



FRAMING ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND GREENWASHING IN CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF FAISALABAD'S TEXTILE INDUSTRY

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Abstract

As sustainability becomes an increasingly important component of corporate communication, concerns have emerged regarding the credibility of environmental claims made by organizations operating in environmentally sensitive industries. This study investigates how textile firms in Faisalabad construct and communicate environmental responsibility through corporate sustainability discourse and examines the extent to which such discourse reflects greenwashing practices. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research analyzes sustainability reports, annual reports, corporate websites, and social media content produced by selected textile firms between 2019 and 2025. The study is guided by three objectives: to identify and classify greenwashing practices in environmental claims, to examine the linguistic and rhetorical strategies used to legitimize these claims, and to explore the relationship between greenwashing intensity and the construction of environmental legitimacy. A purposive sample of medium and large textile firms was selected, and environmental claim units were coded using established greenwashing typologies, including vagueness, no proof, irrelevance, hidden trade-off, lesser of two evils, fibbing, and false labels. The analysis also examined legitimation strategies such as authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation, and mythopoesis. Findings indicate that vagueness, lack of evidence, and selective disclosure are among the most common greenwashing practices, particularly in website and social media communications. Firms frequently employ regulatory references, technical language, ethical appeals, and success narratives to enhance the credibility of environmental claims. The study further reveals that higher levels of greenwashing are often associated with weaker textual environmental legitimacy. By combining CDA with greenwashing analysis, this research contributes to the growing literature on corporate sustainability communication and offers insights into environmental accountability within Pakistan's textile sector.

Keywords: *Corporate Sustainability Communication, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Environmental Legitimacy, Environmental Responsibility, ESG Discourse, Greenwashing, Legitimation Strategies, Sustainability Reporting, Textile Industry.*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Importance

In the last decade, “green” has become one of the most powerful words in corporate communication. Governments, investors and consumers increasingly expect firms to show how they reduce carbon emissions, conserve water and respect social and governance standards. To respond, companies publish sustainability reports, redesign their websites and launch eco-friendly campaigns. However, alongside genuinely responsible initiatives, there has also been a rapid rise in greenwashing the practice of exaggerating or misrepresenting environmental performance through communication. Recent work on ESG (environmental, social and governance) disclosure shows that greenwashing in sustainability reports can seriously damage the credibility of corporate information and complicate decision-making for regulators and stakeholders (Sneideriene et al., 2025).

The problem is particularly visible in the fashion and textile sector, which is widely recognised as one of the most polluting industries worldwide due to intensive water use, chemical dyes, energy consumption and large volumes of waste. A recent systematic review of greenwashing in fashion and textiles finds that many brands rely on vague buzzwords such as “eco-friendly” and “conscious collections,” while their business models still depend on overproduction and fast-changing trends (Badhwar et al., 2024). The review highlights how sustainability claims in marketing and corporate reports often lack transparent data, making it difficult for consumers and watchdogs to distinguish sincere efforts from misleading messages.

In Pakistan, the textile industry is the backbone of the economy, contributing significantly to exports, employment and industrial output. Yet the environmental footprint is severe, especially in major industrial hubs such as Faisalabad. Recent environmental studies show that effluents discharged from textile mills in and around Faisalabad contain heavy metals and other contaminants at levels exceeding national standards, creating health risks for nearby communities and ecosystems (Sattar et al., 2024). These findings sit in sharp tension with the green narratives that many textile firms present in their reports, websites and promotional material. At the same time, the sustainability performance of Pakistani cities is attracting policy attention. A multi-dimensional assessment of major Punjab cities found that Faisalabad performs relatively better than several peers on some sustainability indicators, but still faces pressures related to resource use and pollution (Kousar et al., 2025). This context makes Faisalabad’s textile sector a strategically

important site for examining how corporate green stories are constructed and how far they match on-ground realities.

Against this backdrop, greenwashing is not only an ethical issue but also a discursive one. It is produced through language: choice of words, metaphors, visuals and silences. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) and ecolinguistics argue that the “stories we live by” can either normalise environmental harm or support more sustainable identities and practices (Stibbe, 2020). When companies frame incremental improvements as “transformational,” or present compliance with minimum legal standards as “leadership,” they create powerful narratives that shape public understanding of environmental responsibility. This thesis, therefore, aims to “unmask greenwashing” in corporate communication of the textile industry in Faisalabad. By using a critical discourse analytical lens, it will explore how sustainability is constructed in corporate texts, what discursive strategies are used to legitimise questionable practices, and how these narratives intersect with broader socio-environmental realities. In doing so, the study links the environmental impacts documented by scientific research with the linguistic and symbolic work done in corporate communication, offering a more complete picture of greenwashing in this key industrial hub.

Recent Pakistani work in eco-critical discourse analysis shows how environmental narratives in national media and policy documents can either foreground ecological limits or obscure them through technocratic and growth-centred language (Ishaq et al., 2025). Although these studies do not focus on textiles, they highlight the relevance of analysing local discourses rather than simply importing Western concepts of green communication. Extending this line of inquiry to corporate communication in the textile industry can illuminate how global sustainability discourses are re-contextualised in a specific industrial and urban setting such as Faisalabad.

