of questions and adapt the interview for a specific respondent (Fielding & Thomas, 2016, p. 282). The interview follows a predetermined plan with main questions. Relevant topics and themes are selected beforehand, but use of improvisation, follow-up questions, and clarifying questions can be used for exploring topics of interest that emerge during the process. (Arksey & Knight, 1999.)

Theme interview as a method does not require a certain number of interviews. It has the same selected themes for different interviewees, even if the questions inside them would be different. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008.) For a successful theme interview, the researcher must be thoroughly accustomed to relevant literature and prior studies that surround the studied phenomenon. In addition, selection of interviewees must be based on assumption that they have experience or knowledge about the selected issues and processes. Roles of interviewer and interviewee can be profoundly different between interviews because the answers and way of answering often vary among interviewees. Even if the themes selected should be mainly based on prior knowledge and theoretical framework of the study, it is important that the language used is understandable for both parties. This means that the interviewer is accustomed for example to the studied organization, person, and their work description before conducting the interview. Especially terminology used should mean the same thing for all participants. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008; Juuti & Puusa, 2020.)

To conclude, theme interview is used as the interview method for data collection. Researcher has accustomed to the case company by visiting it, through email communication, examining material provided by the company, and participating in several remote meetings that have been conducted during a five-month period before interviews. Persons selected for interviewing were chosen based on GREEF-project research team's observations and suggestions from the case company and suggestions derived from these participants.

5.3 Description of the case company

The case company, referred as *Faervis Mechanics*, is a subsidiary of a multinational corporation referred as *Faervis Global*. These companies operate in B2B industrial field providing products and services to other companies. Both names *Faervis Mechanics* and *Faervis Global* are pseudonyms for real-life companies. Use of pseudonyms, also known as code-names, ensures protecting the identities of the companies. Other possible identifiers are also pseudonymized for the purposes of this study. For an accurate representation of the case, the company and brand structures are not changed. Below, both companies will be described in detail and an illustration of the brand hierarchy and domesticated market are presented.

Faervis Global is a large industrial MNC where the annual revenue has been over 10 billion dollars in its peak. It operates mainly in a specific industrial field what it is mainly known for, but it has also subsidiaries that operate in other industrial fields. *Faervis Global* owns a multitude of brands: brands that do not carry the *Faervis* name (e.g. *Aegis*, *Fenrir*, *Spatha*) and so-called support brands that do carry the corporation's name (e.g. *Faervis Finance*, *Faervis Maintenance*, *Faervis Mechanics*). Originally *Faervis Global* has been primarily a holding company for multiple brands, and that has led to many acquisitions of brands during its history. It is a fitting representation of the classic house of brands architecture, and it operates through multiple subsidiaries mainly in Europe and America. Some of these subsidiaries are also brands for *Faervis Global* including the case company *Faervis Mechanics*. However, many subsidiaries are not seen as their own individual brands, but only as business units or manufacturing factories supporting the main brands of *Faervis Global*.

Because *Faervis Global* owns a multitude of brands, some of them are directly and indirectly competing against each other. Manufacturing products requires cooperation from *Faervis Global* and its subsidiaries. Products that are delivered to customers can be components such as wheels, or end products such as industrial machines or industrial engines. Manufacturing parts and finally assembling them requires participation from multiple subsidiaries, and as a result, they might compete against each other for the right to participate. Therefore, transactions for each other create the domesticated market for subsidiaries. In this domesticated market, subsidiaries buy

and sell offerings to each other while being part of the same corporation Faervis Global.

Faervis Mechanics has operated under different names before the acquisition to Faervis Global. Its main factory and facilities are in the Nordic countries, but it has also three other manufacturing plants in South America and Asia. The main factory has a long history, with loyal customers even before the time of Faervis Global. However, many customers are not necessarily aware of Faervis Mechanics' heritage, because of the name associated to Faervis Global which is mainly known for a different industrial field. Faervis Mechanics focuses on several industrial engines and components, that it manufactures for the corporation and its brands. These include an essential technical part which is used in nearly 75 % of the assembled products Faervis Global is selling. There are multiple variations of these parts including customized solutions. This gives Faervis Mechanics a specialist role among subsidiaries and it has been recently highlighted among main brands and some of the support brands in Faervis Global's website.

Faervis Mechanics offers products that are considered top of the line in environmental sustainability in their respected categories. It has already solutions available that fulfill current regulatory environmental demands, such as emission requirements, and even surpass them. Regulations differ between countries and that is why there are different versions of the same core product available. However, Faervis Mechanics is strongly focusing on these latest regulatory requirements and products that surpass them. Two years before this master's thesis, in 2020, Faervis Mechanics approved two goals for its official strategy: growing sales for third party companies and building a stronger brand for Faervis Mechanics.

Differing from most other subsidiaries, Faervis Mechanics is allowed to conduct business independently with third party companies that are not part of the Faervis Global corporation. Lines between subsidiaries in Figure 2. represent transactional relationships that take place inside the domesticated market. In addition to them, Faervis Mechanics sells 10-15 % of its products to these third parties outside of the domesticated market, as illustrated in Figure 2. The goal for Faervis Mechanics is to

grow this percentage and appeal to external customers while simultaneously strengthening their position inside Faervis Global.

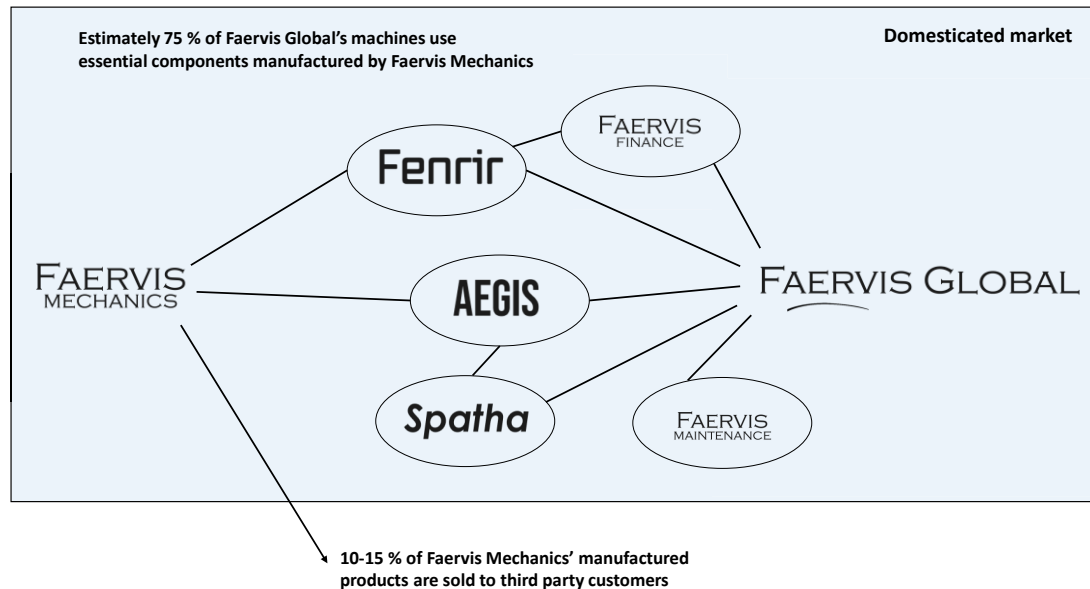


Figure 2. Simplified illustration of Faervis Mechanics' domesticated market.

In Figure 2. Fenrir, Aegis, and Spatha represent other subsidiaries in the Faervis Global corporation. Supportive brands such as Faervis Finance and Faervis Maintenance are not necessarily subsidiaries, but supportive functions that have an established brand. Other subsidiaries than Faervis Mechanics do not usually conduct independent sales outside of the corporation, Faervis Global does it for them. This makes Faervis Mechanics an interesting and unique case in the corporation. Figure 2. and 3. represent only a small sample of brands that Faervis Global really owns. Names and logos used in these illustrations are pseudonymized both in naming and visual outlook.

Figure 3. illustrates the variety of different brands that Faervis Global owns. Because many of them have been acquired, naming and visual outlook might differ from the corporation's established outlook. Main brands, such as Fenrir and Rush Force, do usually have their own name and visual outlook, but support brands, such as Faervis Mechanics and Faervis Maintenance, often carry the same visual outlook and corporation's name in their brand. Overall, there are multiple different brands in Faervis Global representing either independent branding or corporation's branding.

FAERVIS GLOBAL



Figure 3. Simplified illustration of house of brands architecture of Faervis Global.

Companies rarely follow the exact theoretical outline that is established for certain brand architectures, which is also true for Faervis Global. It has recently developed and highlighted more brands, such as Faervis Mechanics, that are directly associated with the corporation's name. Looking from that angle, it does have elements shifting the focus from house of brands towards a mixture of it and a branded house architecture. However, because the main brands do not reflect this approach, Faervis Global in its current state is classified representing house of brands architecture.

5.4 Description of the case company's customers

These companies are operating globally in the forest machine manufacturing industry. They have been customers of Faervis Mechanics even before it was acquired by Faervis Global. During the time when Faervis Mechanics was not being allowed to create new third-party business relationships, these two already established business relationships were allowed to continue. Overall, they are part of Faervis Mechanics' third-party customers since they are not owned by Faervis Global. Also, they do have designated account managers from Faervis Mechanics, that customers (other subsidiaries) inside the Faervis Global's domesticated market do not have.

These two customers do also operate in the Nordic countries like Faervis Mechanics does. End customers for these two companies are either individual operators of forest machines, or companies that employ multiple forest machine operators. The first one is a smaller company that is known for innovative solutions and being at the forefront of technological solutions. The second one is a larger company, and it is one of the world's leading forest machinery manufacturers. Both operate globally and their headquarters are in the Nordic countries. Because they operate in the same field, similar environmental requirements and expectations apply to both.

5.5 Data collection

19 theme interviews were conducted in May 2022. Interviews lasted between 29–111 minutes. One participant was interviewed twice. Theme interview was the used interview method for data collection. Before conducting any interviews, the researcher has accustomed to the case company by visiting it, through email communication, examining material provided by the company, and participating in several remote meetings that have been conducted during a five-month period before interviews. Preparation was also done for participants not representing Faervis Mechanics by familiarizing with their companies and individuals' work histories. In many instances, communication was conducted via email, social media channels such as LinkedIn, or through phone before conducting the official interviews. The official interviews were recorded, transcribed, and in cases where the interview language was not English – certain sections were translated to English when those sections were highlighted in the empirical analysis. Consent for participation was collected from all interviewees before conducting the interviews.

Persons selected for interviewing were chosen based on GREEF-project research team's observations, suggestions from Faervis Mechanics and suggestions from interviewed participants. Persons who were part of the business relationships between Faervis Mechanics and its customers were also interviewed to gain a comprehensive picture from both perspectives. As a result, selected and interviewed participants were from Faervis Mechanics, and third-party customers of Faervis Mechanics. A representative of a large state-owned forestry enterprise, and a representative from a

wood procurement development company were also interviewed based on third-party customer interviews.

The themes of interviews were formed based on this study's research questions, theoretical framework, and goals of the GREEF-project which this master's thesis is part of. Themes of the interviews were: green brand, sources of green brand legitimacy, legitimation and cooperation, business relationships, and environmental sustainability in participant's area of expertise. A combination of these themes was tailored for the participant according to their role, company, history, and available time for the interview. A typical interview included three themes, but there were also exceptions to this which were mainly dependent on the participant's available time for the interview. It is worthy of noting that the interviews were used to collect data in general for the GREEF-project, and not all of it was relevant for the purposes of this master's thesis. As the interviews progressed, it was clear that answers from themes involving environmental sustainability were often overlapping with multiple themes and labeling them under the predetermined theme was not always correct.

Predetermined questions were formed under these themes, and they were further tailored for each participant. During the interviewing process, some questions were altered based on participants understandability of them, and answers given to them. Many questions were specific for the role of the participants, and they were either not included in other roles, or they were changed for that specific role. For example, participants who were not participating in the buying process, were not asked for specifics of environmental sustainability's importance in the buying process. A list of selected themes and several guiding questions was sent to most participants before the interview took place.

During the interviews, the order of themes and predetermined questions varied based on participants answers and the natural flow of conversation. Participants were interviewed mainly by the writer of this study, but in few instances a co-interviewer from the GREEF-research team was also present during interviews. Participants were interviewed individually; no group interviews took place. When new interesting topics emerged that were not expected beforehand, some themes or questions were left out to discuss these emerging themes. Probing questions were also used to further gain clarity

for answers, or help participants better understand what was being discussed. Interviews were conducted online using Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Recording was done mainly using Zoom's built-in recorder (to local files, not cloud). A physical recorder was used as a backup, and as the main device on the instance of conducting interview via Microsoft Teams, because Microsoft Teams could only record the interview to a cloud storage instead of local computer. This choice of not using Microsoft Teams' own recorder was made purely by privacy reasons.

Table 1. Interview participant information.

Participant	Company	Experience in the company	Method	Date	Duration
Head of Marketing	Faervis Mechanics	1.5 years	Zoom	5.5.2022	1 h 51 min
Specialist, System & Environmental Projects	Faervis Mechanics	3 years	Zoom	6.5.2022	1 h 33 min
Account Manager	Faervis Mechanics	10 years	Zoom	9.5.2022	1 h 30 min
Account Manager	Faervis Mechanics	1.5 years	Zoom	9.5.2022	1 h 35 min
Head of Sales	Forest Machine Manufacturer 1	20 years	Zoom	11.5.2022	30 min
Director of Sales and Marketing	Faervis Mechanics	6 years	Zoom	12.5.2022	55 min
Director of Product Development	Forest Machine Manufacturer 1	20 years	Zoom	12.5.2022	1 h 9 min
Chief Executive Officer	Forest Machine Manufacturer 1	5 years	Zoom	16.5.2022	58 min
Chief Executive Officer	Forest Machine Manufacturer 1	5 years	Zoom	13.5.2022	54 min
Account Manager	Faervis Mechanics	1.5 years	Zoom	13.5.2022	1 h 9 min
Chief Operating Officer	Forest Machine Manufacturer 1	4 years	Microsoft Teams	13.5.2022	42 min
Logistics Development Manager	Forest Machine Manufacturer 2	12 years	Zoom	16.5.2022	29 min
Head of Marketing	Forest Machine Manufacturer 1	6 months	Zoom	17.5.2022	1 h 36 min
Environmental Engineer	Faervis Mechanics	15 years	Zoom	19.5.2022	1 h 38 min
Project Manager	Forest Machine Manufacturer 2	1 year	Zoom	20.5.2022	1 h 35 min
Researcher	Wood procurement development company	24 years	Zoom	20.5.2022	39 min
Silviculture Manager	State owned forestry enterprise	13 years	Zoom	23.5.2022	38 min
Strategic Purchasing Manager	Forest Machine Manufacturer 1	14 years	Zoom	24.5.2022	1 h 36 min
Senior Design Engineer	Forest Machine Manufacturer 2	25 years	Microsoft Teams	25.5.2022	33 min

Information about 19 theme interviews with 18 participants. All interviews were conducted online and recorded.

5.6 Data analysis

From the 19 interviews, every interview was recorded and 15 of them were transcribed. Last 4 interviews were not fully transcribed because of time limit, but the recordings allowed going through them based on notes taken during the interviews. During interviews, notes were taken that were later used for finding relevant information in transcripts and recordings. Because legitimacy is quite abstract concept, data relating to it was often gained throughout the interview regardless of the official theme that was under discussion. Often participants even half accidentally mentioned or remembered something that eventually led up to a connection to legitimacy. These connections usually happened when participants were talking about their own experiences, for example about their expertise or about a memorable day at work.

Transcripts were read multiple times through, and relevant information regarding the research questions of this study were highlighted and copied to a separate word document compiling answers of the same theme and topic. Comparisons were made here between participants, but because of having 19 interviews, the copied direct quotes added up and comparing them required creating a new more cohesive document which did not contain every single direct quote of relevance. Not every quote regarding the same issue was copied here, only a selected few, making the analysis much easier. At this time, a list was conducted of all individual identified sources of green brand legitimacy which was updated after analyzing more data. During the analysis process, transcripts were usually also searched for certain words using a find box. This was done with words that seemed relevant in other interviews, or subjects that needed particularly more detail.

At the same time as compiling the list of individual sources, ideas and connections about these sources and other comments from participants were compared and a mockup list of possible legitimation strategies was formed. Finally, a last larger comparison was made between compiled and analyzed data and transcripts and notes. Last interviews, which of four were not transcribed fully, were compared to the time stamps based on notes taken during interviews.

6 EMPIRICAL STUDY: FINDINGS

This chapter examines empirical findings from the interviews, compares them to prior literature and theoretical framework of this study, and finally presents an empirical grounded model. This chapter is divided into four sub-chapters. The first three sub-chapters examine and present the findings from different themes. Instead of going through same themes as they were labelled in the theme interviews, a combination of predetermined themes and emergent themes is used. This choice is based on transparency and understandability since many answers were indeed part of multiple themes. Simplifying and combining answers under similar topics improves understandability and analysis. Three chapters and combined themes are: sources of green brand legitimacy, green brand legitimation and co-creation, and evolution of Faervis Mechanics. The fourth chapter presents a conclusion for empirical findings and the empirical grounded model that updates theoretical framework with empirical findings.

Citations presented in the upcoming sub-chapters are modified in a way that support words are either removed or added to make citations cleaner and easier to understand. Some of the citations are also translated to English. Pseudonymized name, title and company are also presented after the quote. In few instances regarding sensitive statements, those identifiers are not presented if the participant could be identified internally. In those cases, general phrases such as ‘one of the directors, forest machine manufacturer 1’ or ‘person involved in sales, Faervis Mechanics’ are used instead.

6.1 Difficulties with sustainability and branding

This sub-chapter presents some of the challenges that brands were facing in implementing sustainability in their operations. Sustainability and branding were both seen as developing processes in the industrial companies that were interviewed. Because branding and marketing were itself still developing, the implementation of sustainability to branding had not necessarily been fully completed. Opinions varied between different participants of their brand’s current greenness and sustainability, but it was clear that there were generally many issues surrounding sustainability and

branding. However, many of these issues were already identified and they were already being improved or waiting for corrective actions to start.

6.1.1 Opinion differences

Some participants in managing roles openly communicated their lack of interest towards sustainability issues. Many participants thought that in their company, there were two far ends of being either green or anti-green. However, some participants that were presumably anti-green, were indeed very informed and interested in sustainability issues. Usually, the lack of interest was justified either by just stating that the issues do not personally interest them, or that is because of conservativeness of the industrial fields and there is no use for fighting it. Some of the various opinions are highlighted below. Because of the sensitivity of this subject, no direct work titles are revealed in the quotes.

“I can state that personally I am not that green. This – everything we do here, is greenwashing, but I have joined in because we can get to new markets, and howl as wolves among wolves... I like to drive on a big diesel engine, I do not own an electric car, and my summer car has a V8 engine.” (One of the top managers)

“It will take about ten years or so when we are in a turning point... The next generation will not care anymore about engine noise – and then these people who swear by engine noise and black smoke, they are screwed.” (Participant)

“I can instantly give you a list of names from people who are pro-environment and who are anti-environment” ... If your superior is very anti-environment... many do not have the courage to bring out how environmentally friendly they really are.” (Participant)

“We have many salespersons, who are very environmentally aware... And persons who think this is pure nonsense... There are these two far ends.” (One of the managers, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

6.1.2 Framing of sustainability

Depending on participant's role in their company, their perspective of what is sustainable and what is not were often quite different. Sustainability could be knowingly framed differently, or it could be a result of department, or company

culture. General finding was that usually many things that could be presented as being sustainable, were instead presented being of better quality, saving material costs and consuming less energy. Overall, there were various perspectives that participants identified. Much like opinions differences being present, so were the perspectives about sustainability. However, the importance of sustainability was perceived being lower compared to many other issues such as work safety or cost savings, such as the comment below from Freya and Henry. Petra also highlighted that sometimes money just goes before sustainability, even if sustainable choices would be acknowledged.

“...As I said, we do many good things, but quite many – we can’t yet seem to be able to think about things we do from environmental point of view. Instead, these things are thought and done based on cost reasons, and even work safety seems to go before it. For example, use of glues is reduced, and that might be done from a work safety viewpoint, even if it is environmentally really important to reduce the use of chemicals.” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“... Why people don’t really report about sustainability internally [to the internal initiative system] is because people don’t really perceive things from sustainability’s viewpoint. For example, if oil is spilled on the floor, it is first perceived as a safety issue – because you trip and hurt yourself... But many don’t think past the fact of oil being on the floor, when you could think why the oil was spilled in the first place and could it be prevented – is something leaking, are our transportations vehicles fine...” (Henry, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“I can sometimes feel that I give suggestions of what we could do in my area...and then I get the answer from my company management that state that they are very much for sustainability, but I should choose the less expensive, less sustainable solution... So money goes before sustainability in some areas.” (Petra, Logistics Development Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

An interesting perspective was sustainability being framed as a necessity, and even as a vital requirement for business operations. Freya and Emilio both indicated that sustainability is an essential requirement for companies’ existence, especially in the future.

“Because... We don’t have a future as a company, if we don’t take care of environmental issues. It will be... It already is, maybe not in customer demands, but for investors it is a clear demand. Thinking it that way, I think it [being sustainable] is a vital requirement for business practices.” (Freya, specialist, Faervis Mechanics)

“... It’s not just about altruistic vehicle manufacturers that care about the environment, it’s because the legislation is very harsh. They know that if they don’t invest in this, they will not be able to do business.” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

Sustainability and ‘greenness’ were compared, and their meaning was perceived being as different. Emilio perceived caring about nature or ‘greenness’ as a tangible thing, that anyone could relate to. Sustainability was sometimes being perceived as a distant and intangible construct like Emilio and one of the managers mentioned. One individual also thought that the brand of ‘greenness’ had become poisoned in his own country, and that caused problems with integrating sustainability and branding together.

“One [caring about nature] is more tangible than the other [sustainability] I think. Anyone can relate to caring about nature... Environmental case, about more global phenomenon, it’s quite untangible for a lot of people.” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“They could not care less for the ‘market created sustainability issues’... It’s hard to say how much these genuine contractors really care about sustainability, even if they often are feet-on-the-ground people and care about nature...” (One of the managers, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“For me, in this country, the brand of ‘greenness’ has become poisoned.” (Participant)

The forest industry was seen as slow moving, conservative and not necessarily yet sustainable industry. Attitudes of end customers working in this industry were pondered multiple times, as well as attitudes of the whole forest industry. Overall, companies operating in forest industry are slowly forced to adapt to a more sustainable practices and products, which was accepted with mixed opinions. Michael highlighted the importance of regulations and their effects on forest industry. He also thought that adoption problems of new technologies had left a negative reputation for the industry and for new ‘greener’ machines, because they had been in the past been more expensive and had problems that regular machines did not have. Kalle wondered about the industry’s conservativeness affecting its perspective towards sustainability and sustainable products.

“Yes, it [obeying environmental laws and regulations] is very important for forest industry, because it is an industry where sustainability issues are currently very sensitive. Of course before, a long time ago – they were not even cared for. It has left a mildly bad reputation.” (Michael, Head of Sales, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“It’s an astonishing thing that it [competition for ‘greener’ technology] has not arrived yet. Everyone in our company is wondering, and being like what on earth?... Maybe it is just this industry’s conservativeness, that people don’t just believe in these things...” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

6.1.3 Communication problems with green brands

Participants identified several communication problems that were present in their companies. Gaps between departments, individuals, and management were often mentioned and a common wish was having official environmental leadership and recognition of sustainability practices. Some departments were generally more informed about sustainability practices than others which Henry, Petra and one of the managers indicated below. Emilio told about a divide between product development and business administration.

“...It varies. Some [persons in product development] are very active and hope that sustainability would be implemented more, particularly in product development. Others couldn’t care less about it, what matters is producing a competitive engine. Overall, it varies in all functions, some are interested, and others are not.” (Henry, member of an environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“If you’re working with, for example, the engines, then you’re well aware of it [sustainability]. If you’re working with packaging, you know very much about it. Also, if you’re working with chemicals.” (Petra, Logistics Development Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“It’s bit of a tribalism going on... There’s this huge divide between economics, business administration and engineering...” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“...It [communication about sustainability] is not necessarily that much present – or originating from our executive board...” (One of the managers)

Knowledge of sustainability issues, and personnel responsible for them varied. Some participants could not identify anyone who would be responsible for sustainability

issues in their company, or if there even were these kinds of persons. Similarly, these persons did not necessarily were aware of possible codes of conducts, or about the existence of an environmental team. Often sustainability was seen as ‘someone else’s job which does not concern me’. Compare the below examples from the same company. The first participant is aware of the existence of an environmental group, and how it works, and the second participant is not even aware if there are any sustainability personnel in their company.

“I know that the chairman of our environmental group reports to the management.” (Participant)

“...In our company specifically, I haven’t seen any [persons responsible for sustainability]. I’m not so sure if have [them].” (Participant)

Solving these communication problems or gaps between departments was done in various ways. Getting accustomed and speaking ‘the same language’ with product developers was seen as an important skill. Some persons were acting as translators between product development and other functions. Translation was sometimes required in both ways, not just from engineers to other departments, but the other way around as well. Kalle thought that knowing the language of product development was the key for him to shorten the gap between marketing and product development. Emilio also acknowledged the gap between different business units, and he often acted as a translator between them.

“The problem has previously been, that marketing has been outsourced and those persons doing it have not been able to properly ‘speak machine’ with our production...” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“I often have to be able to understand that [language of engineers] ... and communicate that to other functions that maybe not have this language.” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

People responsible for external marketing and communications faced several problems about what information about company’s operations could be shared. Various measurements regarding sustainability could not be publicly shared until they are verified and internally approved. Katie, Dwight, and Kalle mentioned about the

shyness of information sharing, that is a result of company culture, corporate secrets, and carefulness to avoid stigma for greenwashing.