The research background shows that greenwashing in corporate communication is both a global and a local issue. Globally, sustainability claims are becoming more frequent and more complex, while regulatory and civil-society scrutiny is intensifying. Locally, in Pakistan and especially in Faisalabad’s textile industry, environmental pressures are acute, and yet companies increasingly present themselves as responsible and eco-friendly actors. There is, therefore, a clear need for a critical discourse-oriented study that systematically analyses how textile firms in Faisalabad construct their green identities, what rhetorical and linguistic strategies they use, and how these narratives relate to documented environmental realities. This study directly responds to that need.

1.2. Problem Statement

As sustainability has become a key component of corporate communication, textile companies increasingly employ environmental responsibility narratives through annual reports, websites, sustainability disclosures, and social media platforms to demonstrate

their commitment to sustainable practices. However, growing evidence suggests that such communications may not always accurately reflect environmental performance, often relying on selective disclosures, vague claims, and other greenwashing strategies that create a favorable environmental image while obscuring ongoing ecological concerns. This issue is particularly significant in Pakistan's textile sector, where Faisalabad serves as a major industrial hub that contributes substantially to the national economy but also faces persistent environmental challenges, including industrial pollution and regulatory compliance concerns. Despite the increasing adoption of sustainability-oriented language by textile firms, there remains limited research examining how environmental responsibility is linguistically and rhetorically constructed in corporate communications, how greenwashing practices manifest across different communication channels, and how corporate sustainability claims align with national and international governance frameworks such as SECP, PSX, PEQS, and ZDHC guidelines. Furthermore, existing studies on greenwashing and sustainability reporting have largely focused on consumer perceptions or disclosure practices, leaving a gap in discourse-based investigations of how corporate actors strategically frame environmental responsibility to secure legitimacy and stakeholder trust. Therefore, this study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the discursive strategies, greenwashing patterns, and regulatory alignments embedded in the corporate communications of Faisalabad's textile firms, contributing to a deeper understanding of the relationship between corporate sustainability discourse and environmental accountability.

1.3. Research Objectives

The aims and objectives of this research are;

- To examine the manifestation of greenwashing practices in corporate environmental claims by classifying and interpreting them through recognized greenwashing frameworks.
- To analyze how textile firms use linguistic and rhetorical strategies, including authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation, and mythopoesis, to legitimize environmental responsibility claims.
- To critically examine the relationship between greenwashing intensity and the discursive construction of environmental legitimacy through detailed case-based discourse analysis.

1.4. Research Questions

1. What types of greenwashing practices are evident in the environmental claims of textile firms in Faisalabad, and how can they be classified using established greenwashing frameworks?

2. How do textile firms employ linguistic and rhetorical strategies, such as authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation, and mythopoesis, to legitimize their environmental responsibility claims?
3. What is the relationship between greenwashing intensity and the discursive construction of environmental legitimacy in the corporate communications of Faisalabad's textile firms?

1.5. Research Significance

This study is significant at several levels: theoretical, methodological, sectoral and policy-oriented. First, at the theoretical level, the thesis contributes to the growing body of work on greenwashing and ESG disclosures by bringing a critical discourse analytic and ecolinguistic perspective to corporate sustainability communication. Much of the existing greenwashing literature focuses on measuring discrepancies between environmental performance indicators and reported information, or on examining the financial and reputational consequences of misleading claims (Sneideriene & Legenzova, 2025). While these approaches are valuable, they often treat texts as neutral containers of information. By contrast, this study views corporate communication as a site where power, ideology and environmental meanings are actively produced. Drawing on CDA and ecolinguistics, it explores the narratives, metaphors and legitimation strategies through which textile firms construct their “green” identities, thereby enriching conceptual debates on greenwashing as a discursive practice rather than merely an information gap.

2. Literature Review

Greenwashing has become one of the most widely discussed problems in contemporary sustainability debates. It refers, in simple terms, to situations where companies look greener in their communication than they actually are in practice. Recent reviews show that research on greenwashing has grown very quickly since 2020, cutting across marketing, management, environmental policy, and communication studies (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020; Feghali et al., 2025). The fashion and textile sector has become a priority field for greenwashing research. It is consistently described as one of the most polluting industries, with significant impacts on water, chemicals, waste and labour conditions (Adamkiewicz et al., 2022; Sardar et al., 2022). At the same time, fashion and textile brands are very active in sustainability communication, using labels such as “eco”, “conscious”, “sustainable” or “green collections”. A systematic review of green marketing and greenwashing in fashion shows that companies often rely on vague claims, soft language, and selective storytelling, which tend to blur the line between real environmental progress and mere reputation management (Badhwar et al., 2024). In parallel, studies of textile and apparel sustainability and ecolabels warn that weak verification mechanisms and inconsistent standards can further encourage misleading claims (Plakantonaki et al., 2023).