“...You must really fight for it [having the leading status], especially in an industry like this where there are multiple corporate secrets, prototypes, and patents. There is this balance between what can be currently talked about, and what cannot be talked just yet.” (Katie, Head of Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

“You could say that we have a lot of hidden information that is not revealed, and it’s quite typical for us that we do things and we do them well, but we decide not to talk about them until customers are in the negotiating table with us... Only then we really start to reveal what all we have in store.” (Dwight, Account manager, Faervis Mechanics)

“...Our green brand, we have done great work towards it, but we have been rather shy communicating about it.” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

6.1.4 Separating truly green brands from others

Sustainability and ‘greenness’ have been often associated with brands, but many participants saw a difference between truly green brands and brands that tried to look green but were not. Separating green brands was seen difficult because of the lack of accepted scales between brands, and the ‘greenness’ being a trend that is communicated, whether the company would be green or not. Employees in different roles highlighted different things often from their perspective, but a common thing was concrete actions. These actions were often combined with transparency, openness, honesty, and trustworthiness. The below quotes illustrate that verifiable and concrete actions are what matter. Hans also mentions doing things that benefit solely the environment instead of just being financially viable choices is important.

“It all has to do with action, I think. If there is true action to really become more sustainable, for real, not just for showing various numbers, or like this – greenwashing that exists quite a lot.” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“I could say based on an engineering background, that these things [being a green brand] should always be verifiable.” (Veikko, Director of Sales and Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

“...Concrete actions... Doing really those direct actions [towards sustainability] and not trying to search for an existing process whose ‘greenness’ we haven’t realized and capitalized yet... If a company wants to truly be green, it does the green thing, even if it would not financially the best choice... The main driver [for a company] must be truly being environmentally sustainable – that for me is the most concrete thing that you can do to a company.” (Hans, Account manager, Faervis Mechanics)

“From the viewpoint of branding, I see that a rightfully green brand is ready for investing actual money towards replacing technologies with less polluting, less demanding on the environment, more sustainable – to make more sustainable products.” (Katie, Head of Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

“It [truly green brands] needs to be factual based, and have real environmental caring behind it.” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Fulfilling regulative minimum requirements for having certain certificates was not seen itself making a brand green like Freya mentioned below. If regulations are mandatory, and all competitors must fulfill them, that is not necessarily a viable metric for comparing their ‘greenness’. Because there are regional differences in legislation, products with varying emission standards are sold to multiple countries, even if the emission technology would be over ten years behind current leading technologies.

“...I don’t consider fulfilling only legislative minimum requirements as ‘greenness’...” (Freya, member of the environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

Differences were seen globally. Rasmus mentioned sustainability issues being more dominant in Europe and in the Nordic countries. America was roughly five years behind the current top emission standards in Europe. Veikko described China aiming for its own emission standard, which is similar, but slightly different to Europe’s Stage V. Alfred described Russia, Australia and New Zealand being at least ten years behind Europe in emission standards. In these countries the emission standard was Stage II, which does not require a catalysator at all. Sven also reminded Africa being an area which does not have higher standards than Stage II.

“Let’s say that in the Nordic countries and in Europe this sustainability issue is significantly more important.” (Rasmus, Account manager, Faervis Mechanics)

“...They [emission requirements in America] are roughly five years behind us [in Europe]. Then in Russia, Australia, and New Zealand – they are ten years

behind us...You don't need to use the catalysator in there at all.” (Alfred, Strategic Purchasing Manger, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...Similarly, Africa does not have any [higher emission standards than Stage II]...” (Sven, Chief Executive Officer, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“In China, they are aiming towards China's own Stage IV, which is perhaps slightly more demanding than EU's current stage [V]. Their technology will be our European Stage V, but its emission requirements are slightly lower...” (Veikko, Director of Sales and Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

When everyone is trying to be green, it becomes increasingly difficult for separating between green and pretending-to-be green brands. One participant was frustrated from searching from already existing practices for some 'greenness' instead of focusing on new things based on purely environmental goals. Emilio said that he must properly investigate companies to determine if they are green or not, because it is becoming harder to see what communication is authentic and what is not. Alfred said that it was difficult to separate between truly green and non-green brands, especially when dealing with many potential manufacturers. For him, company visits were the only reliable way of making this separation possible, where he could see in his own eyes the outlook, quality, cleanliness, and processes in their true nature.

“...Otherwise [without a proper investigation of brand's sustainability] I just fall for the – if they say they are, we say we are... But I have no insight into that.” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“It's not that easy [separating truly green brands from non-green ones]... Usually you have to plan weeks, or even months ahead if you want to conduct a company visit. It is really difficult.” (Alfred, Strategic Purchasing Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

One participant was frustrated from searching from already existing practices for some 'greenness' instead of focusing on new things based on purely environmental goals.

“...Because everyone else is green, you 'search from our ongoing process'. You don't necessarily actually do anything, but you communicate something like 'Hey, we are green. Did you know that we do this?'... For example, why we recycle? To have ISO 9000 certificate. And now we advertise that we are green. We have always recycled...” (One of the employees, Faervis Mechanics)

6.2 Green brand legitimation strategies

This sub-chapter presents strategies that were being used for green brand legitimation. Some of the strategies were planned and some of them were results of emergent actions. Additionally, several strategies that were not properly utilized, are presented in this chapter. Many participants identified rhetoric, symbolic, and behavioral strategies that were used for legitimating the green brand or hoped that they would be used. Use of colors in forest machine industry had to consider colors of competitors which are very well established. One forest machine manufacturer is heavily associated with green, and that can limit the use of the word green, and the use of green as a color for competitors of this company.

“Their [competitor company] machines are green, so we can’t say anything about green...” (Participant)

Rhetorical strategy of using sustainability related words and phrases like Katie mentions, was the most common one that was present in interviews. Use of a certain product name associated to sustainability was heavily used in Kalle’s company. Combined with rhetorical use of sustainability related words and phrases, a strategic repetition of words and themes revolving around sustainability, low emission, and low consumption, was also used by Kalle.

“When we are talking about our engines, we use certain phrases and words, for example sustainable and reliable... especially the word sustainability with a constant, light repetition... currently the ‘greenness’ in our engines focuses on low-emissions and sustainability [in external communication] ... and the word alternative fuel is also used more and more” (Katie, Head of Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

“Every press release, this is also our management’s decision... Our own people are perhaps even tired for it [the ‘greenest’ forest machine of this company] still being talked about... Our low emissions are mentioned in every magazine ad, every social media post...” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Visual imagery showing nature was used, but it was not always a strategic choice itself. Elements of nature such as water and earth were used, and knowingly used as well, but the use of them was not necessarily yet quite strategic. Earth included trees, forests,

plants, and crop fields. Water included rivers, lakes, and snow. Air was mentioned only in the case of aerial shots used in videos from the factory area. Fire or burning was absent from conversations. Because of forest machines operating in forests, they were often either in pictures or videos – in forests. And if the location of facilities is near nature, showing nature happens almost by accident. However, these nature views were appreciated and beautifully shot, as Freya mentions. Kalle points out that they have made videos and images with nature, but they have not always been done because of green values, but because forest machines simply are in a forest when you photograph them. One of the directors appreciated nature imagery, and for him, it was a positive thing improving greenness of the brand.

“...In our summer videos, there [in the factory area and its surroundings] is so lush and green, and you can see the nearby lake. And during winter... this pure nature... this lovely white winter landscape where every tree is coated with white – that is something where [our] appreciation of environment is seen.” (Freya, specialist, Faervis Mechanics)

“...We have already made a video which features nature. In the video, it is said in exemplary way, that wood is one of the greenest and most sustainable ingredients we can use.” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...They have almost in all their brochures and visual materials, I think they usually feature some sort of nature picture from a field, or pretty landscape picture and things like that. At least for me, in my eyes, it brings greenness to their brand.” (One of the directors)

Strategy specifically tailored for typical forest machine contractors was used. In this strategy, the communication and messages were geared for ‘macho men’, as Ilias pointed out. Kalle also tried to make frame sustainability issues understandable and relatable for forest machine contractors, compared to sustainability being related to only politics in cities, way outside of countryside.

“It [forest industry] is quite conservative, and so-called macho men’s industry in its full sense. It’s what it is, that’s a fact, and that is how we should operate, communicate, and advertise.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“For a good and just forest cycle. That’s a message that resonates with forest machine contractors, because they get constantly negative feedback for cutting down forests.” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

External validation strategy was used extensively by the other forest machine manufacturer. They had participated in an external study, where an independent company measured their products environmental performance. This led to a report that was shared in marketing channels for customers with great success. Ilias and Kalle mention about the importance and popularity of these factual measurements.

“It’s [internal and external measurements] one important part of things that we highlight every time we get a chance.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...It [featuring the previously mentioned report] was one of our most popular posts we have done in the whole year...This independent study was made, and it was widely covered.” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Also being partly of external validation strategy, gaining certificates was also a way of gaining environmental legitimacy. However, the strength of this strategy for legitimation of green brands can be debated. Alfred mentioned that when evaluating possible manufacturers in company visits, manufacturers often mention their certificates in company presentations. However, he said that it was not always clear if they were currently in use, or were they expired. Freya talked about collecting multiple certificates, not just for sustainability. Kalle was aiming for certification in the long run. Katie also thought utilizing environmental certificates in company website could improve its environmental credibility. Many certificates are voluntary and expensive, but the correct emission tiers are required for selling products in a certain country like Ilias mentioned. Therefore, meeting the latest EU’s Stage V emission tier would not be a strategy for legitimating green brands since it is a requirement for business operations.

“...Our quality- and environmental systems are certified. Also, our occupational health- and work safety systems are about to be certified during this spring.” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“When we are shown PowerPoint slides and such [in company visits when visiting a potential manufacturer], they mention in them that they have certificates of this and that...” (Alfred, Strategic Purchasing Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“And we have to look at them in our five-year-plan, that we would have certificates and other things in check.” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...We have a clear legislation about these emission norms, there is no choice about them. You must fulfill them.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...Lots of certificates and awards on your website, that’s how you build your credibility [for a certain audience]. In a certain way, these environmental certificates and these medals could be one way of doing it.” (Katie, Head of Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

Being part of projects that revolve around sustainability were seen as concrete ways of building the green brand. Freya and Katie mentioned several projects their company was participating in. Benefits that come as an outcome of a project are often those which are focused on, but the participation itself could be better utilized from a branding point of view. Association to not only the project, but to the other authorities involved in those projects could be a viable way increasing legitimacy of a brand. Ilias mentioned being that their company is part of StanForD cooperation, where multiple actors are involved.

“Another is this GREEF co-project... where we have multiple assignments and work packages... And we also have this [other] project based on European Union’s REACH-regulation [Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals] and RoHS directive [Restriction of Hazardous Substances Directive], for ensuring that we are not using harmful materials and substances in our production. (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“One central part of it [of building a green brand] is this GREEF-project.” (Katie, Head of Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

“...Through this StanForD cooperation. It has its own task force, where forest corporations, forest machine manufacturers, state owned forest enterprises, and all these parties are involved. Roughly saying, they have monthly sessions – improving the world, developing this and that...” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Internally, officially resourcing more people for sustainability roles, and establishing environmental teams were seen legitimating green brand internally. However, participants hoped for the final stage of this, which would be assigning a director responsible for sustainability issues. This would finally make sustainability, and green brand as a serious thing associated with authority. Petra described her company's environmental group which has members from each department. The chairman of this group reports to management.

“Yes, we have what we call the environmental group, which meets once a month, and we have representatives from each department.” (Petra, Logistics Development Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

Making facilities as clean and pure as possible was one strategy that was not necessarily done for purposes of enhancing brand's greenness, but for quality and work safety reasons. However, the cleanliness of a manufacturer's facility was seen very important signaling about the environmental practices and greenness of company's brand. Manufacturers are often physically visited before an official business relationship has started, and during this visit the cleanliness was a reason of preferring a brand, or even disregarding them based on poor conditions of facilities. Alfred mentioned that for him, these company visits have been very important when evaluating possible manufacturers and their green brand, but also for ongoing business relationships as well.

“We have officially, and for real, focused on cleanness and pureness in our new facilities...” (Member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“Sometimes we also get invites [to visit company facilities]... but these visits are not conducted in the same way... [compared to conducting company visits at the start of business relationships]” (Alfred, Strategic Purchasing Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Lastly, a supervision strategy was used between business partners. This was done also from technical and financial reasons, and not only from environmental perspective. This strategy includes conducting audits, reviews, supervision, and teaching environmental aspects, and demanding greenness from a business partner. Ilias mentioned that suppliers are audited at the beginning of business relationship, and then they are monitored using a certain set of indicators. Petra mentioned that they have a

mandatory teaching of eco-driving with new machines in a certain country for customers. Similar practices as Ilias and Petra mentioned were described in various interviews, it was important to know what your suppliers and customers are both doing. Freya mentioned that certificates are hoped, but not demanded from suppliers. Absence of them can be replaced with certain audits.

“...There are no regular yearly overviews, so to speak. Once you have the initial audit [towards a supplier], and then you have these indicators which are followed.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“When we deliver a new machine, we have a technician that has a meeting with every new customer, and teach them how to use eco-driving with the new machine.” (Petra, Logistics Development Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“With our suppliers, we don’t necessarily demand, but we hope that they would all have the environmental certificate ISO 14001. If they don’t, they go through a precise audit that we conduct for our suppliers... Also, with REACH-legislation, we also aim to affect that our suppliers are providing us with only items that contain no harmful substances that could be dangerous to the environment or humans.” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

6.3 Sources of green brand legitimacy

This sub-chapter focuses on individual source or sources that were identified legitimating a green brand. Physical, non-physical and a mixture of the two sources of legitimacy are presented. Many sources identified by participants were not known by other participants. This is mostly a result of having internal communication problems like was examined in sub-chapter 6.1. Even if a source was underused by a company, if a participant identified it, it will be presented here.

6.3.1 Physical sources of green brand legitimacy

Rhetorical sources such as words, phrases, and slogans were used. A certain word relating to sustainable machines was heavily used, but it is currently only associated with one of the companies, so it is not used in its real form in this thesis. It is called X in this context. Kalle mentions that in his mind, this word and product are a huge thing

for the whole company and its brand. Taavi also talked about using company slogan which communicated about green values. Katie also agreed that words are heavily used in their green communication, but she hoped it would become more versatile in the future.

“... It was, we talk about these environmentally friendly machines. Yes, we use that slogan there.” (Taavi, Chief Operating Officer, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...Biodiesel. And these things keep coming up in discussions...” (One of the directors, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“Looking at the viewpoint of sales margin, brand viewpoint, every other viewpoint – I think our X [greener machine] is a huge thing.” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“Currently I would say that it [sustainability] is communicated with use of words and wordings... Currently it focuses, practically the greenness focuses on our engines and their low emissions and sustainability.” (Katie, Head of Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

Images and videos were used to symbolize nature, sustainability, green values, and production facilities.

“...Some sort of nature picture from a field, a pretty landscape...” (One of the directors)

“...Social media, magazines, videos...” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...Pictures in our website, because we have tremendously clean and pure – factory, which can break expectations that some people might have...” (Katie, Head of Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

Certification and certificates were extensively featured as an expected requirement regardless of the company. Existence of them was communicated orally, in websites, or in physical ways such as using PowerPoint presentation or having a framed diploma of them hanging in the wall. However, the existence of certificates was not necessarily regularly updated. Alfred mentioned that he had seen some companies even using outdated certificates framed on a wall when inspecting them closely. Having

certificates such as ISO 14001 is a signal of investing in certain things, such as sustainability, and for some companies they are in larger role than others. Freya mentioned about current certificates and plans to get more of them. Katie supported the importance of certificates for certain audiences, which in this case can be large companies that have strict standards for conducting business.

“Currently we have ISO 14001, which is the environmental system certificate... We have also pondered that there are also certificates related to energy efficiency and water footprint. For our corporation in the background, for example for them these energy and water issues are really important.” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“...An audience who understand these certificates, they know instantly that we fulfill a certain set of criteria in our actions. I see that they have a strong position.” (Katie, Head of Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

“It [certificate] can be a picture frame on a wall, and it looks nice – even if it is outdated.” (Alfred, Strategic Purchasing Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Emissions of products was also heavily featured topic when judging if something is green or not. Emission tiers such as European Union’s Stages I to V, were mentioned on several occasions. Much like Freya, Sven, and Dwight state, these emission tiers are known and very present in the industry. However, their importance is more in the category of staying operational, instead of indicating about ‘greenness’ even if they do require new technology that produces less emissions.

“...Our customers are certainly aware of these... Stage V [most recent EU emission rating for nonroad engines], these emission standards, and similar things.” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“...Things have really improved, when the finalization of Stage V arrived – things really work great now.” (Sven, Chief Executive Officer, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...Stage V came in 2019 [Talking about evolution of type-approval]. On every different stage, the technological leap has been significant and demanded different development paths. Some companies have clearly chosen different strategies to fulfill these emission regulations. There are many different views which is the right approach.” (Dwight, account manager, Faervis Mechanics)

Sustainability reports and codes of conducts were mentioned by Freya and Petra. Often participants that were not directly involved with sustainability practices were not necessarily aware of the existence of sustainability reports or codes of conduct.

“...These [sustainability data] are collected for our corporation’s [Faervis Global] shared sustainability report.” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“We have a code of conduct where it’s stated, how to work with this [environmental issues].” (Petra, Logistics Development Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

Measurable key performance indicators related to sustainability were present in some companies. Petra noted that KPIs used in her company were CO₂, emissions, and how much scrap (wood, steel, plastic) each factory is producing. Emilio gave more details and told that all the business units must contribute to sustainability using these KPIs. He also saw the existence of KPIs as symbolic, and itself signifying some value, but participants noted that all KPIs are not the same. Often, they are just a number, some are better, and some are worse.

“We have an actual KPI that we report... one of them is CO₂ emissions that we measure each year to see how our transportation is impacting the environment.” (Petra, Logistics Development Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“All the business units have to show activities that contribute to this goal [improving sustainability].” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“...It’s also partly a symbolic value to just have a KPI, to follow a KPI...” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

Research results and measurements conducted by independent actors were used signifying unbiased results from environmental performance. Taavi considered these measurements very important as did many other participants from the same company.

“They have done measurements for us, and we have used them in our marketing. Globally. These kinds of results that an independent actor has said from our machines, what all can be achieved using them and so on.” (Taavi, Chief Operating Officer, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Overall, the factories and facilities were seen as a major contributor for green brand legitimacy. They are physical and tangible places which have a strong effect on internally on employees and externally on visitors. Materials used in facilities, energy used and produced within facilities, and outlook of facilities were often mentioned. Ilias and Katie highlighted cleanliness and pureness of facilities that can signal about greenness. Emilio mentioned the symbolic value of constructing facilities out of wood, but it also having practical environmental reason for capturing carbon. Solar panels were used in the facilities for energy production, and the total sum for the whole year could even be net positive for energy production.

“... Practically, we do have a clean [environmentally] assembly plant.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“We are part of the greater forestry industry so it’s... it’s symbolic that we build it [a new office facility] out of wood. But the main reason I think is, that the building itself captures a lot of carbon by using wood instead of other materials... our whole factory roof is covered with solar panels...I think net over the year, we are positive in energy production... Of course, not always over the winter, but if you look at it over the whole year, the net sum is that we are producing more electricity than we used from the power grids.” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“...But yes, it [the pureness of factory] is somewhat unknowingly used for creating a certain image. When you have these modern looking facilities, they should certainly be [from the viewpoint of the viewer] also really progressive and perhaps sustainable as well.” (Katie, Head of Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

“One of the largest [concrete actions for improving sustainability] has been this over 100-million-euro investment, which is still going on. Building this state-of-the-art assembly plant... that collects waste energy... and every engine is tested... and there will be a totally closed cycle [mixture of cooling liquid and metal waste] that is not going to the nature or breathing air where workers are.” (Katie, Head of Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

Physical sources that aimed for improving pureness, or keeping impurities contained were also mentioned on several occasions. Regular cleaning services, changing mats and even using industrial type solutions for bristle mats were used to make sure cleanliness was maintained. Freya hold important the concrete things for improving pureness of facilities such as industrial bristle mats and having dedicated clean and dirty areas in facilities. In addition to physical sources that focus on cleanliness, some

things were chosen purely based on environmental reasons alone. One example of this is a special Noxite coating that was used in factory roof as Freya below talks about it. Using these purely environmental things was seen highly positive for the green brand, but only using one or two things was not seen suddenly making the brand green.

“We have put these [new] bristle mats [or even fields] in doorways... It is like a plastic mat, which has these bristles, where you wipe your feet. Imagine something like that, but in a far larger scale and suitable for industrial environments – we have these in entrances, where trucks move, or they otherwise are used for transporting items. These bristle fields then collect the dirt from bottoms of wheels and shoes. With those, it [dirt] can’t drift to the production area.” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“...That the company does things that might even cost a little bit more. For example, this Noxite coating that we use [in factory roof to reduce oxides from air] is slightly more expensive than regular roof coating, and it is selected by purely environmental reasons... (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

Close location and potentially being in the same country were both seen as positive factors affecting the perceived sustainability of a brand. For Alfred, location of Faervis Mechanics was an important fact that made the brand green compared to other more distant manufacturers. Ilias said that domestic products have the benefit of being made nearby and having the high standards of the home country.

“For us, the fact that they are so close to us... [compared to other global manufacturers]” (Alfred, Strategic Purchasing Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...They are not from India or China, but instead we have domestic products [selected a number of manufacturers from the same country] that are made according to the standards of this country.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Wellbeing of local nature and local communities were embodied in a few physical sources. Freya and Henry talked about a row of 30-40 birdhouses in a factory roof, which were homes for local swallows. In addition, the factory’s own fire department was highlighted multiple times in different interviews signaling sustainability and sense of community for the local area. Katie and Freya talked about the practicalities

of that fire department, and it takes care of the factory and local surroundings, also being a place for junior activity.

“...Actually, we do have birdhouses on the roof of one factory. It has even a line of birdhouses, and I don’t recall that their existence would have been in any ways being told forward.” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“...There [on the roof] is approximately 30-40 birdhouses in a line... Our former head of facilities was, and still is a diehard nature lover. He did himself put them in there, and the line of birdhouses can be actually seen when walking past the factory. We have lots of swallows in the area which nest in them...” (Henry, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“...And yes, we do actually have our own fire department which still sounds so funny...” (Katie, Head of Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

“...This factory fire department, they do have active junior activities, and they participate in many sort of things...They respond to also other calls in our surroundings, not just our factory’s.” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

Company benefits for workers were seen as potential sources of green brand legitimacy. Hans enjoyed cycling benefit that the company currently had, and for him it was symbolizing greenness.

“...We have a cycling benefit... You could turn it in a way that it is greenness – come to work rather by bike than with car. Yeah, that is one symbolic gesture we already have.” (Hans, Account manager, Faervis Mechanics)

Freya mentioned about internal transportation in the factory area where their company had move on to renewable fuels.

“We have moved on to using renewable fuels in our internal transportation.” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

Production and products were important factual based sources of green brand legitimacy for many employees and customers visiting these facilities. Rasmus and Emilio indicated that customers appreciate the environmental qualities of products that can potentially improve customer’s own sustainability. Ilias also mentioned that the

physical equipment and clothing of employees in production facilities had could be affecting sustainability.

“Our engines must be compatible with those fuels [HVO or hydrotreated diesel oil]. It is not necessary demanded by law, but our customers want to reduce their own carbon footprint by using fuels like that...” (Rasmus, Account manager, Faervis Mechanics)

“Their [Faervis Mechanics] products would be a key for our initiatives to become more sustainable.” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“Looking at the viewpoint of our employees, they have adequate or the proper protective equipment and gear in use [in the factory]...” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Lastly, physical business gifts in events were mentioned by Kalle, that were used for symbolizing about water and the greener machine of the company with a rhetoric message on the water bottle. Concrete physical sign was witnessed by Taavi, when a sign was put on the ground saying that this logging area is using green machines for wood harvesting.

“We had in our recent event water [bottle] which said X [message about green machines].” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“... I remember that a dealer had put a sign on the ground, which said that in this logging area, we have a forest machine with a ‘green’ engine, it was a large sign, it kind of signifies green values there. That we harvest forest using a green machine.” (Taavi, Chief Operating Officer, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

6.3.2 Non-physical sources of green brand legitimacy

These non-physical sources were mainly processes or other practices that were present. Common sustainability practices such as recycling and waste management were discussed but these ‘normal’ practices were not seen having themselves a strong impact on brand’s greenness. Practice of having a smoke free workplace was identified by Ilias and Marcus mentioned that in their new facilities, usage of electric cars is made more convenient compared to the old facilities. Some practices like these may seem so mundane and common, that they are not even seen having an impact on

sustainability or the brand. However, combined with everything else the brand is doing, they should be also mentioned.

“...These basic things of course, handling of waste, recycling – then all these substances, liquids, substances or dangerous substances that are used during production, they are handled according to directives, and the waste emitting from them is handled accordingly.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“It [Faervis Mechanics] was already then, a smoke free workplace” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...They have made it easier for people to use electric cars for instance, compared to the old place [old facilities of the company] ...” (Marcus, Senior Design Engineer, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

Auditing, supervision, and reporting were commonly discussed topics relating to green brands. Monitoring own and partners' business practices was widely accepted and practiced, even if the practicalities would differ between companies. Interestingly customers were not only monitoring their suppliers, but manufactures were also monitoring customers and their performance. Freya also described other actors such as city's environmental protection unit, country's chemical and safety agency, and authority approved by the country conducting thorough supervision of many kinds. Dwight mentioned the validation process that is done for improving the quality of product, but also ensuring customers are using the product correctly. For Petra, it was important that yearly surveys were conducted for customers about their feedback on products, but environmental aspects as well. Overall, supervision and reporting to multiple actors was seen to stay up to date on latest changes on regulations, and also improving transparency of the brand.

“...Our country's approved authority supervises our type-approval...” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“...Our environmental system is audited yearly by external auditors... And of course, internal audits on top of these.” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Global)

“Our city's environmental protection unit supervises our operations. We give them yearly environmental reports... And every five years there is an inspection

where an environmental official is present at the factory checking that everything is ok, and up and running... Also, we are under the supervision of our country's safety and chemical agency...who conduct inspections every three or five years I believe.” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“...We check the details of how our customers are using our products, how they install them. Testing of the product is also required for our customers, so they can give us feedback during the development process, and we can give feedback or tell what should be done to improve its operating.” (Dwight, Account manager, Faervis Mechanics)

“... We do surveys every year, and there our customers get to answer questions regarding, for example, sustainability, but also every other aspect of our product.” (Petra, Logistics Development Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

After the initial audit for manufacturers when starting a new business relationship, companies followed a set of indicators or measurements that were examined. No further audits were conducted in ongoing business relationships unless something severe would happen. Ilias mentioned that audits were not regularly made after the business relationship had been approved and initial audit was done. This was a common practice for other companies as well.

“...There are no regular yearly overviews, so to speak. Once you have the initial audit [towards a supplier], and then you have these indicators which are followed.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Training of employees and customers was a common practice. Ilias spoke about training employees to properly handle dangerous substances, and that this issue was also a focus point in supplier audits. Petra told about the practice of teaching eco-driving for all the customers of a certain new machine. This was done for every customer in a certain country, but it was not yet a global practice.

“... The use of these substances is instructed clearly, and when needed – also trained through the line. This is also a focus point when auditing new suppliers.” (Ilias, Director of Product Management, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“When we deliver a new machine, we have a technician that has a meeting with every new customer, and teach them how to use eco-driving with the new

machine.” (Petra, Logistics Development Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

Workplace culture and behavior of employees was also embodying the brand and it being truly green. Henry told about their employees being caring for the local wildlife such as hedgehogs, bunnies and other animals that were living near the facilities.

“Our personnel are tremendously sympathetic towards all animals that reside around our facilities, they often stop to feed all kinds of animals... Our truck drivers are being extra careful saying something like: ‘but we have THE hedgehog, and THE bunny living here, everyone please be careful not to run over them’ ... “(Henry, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

Lastly, Henry mentioned about cooperation that his company was doing with nearby nature park agencies and similar actors for the good of local nature. These practices, such as issuing statements and being collaborative with authorities was not done by financial reasons, but for the environment.

“We have given statements for establishment of new nature conservation area... If things like these have been presented for us – obviously we have supported them to protect our nature.” (Henry, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

6.3.3 Mixture of physical and non-physical sources of green brand legitimacy

Many sources can be a mixture of physical and non-physical sources because of their nature or because they can be perceived from multiple viewpoints. Products and production were discussed from various viewpoints, and for many participants, their qualities were paramount for legitimating the green brand. Surprisingly few participants discussed products’ physical outlooks or designs in detail, many were focusing on the bigger picture what can be achieved using these products and what environmental harm they can potentially cause or avoid causing. Marcus mentioned that the design of a product is very important for green brands, because small details can have a big effect on the environment when all products are taken into consideration instead of one. When the products are designed for serviceability, their maintenance and upkeep won’t cause unintended negative effects on environment. Things like, occasional small oil drops from a single machine might not be that harmful, but with

large amounts of products, they do add up. Ilias also mentioned that sustainable products are long lasting, robust, trustworthy, and easy to use.

“...I would consider it to be green to really focus on energy consumption, that is quite important part. Also designing of serviceability... Because you have a lot of oil filters in these things that you need to change. How can you handle that without having oil creeping to the machine somewhere, and maybe dripping down to the ground and so on.” (Marcus, Senior Design Engineer, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“...The machine is long lasting, robust, trustworthy, and many times being simple is also mentioned...” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Raw numbers and measurements were seen important in products. Often these attributes had simultaneous effects on costs and environmental performance. However, the performance in real life scenarios was seen as practical way of assessing products and brands properness and greenness. Energy and fuel consumption were seen important from cost and sustainability perspective, as well as low emissions and efficiency in real life scenarios. Below are a few participants highlighting these attributes, but they were heavily discussed in most interviews.

“It is generally known that Faervis Mechanics engines have a good consumption per produced kilowatt.” (Sven, Chief Executive Officer, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...For [forest machine] contractors, this sustainability is not that important. It goes to them through having a lower fuel consumption... Other important thing in our product is its efficiency, so it produces more cubic [meters] per hour. (Sven, Chief Executive Officer, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“Usually they [customers] look at how many cubic meters of wood they can harvest per hour, or how many cubic meters they can transfer out of the forest per hour.” (Alfred, Strategic Purchasing Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“External communication messages strongly revolve around machines having low emissions and low consumptions.” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Maintenance and repairability of products from environmental perspective was seen important. Dwight highlighted the practice of remanufacturing old engines that could be then used if end customers needed a new engine. Giving the old engine in exchange for a factory repaired engine was both convenient but environmentally friendly. These remanufactured engines were also given a which signaled that these products were taken good care of, and end customers should do as well. Ilias said that having as little maintenance as possible for products would be optimal for the environment, since maintenance itself can pollute.

“The one thing we like to advertise, what is not necessarily important for our customer [forest machine manufacturers], but can be very meaningful for the end customer [forest machine contractors], is that our equipment can be repaired and sent back to us while saving money and environment. It does not directly relate to the forest machine manufacturer, but they can get a marketing point for themselves in the eyes of end customers.” (Dwight, Account manager, Faervis Mechanics)

“With this opportunity, if an engine really breaks, it can be replaced with a factory repaired engine... This is used because a new forest machine costs a lot more than a factory repaired engine. You can probably talk about 100x price difference.” (Dwight, Account manager, Faervis Mechanics)

“...Less is more. It is part of the environmental sustainability as well [compared to ease of use of products]. The machines life cycle is long, and during that life cycle it causes as little maintenance procedures as possible, what itself pollutes always more or less...” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Final area regarding the products itself, was the time and location of their use. Naturally, minimal effects that machines would leave in nature was preferred. During spring, in Nordic countries and in Russia, when ground melts from the snow, there is a time of couple weeks to a month where the forest machines are not used because the ground cannot hold their weight. Otherwise, these machines are used throughout the year. Ilias also said that it is highly likely that some time in forest machines life cycle, it is used in a place, which especially should not be polluted, such as ground water areas or conservation areas.

“...It [having a time period in spring, when machines are not used] is very typical here in Baltic countries and in Russia. When the frozen ground melts [in the spring], the ground simply cannot hold the weight of the machine...”

Otherwise, these machines are driven throughout summer, autumn, and winter.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“On the other hand, it is highly likely that in some phase of forest machine’s life cycle, it is used in a place in nature, where there are areas which shouldn’t be polluted and so on.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“There could be ground water areas, nature conservation areas... Parks [national] and so on. What happens to run into you in a forest.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Moving on to production, where the products are manufactured, was seen important for green brands. Employees from Faervis Mechanics perceived it to be important to not only freeload on the product’s greenness, but also focus on the production and the whole company’s sustainability. Emilio told that in his company, research and development, and production have in his opinion the largest practical effects on their sustainability.

“...Not just the product, but more like, how does our company operate...” (Veikko, Director of Sales and Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

“...Not just freeload on the fact that our product is sustainable, but also [communicating about] aiming for our whole production to be sustainable.” (Employee, Faervis Mechanics)

“I think it’s [what functions have the largest impact on this company’s sustainability in practice] two main contributors would be the part that I am part of, the research and development since it’s about our future products, but it’s also about the factory itself, the manufacturing part. It’s more about what we do right here right now.” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

Moving on to the whole company, and its opinion and recognition of sustainability, the company’s support was seen very important for allowing the existence of a green brand, and also allowing employees to present that green brand outside. Employees from Faervis Mechanics experienced that having more personnel responsible for sustainability improves the practice of it, and even having a team working on sustainability issues does increase its appreciation. However, they did also hope for an appointed director leading sustainability. Emilio reminded that if there is no official

person responsible for sustainability, then it becomes no one's responsibility. When sustainability is taken seriously internally, it can be transferred externally to customers not only through marketing channels, but through employees, like Hans mentions account managers being the 'faces of the company' that represent the company and being the contact persons back and forth.

"...Now we have a little bit more resources for it [company adding more people to environmental team], and that means we can actually develop our operations." (Member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

"At a practical level, it [responding to sustainability requirements] also needs resourcing personnel for them." (Dwight, Account manager, Faervis Mechanics)

"One of the main benefits of having an environmental manager or sustainability manager type of role is to get a dedicated resource that can work on this issue. Often you have safety managers, their responsibility is to lead the safety work... Otherwise it's no one's responsibility to do it." (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

"...We [account managers] are like faces of the company outside..." (Hans, Account manager, Faervis Mechanics)

When sustainability is originating from the management, and from the parent company if being part of a corporation, then it is being somewhat uplifted and recognized as a real thing. Below examples from Faervis Mechanics highlight this issue but hopes for better recognition were wished from other companies as well.

"Sustainability should originate from the management level... Not only as a once-a-year reminder, but as constant issues coming from persons of authority as well... Implementing sustainability issues to daily lives of our employees instead of reminding about them once a year..." (Henry, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

"I'll be straight with you – now we have a management [in Faervis Global] what wants those things [sustainability] to be practiced. They even personally say that these things really matter for us. So overall, we have a good support for them." (Director, Faervis Mechanics)

Integrating green values to company values, and even to the company strategy could be further utilized as a signal of approval. Sven said that sustainable forestry was used

in their company values and other places as well. When sustainability is present in company values, it can be featured in many physical places such as in presentations or websites, but these values can also manifest in behaviors and practices and act as a guiding principle for the whole company, as Ilias mentioned.

“...Sustainable forestry is integrated to many parts of our values.” (Sven, Chief Executive Officer, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“Our environmental friendliness, sustainability, and sustainable wood harvesting are heavily featured in our company’s core values, and that is the direction we try to guide our whole company and products.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Participating in sustainability projects was seen lifting greenness, especially internally. Freya talked about various projects their company was part of. Both being part of a project and its outcomes could potentially be improving the greenness of one’s brand. Ilias told about StanForD standard in forest industry, which has its own project group from forest corporations, forest machine manufacturers, state owned enterprises and other actors involved in ‘improving the world’. This group gathers roughly once a month for working on issues related to this standard. Sven told that being part of projects can lead to situations where other actors involved in those projects can end up financially paying for experiments the green brand is doing.

“Another is this GREEF co-project... where we have multiple assignments and work packages... And we also have this [other] project based on European Union’s REACH-regulation [Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals] and RoHS directive [Restriction of Hazardous Substances Directive], for ensuring that we are not using harmful materials and substances in our production. (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“Especially in automation, reporting and everything, they have to be exactly and not almost like these forest corporations demand. Around this has even formed its own standard called StanForD. Lastest version of it is from 2010.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...Perhaps this country [or the state-owned enterprise] will pay for that experiment.” (Sven, Chief Executive Officer, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Attributers of cleanliness and pureness, transparency, and trust were present in various levels of discussions from individual products to the whole supply chain. Starting with cleanliness and pureness, both were used in multiple occasions often meaning the same thing. Freya and Katie were really impressed by their factory's cleanliness and image of pureness. Alfred, who does lots of company visits, said that for him, cleanliness of facilities is directly connected to having a green brand. Cleanliness was about having physical places in pristine condition, but pureness was seen more as the overall image and feeling of place.

"...The pureness – it's clear and luminous instead of gray and worn-out, like you could expect from this kind of traditional industry." (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

"...We have tremendously clean and pure – factory, which can break expectations that some people might have..." (Katie, Head of Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

"We have officially, and for real, focused on cleanness and pureness in our new facilities... No impurities from the outside, such as sand, stones, or such, should not get in from the outside... But also with pureness I mean that there are no exhaust fumes or chemical fumes in the air – or anything like this, but it is just – pure." (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

"...When doing company visits for potential manufacturers, you should always look what condition the bathrooms are. It gives a good outlook what the whole company is about. If it's clean, usually the all the other places are clean as well...Overall this cleanliness, it shows how much they care about the environment." (Alfred, Strategic Purchasing Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

Transparency and trust were both seen as building blocks for a more legitimate green brand, but they were also the outcomes of it. In addition, they often go hand in hand, like Henry mentioning that a green brand is trustworthy as has verifiable and accurate information about them available. Kalle further said that information should be understandable, even by the grandma living in the countryside. What benefit does a accurate and transparent information give, if it cannot be understood?

"Customer must be able to trust that the information is accurate... [Green] Branding must be able to communicate what information is presented, how it is constructed, and how it is gathered... It [Green brand] is trustworthy and it has

the 'right' information available.” (Henry, Environmental engineer, Faervis Mechanics)

“These thing [sustainability] must be clear enough that everyone can understand them, even the grandma living in countryside... You must be able to understand them with common sense and everyday speech – that, this is a good thing, and it reduces emissions.” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Henry thought that being open about challenges and even negative issues can build trust. Especially on sustainability issues, changing to a more sustainable production can take time and showing the small steps towards the right direction is about being transparent, even if the company would still have some non-sustainable practices in use.

“...Maybe trust is actually increased if a company is willing to indicate what it still needs to improve in its operations... Personally I do not see it as a negative thing identifying problems that still require improvements – that we actually recognize that we are not perfect.” (Henry, Environmental engineer, Faervis Mechanics)

Being proactive and having even the status of a forerunner in sustainability issues was seen quite positively. Freya told that because of proactive and independent actions towards sustainability, Faervis Mechanics is now seen as a forerunner inside Faervis Global. Ilias mentioned that the Nordic countries overall can be seen as forerunners in forest industry and emission issues. Kalle said that their product development was independently solving sustainability issues before they had become even mandatory for their products. Passion for making products better also leads to making them more sustainable.

“We have a large corporation, it is on very different levels than us. For example, we were the frontrunner in REACH-legislation. We really had to demand and demand our corporation to get a special permit for starting to do this investigation... For now, we are our corporation’s frontrunner in this [REACH-legislation].” (Freya, member of environmental team, Faervis Mechanics)

“...This [product development proactively improving sustainability of new and existing machines] is actually extreme greenness, but we are unable to show it in the right light.” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...These Nordic countries are in fact forerunners in forest industry.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Presence of companies in events, hosting own events or visiting other companies are all practices that can help justifying the greenness of a brand. Events could be of the same industry, or for the end customers, or for totally different occasions. Company visits could be conducted separately or as a part of events. Petra said that their company hosted an event where their customers would visit the factory and other facilities and meet persons behind the products. These were also opportunities for communicating about sustainability issues as well. For Emilio, visiting and seeing another company's facilities with his own eyes was the best way of determining does their brand hold up to the promises made. Because the pandemic had limited company visits, Alfred had hoped for alternative ways for presenting and visiting companies such as virtual company visits. Henry said that nearby city's business events focusing on sustainability had been good for benchmarking own performance against other companies, but also learning new practices that were not yet being in use.

“We usually have our customers here for what we call X [company event name]. They come and join us, and look at our factory, meet people from all different departments, and they have been asking how we handle different environmental issues.” (Petra, Logistic Development Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“My rule is what you actually do, and you can usually judge that best by seeing – they can't hide and stuff... If I visit your company, I can see for my own eyes... If it looks exactly like everyone else, or if I can see unique products, that I can meet people who are working on technologies in these areas...” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“For example, some sort of virtual company visit could be extremely useful – also usable in events and in sales arguments.” (Alfred, Strategic Purchasing Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...We start to notice that [in these sustainability forums] – wow, we really do have lots of good things, we are actually doing this really well compared to others, should they actually be benchmarking us?” (Henry, Environmental engineer, Faervis Mechanics)

Elements of nature such as water, earth, electricity were used not necessarily intentionally, but participants connected them to green brands and them acting as

symbols for greenness. Use of these elements varied across companies, and they were not used in their full potential. They had symbolic meaning much like Emilio mentions their new office facilities being made from wood symbolizing the nature. For these elements to be meaningful, they could be used in a more planned way to fully reap their benefits. Interestingly air was not utilized, or at least no participant could identify its usage. Below is a collection of the individual elements mentioned in interviews.

“This yellow rye field, that is also nature in a way, and it lifts the importance of their actions, that their actions are rooted in the ground so to speak.” (Ilias, Director of Product Development, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“...It’s symbolic that we built it [a new office facility] out of wood.” (Emilio, Project Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 2)

“Wood is one of the greenest, and most sustainable resource that we can use.” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“Water element has not been present previously in our communication in any ways... Trees use a tremendous amount of water, why water should not be used as well...” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“Electricity, its image is the greenest thing in the world... But the best thing, for being green, would be if we would not use electricity at all.” (Kalle, Head of Marketing, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

Finally, different types of external validation were presented during interviews. References gestured approval of other companies. Alfred mentioned that manufacturer having references is very important because it automatically gives them credibility, especially if those references are from larger companies. Trusting the auditing process of these large companies transferred the gained trustworthiness and competence to this potential manufacturer, even if no own audits would not be made yet. However, he also noted that manufacturers with too much connection to certain companies should be avoided because that could hinder relationship with other companies because the manufacturer could not have any resources for others.

“They market their products and use us as a reference.” (One of the directors)

“References are really important. If I know that they [a potential manufacturer] are providing products for a larger company, then I know the groundwork is

already done, because these large companies have very strict audits. If a component is good enough for them, it's good enough for us.” (Alfred, Strategic Purchasing Manager, Forest Machine Manufacturer 1)

“... But when someone else has audited, a listed company has audited them, and considered systems proper, that suffices for us too.” (One of the directors)

External validation could also come from actions of other companies. Veikko said that they follow what competitors are doing, including announcements, projects, and corporate acquisitions. If a competitor would decide to really invest in sustainable technology or buy a forerunner company, those things could themselves make similar things worthy of investigation and even implementation. This does not concern only green brands and their legitimacy, but other actions as well.

“...Competitor announcements, projects, and corporate acquisitions – they are actually a very interesting topic. It instantly wakes you up, and makes you wonder that why they did buy that, what are they going to do with it...” (Veikko, Director of Sales and Marketing, Faervis Mechanics)

6.4 Conclusion of empirical findings

Several difficulties and problems were affecting how sustainability practices were communicated which was in line with Kapitan et al. (2019). In addition, much like Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014) found out that branding seems to be the combining factor between operations and marketing towards better sustainability performance, and this study further emphasizes the importance of holistic green branding throughout the organization. Uncertainty about company's official and unofficial stances towards sustainability created internal and external communication challenges. Participants had problems separating truly green brands from brands that seemed green but were not. When competitors and customers are becoming greener and demanding truthfully sustainable business partners, standing out from the crowd becomes even more important. Internal frustration and uncertainty can directly affect how contact persons between customers are behaving and are they embodying the green brand or not. In B2B relationships, these personal contacts should not be undervalued since these individual persons are essentially 'the faces of the company' as one account manager said.

6.4.1 Nine identified green brand legitimization strategies

Nine strategies were identified for building green brand legitimacy. These strategies were not used by all companies, and some of them were not necessarily used knowingly, but because of coincidences. In this case a looser definition of strategy is used, and it is understood as sequences of similar actions that have resulted in making the brand greener. If a company did actions that could have improved their brand's greenness, but those actions were not meaningful or known to customers, these actions were not labelled as a strategy. Comparing nine identified strategies to prior literature reveals that some of the strategies are essentially modifications of generally used legitimization strategies. However, for legitimating a green industrial brand, there are not any strategies identified in similar context. Green brand legitimization's target has been B2B customers, but when examining these strategies, it becomes quite clear that they do also build green brand legitimacy for other stakeholders as well. Next, the nine strategies are presented individually.

Rhetoric sustainability, where sustainability related words and phrases were used extensively and repeatedly in marketing materials and channels. Words included repetition of green, sustainable, ecological, and other similar words. These words were then combined to small phrases or slogans such as the likes of 'green power' or 'sustainable force'.

Nature elements, where nature and its elements were featured in digital and physical materials such as images, videos, business gifts, and buildings. Elements of nature used were earth, water, and electricity. An example of a large and practical symbol was an office building constructed out of wood. It was symbolic to forest industry, and it also captured carbon dioxide.

Mimicking, where the external communication was modified for the general forest machine contractor in mind. Supplier was trying to appeal for these end customers and mime the typical contractor, whether the typicalness was accurate or not. In practice, this meant using masculine language and imagery, and using language relating to power and strength. Sustainability was framed as enjoying nature, and greener

products were framed as having more power, cost efficient and simultaneously greener.

External validation, where positive green brand enhancing results were presented, shared, and advertised. These results were conducted by an independent external party, that was seen as authoritative and representative of other approved entities in the field. In practice, a independent study and its results were used for this strategy.

Certification, which collects and presents gathered certificates. These certificates are sustainability focused, but other certificates can also be presented to further seem more credible. Most notably, highlighting ISO 14001 was the main goal of this strategy. Existence of certificates could be presented at least orally, digitally, physically in picture frames, and in company presentations.

Project participation, which practically means participating in sustainability projects or creating one yourself. Green brand gets internal and external recognition and association to other parties involved in those projects. It is important to separate between participation in projects and the results of those projects. Just the fact of being part of a project can make the brand seem greener by association to the project and its participants. Through projects, it is also possible for green brands to get potential new customers or other monetary benefits such as an experiment being funded by other parties involved in the project.

Internal acceptance, which means assigning persons responsible for sustainability, forming environmental teams, and creating green values for the company. The higher the sustainability personnel in the hierarchy of company, the more seriously green brand is taken. This strategy indirectly and directly can be seen through employees who are interacting with customers.

Pureness, where the facilities are kept in pristine condition. This ensures the quality of products is not affected by impurities, keeps people safe who are in the facilities, and ensures that facility is not extensively harming local environment. This image of pureness also signals the greenness of a brand which is important for people visiting or seeing the facilities in other ways.

Supervision, where the brand supervises the actions of the company itself, its suppliers, and its customers. This supervision can consist of audits, measurements, reports, validation processes, and teaching. With these practices, green brands transparency and trustworthiness are enhanced.

6.4.2 Comparison of strategies to prior literature

Comparing these nine green brand legitimation strategies to legitimation strategies from prior literature reveals that several similarities can be found. *Rhetoric sustainability* could be seen utilizing pathos (emotion-based arguments) and logos (logic-based arguments) (Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), but a more thorough content analysis could reveal more accurate details of this strategy. Logos was clearly more dominant compared to pathos because many sustainability related power words and phrases were simply stated as facts. Many sustainability related words are generally used, and their meaning is widely understood. From that perspective, use of those generally accepted words resembles strategy of value-based (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), because words of sustainability, green, ecological and others are essentially relying on a wider belief that sustainability is a good thing, and pursuing it is a desirable thing.

Mimicking can resemble avoidance/deflection strategy (Cho, 2009), where the focus from underlying environmental benefits is moved to power and strength of the machines, even if they would still be greener choices. However, the act of mimicking itself was not present in prior legitimation strategies examined.

External validation and *certification* have similar goals with authorization (Vaara & Tienari, 2008). External validation tries to associate green brand with an entity of authority, and certification tries to associate green brand with laws and regulations and lift the brand to the same level as other larger companies which themselves can be seen as authority entities. Image enhancement strategy (Cho, 2009) has similar features of using self-praising material like in this case using certificates or external reports for connecting positive social value of sustainability to the brand.

Project participation has elements of multiple prior strategies depending on how project participation is viewed and what types of projects these are. Differing from other strategies identified in this study, some level of narrative could be seen associated with project participation. Authorization (Vaara & Tienari, 2008) is clearly present regarding the project and its participants, but depending on the scope and goals of projects, elements similar to rationalization and narrativization (Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Vaara & Tienari, 2008) could be connected to project participation. Building a narrative that highlights the relevance and utility for the project, its actors and aimed end results could potentially be used, but these factors were not in detail present in interviews.

Internal acceptance can be seen in line with narratives of purpose and identity, also known as autopoiesis (Erkama & Vaara, 2010), and normalization which tries to make something inside an organization seem accepted, normal, or natural (Vaara & Tienari, 2008). In addition to those, 'official' approval of management could be seen in line with authorization (Vaara & Tienari, 2008). However, how these things are externally perceived was not present in prior literature examined in this study.

Closest similarity with *pureness*, is only on a general level association between green brand to cleanliness and pureness, where pureness and cleanliness are already legitimized symbols and values. This communication about associations to already legitimate things (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975), does not accurately reflect pureness, because the pureness is itself worth aiming for. Brand's greenness is a positive outcome of it, not the only goal of pureness.

Supervision and *nature elements* were quite unique comparing them to prior literature. Collaborative and communal aspect of supervision were not present in other strategies than abstraction (Hahn & Lülfs, 2014), which aimed for generalizing problems concerning the whole industry or a set of important actors in that field. However, supervision is not separating between good or bad things. By using supervision strategy, brands can ensure difficulties are noticed in time, greenness is shared and strengthened by suppliers and manufacturers alike, and difficulties are solved before they necessarily become problems. Nature elements, however, were not resembling of any strategies from prior literature.

6.4.3 Sources of green brand legitimacy

Previously studied sources of green legitimacy in prior literature have been green products (Hashem, 2021), sustainability certificates and certification (Guo et al., 2017; Richards et al., 2017), the ISO 14000 family of environmental management standards and United Nation's sustainable development goals 2030 (Kapitan et al., 2019), sustainability reports (Alrazi et al., 2015; Hahn & Lülfs, 2014; Mousa & Hassan, 2015), green innovation (Yao et al., 2021), recycling, green energy and waste disposal (Li et al., 2018), and environmental patents, eco labels, trademarks and presence of an environmental committee (Berrone et al., 2017).

Physical, non-physical, and mixture of physical and non-physical sources of green brand legitimacy are presented in the below three tables. Many of these identified sources can be further enlarged, for example when walking through production equipment could individually be labelled instead of labeling them as 'production'. When examining sources from below tables, it needs to be noted that their importance varies and their relative strength for building green brand legitimacy must be individually assessed because that was not studied in this master's thesis. Execution of these sources will also affect their effectiveness. For example, having one solar panel is not the same as having enough solar panels for being net positive in energy production over the course of year.

Even if some of the found sources do not in themselves require monetary investment, most of the participants indicated that things that signify commitment, concrete, and verifiable action towards sustainability are seen more impactful compared to rhetorical sources such as words and promises. Preferring 'stronger signals' compared to empty promises, is in line with Berrone et al. (2017), and favoring concrete proactive behavioral actions for building green legitimacy are similar to findings of several scholar (e.g. Alrazi et al., 2015; Bansal & Clelland, 2004; Kim et al., 2007). However, favoring 'verifiable facts' and hoping for practices that were not even available (such as a CO₂ calculator and similar measuring tools) indicated that the expectations in industrial markets are high and constantly growing. Collection of individual sources that were identified are presented below in three separate tables.

Table 2. Physical sources of green brand legitimacy.

Physical source
Words, phrases, slogans
Images and videos
Certificates, digital or physical such as in picture frames
Emission tiers, such as Stage V
Sustainability report
Codes of conduct
Sustainability KPIs
Research results and measurements
Products
Factories and facilities
Construction materials, such as wood or roof coating
Production line, relatable equipment
Individual things inside facilities, such as cleaning equipment
Renewable energy production, such as solar panels
Location of facilities compared to customers
Concrete constructions for nature such as birdhouses
Company benefits such as cycling benefit
Renewable fuels in internal transportation
Business gifts

Tangible in their nature, including digital files or numbers that can be written down.

Table 3. Non-physical sources of green brand legitimacy.

Non-physical source

Recycling and waste management
Smoke free workplace
Support for electric car use
Green company culture, such as taking care of local animals
Behavior of employees
Cooperation with nature park agencies or similar actors
Training of employees
Training of customers
Conducting sustainability surveys for customers
Auditing, supervision, and reporting
Validation process of products

Intangible in their nature, such as practices that exist while they are being conducted.

Table 4. Mixture of physical and non-physical sources of green brand legitimacy.

Mixture of physical and non-physical source
Products and their features, design, and qualities
Performance of products, especially low emissions, and low consumption
Products' maintenance and repairability
Products' impact on environment, such as emissions or marks in forests
Products' use location and timing of their use
Production process
Management and internal company support for sustainability, having responsible teams and roles
Parent company support for sustainability
Green values
Participation in sustainability projects
Participation and hosting of events
Company visits or their substitutes, visiting and being visited
Cleanliness and pureness of facilities
Transparency and trust for the brand
Proactiveness and being a forerunner
References
External validation from actions of other companies such as acquisitions or projects
Elements of nature, such as wooden office facilities

Both tangible and intangible in their nature. Viewpoints and different usages between companies affect them. Depending on them, these sources can also be either tangible or intangible.

Overall, the sources in Tables 2-4. have commonalities with other sources that have been examined in prior literature, but several sources that were not present in prior literature were found. Elements of nature were probably the most unique sources found in this study. Difficulty in studies examining these sources, are certainly finding them, especially if only relying on interview data instead of physical observation. In addition, these sources have not been necessarily examined from a green *brand* perspective like in this study. This also affects prior studies focus on certain sources more than others.

6.4.4 Empirical grounded model

Findings of this study are presented and integrated to the empirical grounded model in Figure 4. Dark green color is used to indicate that the information is added to the model from the empirical findings. Legitimation strategies are updated with nine strategies identified in this study. Previous symbolic and behavioral strategies are replaced with the ones found in this study. They are *rhetoric sustainability*, *nature elements*, *mimicking*, *external validation*, *certification*, *project participation*, *internal acceptance*, *pureness*, and *supervision*. Depending on the strategy or strategies used, legitimacy sources are used that can be utilized in those strategies. It's important to note that some sources might be emergent and not planned, until they are recognized as a source. With sustainable industrial branding, it is possible to make these sources known internally and externally. Amazing sources in themselves are useless if no one is aware of them.

Depending on the company, some sources could be labelled either to physical, non-physical, or to the mixture of physical and non-physical sources. That is why the boundaries between those categories should be treated with room for flexibility. For example, certificate can be a physical picture frame hanging on the wall. It can also be part of a slideshow in company visits, or in virtual meetings. In addition, certificate could be highlighted in company website, or social media channels. However, the process of getting that certificate, also known as certification, is not only physical. Also implementing the certificates requirements may require behavioral changes for employees and physical changes for physical equipment.

Green brand identity was updated with reminder that persons in the customer interface should be especially aware of green brand identity. If they are not aware what it is, there is confusion about it, or it is not even defined – how can they uniformly be faces of the brand? Importance of product development was highlighted many times because they are the ones responsible for the actual products and their environmental impact. Expertise and impact of this function to the green brand should not be underestimated. Often, they are also working hand in hand with customer's product development team, but this interaction is not even considered impactful for the brand. Overall, the brand should holistically be integrated into all business units of the organization.

Lastly, assigned sustainability personnel, sustainability teams, and green values were added to the model, even if they are also part of the internal acceptance strategy. Management level responsibility of sustainability issues was hoped for, such as having a sustainability director in the board of directors. Embedding green values to official values of the company, or to the official strategy would also signify their importance and internal acceptance. Empirical grounded model is presented next page in Figure 4.

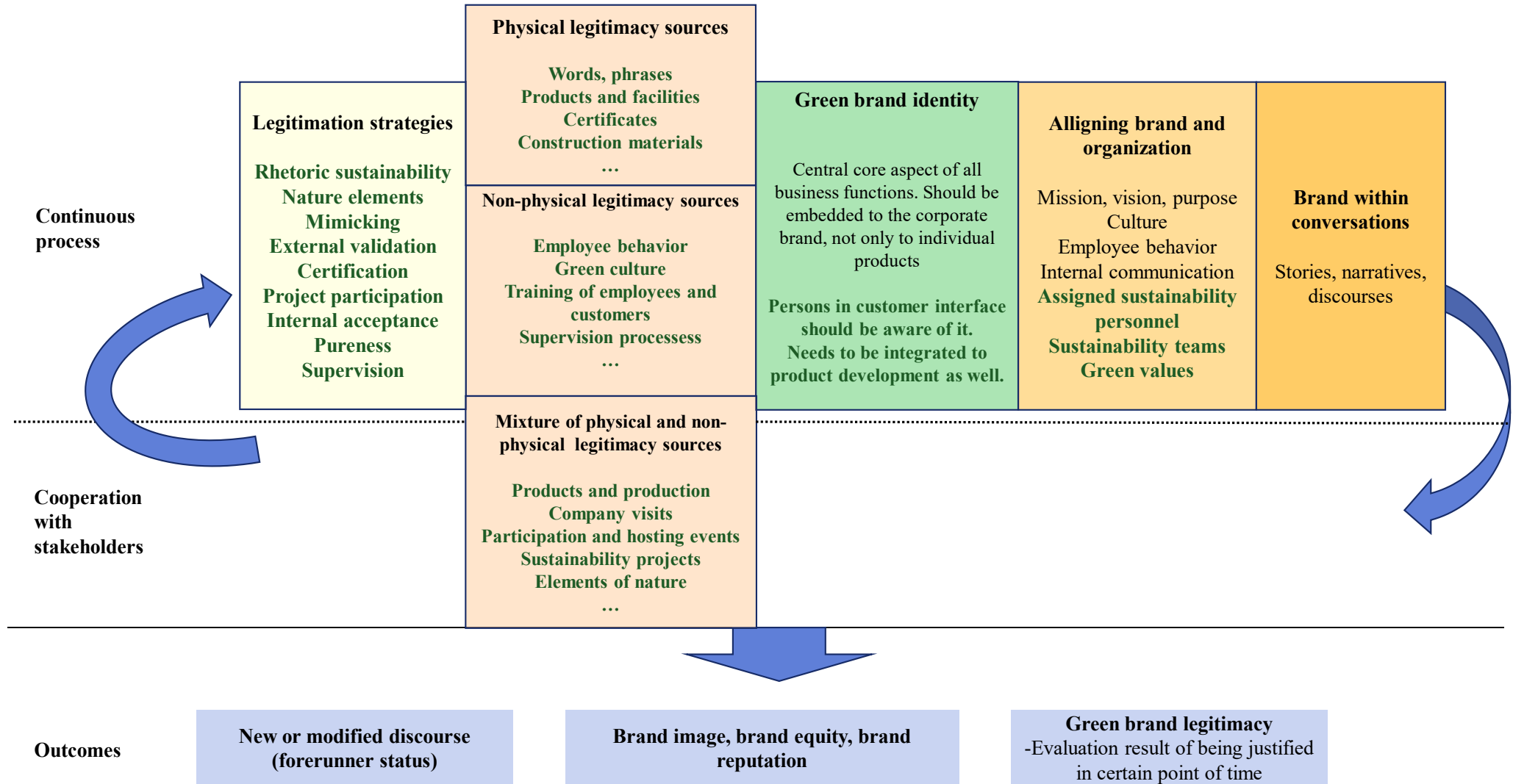


Figure 4. Empirical grounded model of green brand legitimation.

7 CONCLUSION

In this final chapter of the study, answers to the research questions are presented. After that, theoretical contributions and managerial implications are being presented and discussed. Last, the chapter evaluates the study and its limitations, and possible future research suggestions are presented.

7.1 Answers to the research questions

The main research question for this study was “*How do suppliers legitimate their green brands for their B2B customers?*”. Three sub-questions were used for guiding the direction of the study and finding answers for the main research questions. These three sub-questions were: “*How do industrial companies legitimate their green brands?*”, “*What are the sources of green brand legitimacy?*”, and “*How industrial companies integrate green brand legitimation into sustainable industrial branding?*”.

Answers for these questions were studied based on thorough literature review, which was used to create the theoretical framework for the study. This theoretical framework acted as the groundwork for empirical part of the study, which consisted of a total of 19 theme interviews. Data collected from these interviews was then analyzed and compared to the theoretical part of this study. Finally, the theoretical framework was updated with empirical findings, which can be seen in the empirical grounded model in Figure 4.

Empirical part of this study revealed nine possible strategies suppliers use for legitimating their green brands for their B2B customers. These strategies are combined below in Table 5. Strategies with concrete actions, measurable, and verifiable elements were perceived as being valuable for building true greenness instead of only looking green. Individual sources of green brand legitimacy that were identified from analyzing interview data, were present in some or multiple strategies presented in Table 5. Sources were divided into three categories of physical, non-physical, and mixture of physical and non-physical sources of green brand legitimacy. Full lists of identified sources can be found in Table 2., Table 3., and Table 4.

Table 5. Green brand legitimization strategies of industrial suppliers.

Strategy	Definition
Rhetoric sustainability	Repeated use of sustainability related words, phrases, or slogans.
Nature elements	Using nature elements such as earth, trees, and water in symbolic and practical ways.
Mimicking	Modifying external communication to resemble the 'typical' customer, for example using overly masculine language and framing sustainability as practical caring of nature.
External validation	Presenting positive, green brand supporting results that an external independent authority has measured.
Certification	Collecting sustainability related and other certificates. Presenting existence of certificates in oral, physical, and digital ways.
Project participation	Participation in sustainability projects. Being associated to the project and other members in it.
Internal acceptance	Assigning persons to official sustainability roles, forming environmental teams, and establishing green values.
Pureness	Keeping facilities in pristine condition and creating a clean and pure image of facilities and the brand. This is associated to being a green brand, especially in company visits.
Supervision	Supervising actions and practices of the company, its suppliers, and its customers. Supervision can consist of audits, measurements, reports, validation processes, and teaching. Increases green brand's transparency and trustworthiness.

What was interesting regarding individual sources identified, was that many of these sources were unknown to employees in the same company. Knowledge of admirable sustainability practices was not known to everybody. Some participants were even annoyed of the existence of 'unnecessary' practices because they did not know why they were done in the first place. However, when they knew what these practices were for, they could understand their value and importance for the environment and for the brand.

Integration of green brand legitimation to sustainable industrial branding needs collaboration between all levels of the company. If green branding is the responsibility of the marketing department, it will have problems integrating with other departments of the company. Especially in B2B companies, business relationships should consider the green brand as well, instead of only listing the sustainability certificate to company website. Participants in this study were not necessarily even visiting each other's websites even if they were long time business partners. New relationships are probably more dependent on external marketing information compared to existing relationships, but interestingly external marketing was not seen especially impactful for legitimating brand's greenness. However, many participants noted about their industries conservativeness, and marketing activities and functions were themselves quite small and still in development. This too, was recognized by participants and they suspected brand's greenness becoming more important during the next ten years.

Examining branding and sustainability from a legitimacy perspective reveals that there are indeed many similarities between branding and legitimation. The main difference is the focus on what is seen important. From a branding perspective, a brand could be seen as coherent, relatable, and visually green. However, from a legitimacy perspective that same brand could be seen relying too heavily on rhetoric, simplifying information, and overall being not taken seriously by larger actors in the ecosystem. Overall, branding and legitimation are complimentary practices which can be simultaneously practiced. Sustainability solely from a branding perspective can be missing the critical ingredient of social acceptance. Being green should not be targeted because its popular and trendy. It should be targeted for the value in greenness itself. It is easy to look like a green brand, but concretely and truly being one – that is the challenge and potential source for differentiation and competitive advantage.

To answer the main research question, suppliers should legitimate their green brands for their B2B customers using consistent and concrete actions throughout their company, production, and products. These actions are aiming for low emissions, low consumption, and lower impact on brand's own and its partners' environmental impact. Using legitimation strategies of rhetoric sustainability, nature elements, mimicking, external validation, certification, project participation, internal acceptance, pureness, and supervision, are ways that suppliers' green brands can be legitimated for

their customers. Much like branding, legitimation process comprises the whole organization and not just the marketing function. Utilizing employees in the customer interface should be especially given attention, because they are essentially the faces of the brand. Green brands create value for both the supplier itself, and their customers by association or using them as critical components such as engines. With proper sources of green brand legitimacy utilized in branding, fear for greenwashing can finally be put aside and truly green brands can gain the appreciation they deserve.

7.2 Theoretical contribution

Findings of this study, especially the nine green brand legitimation strategies contribute to the existing legitimation strategies (e.g. Cho, 2009; Debenedetti et al., 2021; Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Hahn & Lülfs, 2014; Hrasky, 2012; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Vaara, 2014; Vaara & Tienari, 2008) that have been studied. There has been a scarcity of studies examining legitimation strategies in mature markets (Debenedetti et al., 2021), which this study does contribute to. In addition, this study addresses the scarce topic of B2B brand legitimacy and how it is built (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021). Second, this study further enlarges the emerging research of sustainable corporate branding (Lahtinen & Närvänen, 2020) and more specifically sustainable industrial branding. Challenges between integrating marketing and operations for achieving sustainability (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014), have been further examined with branding as they have suggested. Third, this study focuses also on other sources of legitimacy than the typical ones that are associated with sustainability such as sustainability reports (Hahn & Lülfs, 2014) or sustainability certificates (Richards et al., 2017).

Regulative legitimacy has been extensively studied, but its effect on brand's greenness was not as high than compared to how much certificates and standards are mentioned in prior literature. Symbolic, rhetoric and behavioral legitimacy have been studied, and this study does confirm similarities between prior strategies. Interestingly, prior literature suggested that behavioral strategies are hardly used compared to rhetoric or symbolic ones. From the nine strategies found in this study, concrete actions are present in many of those strategies. This might be a result of toning down marketing activities to avoid greenwashing.

Case company of this study represents a subsidiary brand, that tries to expand from its corporation's domesticated market. This approach has next to no literature behind it, at least from subsidiary brand's point of view. This study focused on the subsidiary brand outside of the domesticated market, which also has not been extensively researched. Concluding this area, in this study, branding literature is also loosely connected to literature of global business management.

7.3 Managerial implications

Most of the interviewed participants experienced that their company could be more sustainable and that their brand could be greener. Sources of green brand legitimacy that were identified in this study could be further examined in a particular company, facility, or factory. Most likely, some sources are missing or not properly utilized. Improving every possible source at the same time is a difficult task, so companies would benefit from systematically going through each of the nine strategies and how their company could implement it to their company or improve a strategy if it's already in use.

To make these strategies as useful as possible, a recommendation is to start with *internal acceptance*. Ensuring that employees and management are even aware of sustainability, company's brand, and the goal of building a green brand should be established before making other practicalities. Naturally, progress does not have to happen instantly, and for example nominating a director for sustainability role might take time. At the beginning of this strategy, just identifying potentially interested people and making them aware of each other and sustainability issues could be a good start. When someone or a group of people are leading these things, development can happen.

After there is internal acceptance of the direction of sustainability practices and improving the greenness of brand, then other of the nine strategies could be put in use. No certain order is important for them, and implementation will vary between companies and their resources available for these issues. Because every company is different, sources already present in their company should be identified. This could be done by walking through facilities, different departments and talking with people in

different roles. After identifying these sources, a comparison to sources identified in this study would be required to see if something is missing. If those sources are not present even after comparison and re-examination, a list of possible sources should be made. Depending on the budget and time available, possible sources could be then ranked according to budget, employee resources, and implementation time. After this, individual sources could be improved based on going through each strategy at a time, a mixture of them, or by choosing between other factors.

To avoid falling to the trap of no one leading these strategies, and information not being shared by employees, a project group could be established for implementation of these strategies and other sustainability issues. It would be beneficial to have people from multiple departments participating in these project groups for ensuring participation of the whole organization. Solving sustainability issues and becoming a greener brand requires cooperation between all units of the company. Only then is it possible for employees to successfully be coherent faces of the green brand. And this green brand should be implemented also in external communication and business relationships. Utilizing people who are in close cooperation with customers such as account managers, product developers, and marketers should be systematically improved.

Being rightfully a green brand requires constant concrete actions that have sustainability improving goals. Just being transparent about steps that are taken towards the larger action can itself make the brand more trustworthy. When many factual and concrete things are done, they should also be communicated both internally and externally. Ways of communication and marketing should be modified according to the industry and customers. Improving sustainability practices and creating a greener brand do take time, and that is why they should be started sooner than later.

7.4 Evaluation of the study and limitations

Qualitative research can be evaluated using three concepts of credibility, rigor, and ethics. Credibility refers to acceptance of the study from the viewpoint of other readers including colleagues, participants, and the public. (Juuti & Puusa, 2020.) Starting with credibility, this study is made as transparent as possible. Description of case company

and the surrounding context is accurate, and so are the descriptions of other parts of the study. Rigor refers to the expertise of the researcher for conducting the study which is evaluated by quality and appropriateness of research methods used in the context of the study (Juuti & Puusa, 2020). Order of events is thoroughly described, as are the choices made during this research. Methodology is transparently described with supporting figures and tables that help reader to quickly see relevant information in coherent form. Theme interviews conducted were relevant for studying the topics in this study, and the amount of conducted theme interviews was sufficient for gaining understanding of the phenomenon. There was enough empirical data to form consistent analysis, and during the end of interviews, saturation in certain answers was seen.

Prior literature was thoroughly examined and utilized for this study. Several dedicated literature searches were conducted in cooperation with other senior researchers and library experts. With the use of Academic Journal Guide 2021, and Finnish Publication Forum, search results could be listed based on academic journals' rankings. This was helpful especially at the earlier stages of this thesis, and when getting search results from previously unknown journal articles that the writer was not familiar with. Overall, references used for this study cover a wide range of publications such as Journal of Marketing, Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Brand Management, The Academy of Management Journal, American Sociological Review, and Organization Studies. Special attention was given for selecting B2B related branding sources instead of consumer-focused journals. In addition, both recent and older sources were used based on the relevance of topics and highly influential authors of those topics.

Examining rigor from reliability's viewpoint examines the accuracy and consistency of research methods used (Koskinen et al., 2005: 253-256). Regarding the results of this study, theme interviews were an excellent method for identifying 'hidden' information that was scattered between different persons, departments, and companies. Theme interviews were conducted from a same physical setting and conducting them became naturally easier as they progressed. Regular feedback was given from GREEF research team's senior researchers who were sometimes participating in these interviews or going through the data independently afterwards. This helped improving the quality of conducted interviews as they progressed. Examining rigor from validity's viewpoint examines how truthfully used methods, results, and statements

represent the studied phenomenon (Koskinen et al., 2005: 253-256). Legitimacy and legitimation are quite abstract concepts, and that is why careful consideration was given for formation of interview questions and their adjustments based on conducted interviews. Persons who were among the first participants were familiar with the concept of these topics, and they acted as good benchmarks what language could be used for asking about these topics, and what terms were too difficult for general participant to understand. Overall, the questions were designed as easy to understand as possible. Some participants required more probing questions than others, and others were very talkative and proactively sharing their experiences. Overall, the validity of the study is sufficient, especially when the data analysis went through not only answers to single questions but to the whole interview, because often legitimacy related findings were found also elsewhere than just the direct questions relating to them.

Transferability is an aspect which determines if the results could be achieved in another research environment and could the subject be studied again there (Aaltio & Puusa, 2020.) This study could itself be replicated in another research environment, but the main limitation would be the case company and the industrial market surrounding it. Finding a similar engine manufacturer which does have similar customers as the forest machine manufacturers interviewed here, could be a challenge. However, if the case company and its customers are allowed to be slightly different, then transferability is quite good. Finding an industrial manufacturer, willing customers for it, and time for conducting enough theme interviews are basically all there is required for replication of this study. And because this study was also conducted using remote interviews, the physical location of researcher does not limit where that study could be conducted.

Ethics and confidentiality are particularly important when researching companies (Koskinen et al., 2005: 278-279). Special attention was paid to participants' and their companies' privacy during the research, not only in this publication but also in recording, sharing, and storing of the empirical data. In this research, a comprehensive Privacy Notice was made according to the guidelines of University of Oulu and GDPR. This was approved by all parties participating in the study. Participants were sent the Privacy Notice via email, and they were asked to submit an answer to Webropol-platform for confirming their agreement to the Privacy Notice. In addition, this was

confirmed verbally at the beginning of each interview. During the research, measures were taken to protect the identities of single participants and the companies participating in the research. Pseudonyms were used for all names, and information about participants' identities or their individual answers were not visible to any other parties than the GREEF research team. Creation of pseudonyms included not only making up new names, but also ensuring that the names were culturally from all over the world.

When assessing the limitations of this study, the limitation of time is a prominent one. Because the interviews were conducted within a month of finalizing this master's thesis, more detailed analysis could have been possible with more time analyzing the data. In addition, even if there was plenty of interview data, it could have been complimented with other methods of acquiring data such as observation of physical facilities and processes. Many 'revelations' of important and good sustainability procedures were constant during interviews, when participants suddenly remembered something out of the blue when talking about something else. Seemingly mundane things that are taken for granted might be hard to pinpoint because they are taken for granted. Also, the last time participants had visited each other's physical facilities, or seen each other in person had been affected by the pandemic. This could have affected their recollection of certain sources of green brand legitimacy. Even if there were many interviews, more interviews from certain employees could have revealed something more. For example, additional interviews of purchasers and product developers could have been relevant and valuable for this study.

One potential limitation is the number of different companies interviewed. Having more companies involved could have revealed something that was not present in this study's companies. In addition, the participating companies were not necessarily the greenest of brands, but they were a good representation of brands in their industries. Researching companies that would have already been very green in their operations and in their brand could have revealed something that was not present in this study. However, this study focused on the journey of becoming green, and not on the qualities of already top of the line green brands. If this study would be replicated with the same companies, the results could be different within a couple of years because of their plans

for becoming greener brands. This journey was mostly in the beginning phases of these companies, and many things were planned but not yet finalized.

7.5 Future research

This study has combined many areas that together are still in need for more research. Subsidiary brands in domesticated markets and their different roles in them could be further examined. This could be also conducted in B2C companies, not just in B2B companies. Brand legitimation is a scarcely researched topic which also could further be studied in both B2C and B2B context. Delegitimation and illegitimacy were briefly mentioned in the literature review, and those could themselves be topics for future research, whatever the context would be. Recent global events in Ukraine that have created stigmas for many brands, could be a valid reason for researching illegitimacy in brand context.

Brands in this study were on the journey towards green brand, but they do not represent the greenest brands overall. Similar study of green brand legitimation could be conducted with brands that are seen as the highest level of greenness of any brands. Green brand legitimation of a subsidiary inside a corporation could also be further studied. A longitudinal study of brands that are aiming for a greener brand could also be conducted to see what strategies they have used, and what strategies have been more useful than others. The nine strategies identified in this study could also be further examined in more detail or in different industries. Different targets for green brand legitimation could also be studied, for example investors or members of local communities. Lastly, importance of identified sources of green brand legitimacy could be studied. Determining which of them are more important than others could itself be a topic of research because some of them are easier to utilize than others.

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Appendix 1

OUTLINE OF THEME INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These questions do not feature probing questions that were spontaneously used during the interviews. In addition, questions tailored specifically for certain participants including names of individuals, companies, or company secrets are not listed in their actual form. Not all questions were asked from every participant, each interview was modified according to the interviewee and time available.

Start and background

- Have you read and accepted the Privacy Notice?
- Could you tell your name, work title and work history briefly?
- Could you tell what your work title is about?

Green brand

- Could you describe current branding of your company?
- How is your company's environmental sustainability communicated?
- What do you consider is a green brand?
- What do you consider is a truly green brand instead of a brand pretending to be green?
- Could you describe a personal experience where *the brand of your company/other participants company* have had an impactful meaning?
- What role does the engine have in environmental sustainability?

Environmental sustainability in participant's area of expertise

- How is environmental sustainability practiced in your company?
- In what levels, is environmental sustainability integrated into your business practices?
- How environmental sustainability is integrated to your production? What about individual products?
- What kind of pressure do you face regarding environmental sustainability? If there is any pressure, what or who is the source of this pressure?

Sources of green brand legitimacy

- How does *your brand/other participants brand* take into consideration environmental laws, standards, certifications, or similar requirements in *your business relationship/in your company/in their company*?
- Can you describe what expectations or demands you have from another participant's brand based on social norms, practices, or expectations? Can you identify some unwritten expectations?

- In what rhetorical, visual, cultural, or symbolic ways do you think environmental sustainability is associated with *your brand/other participant's brand/in your business relationship*?
- What concrete actions in *your brand/other participant's brand/in your business relationship* are done to improve environmental sustainability?

Legitimation and cooperation

- How do your *company/customers/suppliers* value sustainability?
- How do employees participate in your company's environmental sustainability? What are their opinions about environmental sustainability?
- How different departments of your company affect your green brand?
- How do your company's environmental sustainability practices affect your stakeholders?
- How do your stakeholders affect your environmental sustainability?
- What benefits are gained from sustainability? Who can gain these benefits?

Business relationships

- Are you involved in business relationship between company X and Y? If you are, could you tell how you are involved in it?
- What sort of things customers value when making their purchasing decisions?
- How does your brand affect another participant's brand?
- How does another participant's brand affect your brand?
- What do your customers value about your brand? What do you value about another participant's brand?
- How does your brand affect your customers' environmental sustainability?