2.1. Scholarly Interpretations of Greenwashing

Although the term “greenwashing” is widely used in public debate, research shows that scholars do not fully agree on what it means. A large systematic review by de Freitas Netto et al. (2020) found more than 30 different definitions across disciplines, with some focused on misleading advertising, others on incomplete environmental reporting, and others on broader strategic deception. More recent reviews confirm this fragmentation and stress the need for clearer conceptualisation (Feghali et al., 2025). Most contemporary definitions, however, share a common core. They describe greenwashing as a mismatch between what an organization says and what it actually does regarding the environment.

Beyond definitions, scholars have developed several typologies to classify different forms of greenwashing. One influential taxonomy, proposed by Yang et al. (2020), distinguishes four basic forms based on the level (firm or product) and the nature (claim or execution) of environmental communication: firm-level claim greenwashing, firm-level executional greenwashing, product-level claim greenwashing, and product-level executional greenwashing. Firm-level claim greenwashing occurs, for example, when a company announces ambitious net-zero targets in its corporate reports without credible plans or interim milestones. Product-level executional greenwashing, by contrast, may involve packaging and imagery that suggest naturalness or recyclability even when the product’s material composition or end-of-life handling is problematic.

De Freitas et al. (2020) also summarise a number of earlier typologies that remain influential, even when discussed in more recent work. Many of these draw on the well-known “sins” approach to misleading environmental claims (e.g., vague labels such as “eco-friendly”, irrelevant claims like “CFC-free” where CFCs are already banned, or hidden trade-offs where one small improvement is highlighted while larger impacts are ignored). Contemporary reviews argue that these “sins” can be grouped into broader categories such as vagueness, irrelevance, no proof, hidden trade-off and false claims (Zioło et al., 2024).

In emerging economies, including Pakistan, greenwashing typologies have started to be applied to local contexts. Sardar et al. (2022) examine environmental sustainability practices in Pakistani textile mills and note that communication often focuses on visible initiatives (such as effluent treatment plants or certifications) while providing less information on upstream raw materials and labour conditions. (Rehman et al., 2024) show that perceived environmental greenwashing can weaken the positive impact of green supply chain management practices on green brand associations in Pakistani fashion brands, suggesting that stakeholders evaluate not only what firms do but also how convincingly they communicate it.

2.2. Corporate environmental communication

Corporate environmental communication has also been studied in specific socio-environmental contexts. Yasir et al. (2023), for example, investigate CSR-based environmental communication in fire disaster mitigation on peatlands in Indonesia. Their case shows how a state-owned oil company uses CSR programs such as training farmer groups, developing peat arboretums, and establishing mangrove education centers as communication platforms to signal care for local ecosystems and communities. The authors highlight that environmental communication operates on multiple scales: it educates local residents, informs the wider public through media coverage, and simultaneously shapes the company's image as a responsible actor. Crucially, the study reveals that environmental communication is not only textual; it is enacted through visible projects, events, and symbolic spaces that embody the company's narrative of sustainability.

The global textile and fashion industry has become a central focus of sustainability debates because of its heavy dependence on resources and its complex, geographically dispersed supply chains. Estimates from international organisations and recent syntheses suggest that fashion is responsible for around 10% of global carbon emissions and is the second-largest consumer of water among industrial sectors, while also generating substantial waste and microplastic pollution. The rapid expansion of fast fashion characterised by low prices, short product lifespans and high volumes has intensified these environmental pressures and has also drawn attention to social issues, including low wages, unsafe working conditions and gendered labour inequalities. As a result, "sustainable fashion" has emerged as a prominent policy, business and research agenda, but its meaning and implementation remain contested.

From an environmental perspective, the impacts of textiles span the entire product life cycle. Life-cycle assessment (LCA) studies consistently show that major hotspots occur in fibre production (especially cotton cultivation and petrochemical-based synthetics), wet processing (dyeing, washing, finishing), and end-of-life disposal (landfilling and incineration) (Dhiwar et al., 2025). Cotton farming typically requires large quantities of water, fertilisers and pesticides, contributing to water scarcity and ecological degradation in key producing regions. Synthetic fibres such as polyester, which now account for about 59% of global fibre production and roughly 43% of apparel-related greenhouse gas emissions, are derived from fossil fuels and shed microplastics throughout their lifecycle (Textile Exchange, 2025). At the same time, animal-based fibres and leather contribute disproportionately to methane emissions, a potent greenhouse gas, particularly through ruminant-based supply chains (Collective Fashion Justice report summarised in Wall Street Journal, 2025). Together, these findings emphasise that no single material is impact-free; sustainability depends on systemic decisions across the value chain.

2.3. CDA and Ecolinguistics

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and ecolinguistics provide the core analytical lenses for this study because both are concerned with how language constructs social reality, legitimizes power relations and naturalizes particular ways of seeing the world. CDA treats discourse as a social practice that both reflects and shapes institutions, ideologies and material inequalities, and it pays special attention to how powerful actors such as corporations use language to manage public perceptions and maintain legitimacy. Recent work on corporate sustainability communication shows that CDA is now widely used to uncover how firms frame environmental responsibility, manage reputational risk and subtly downplay contradictions between green promises and contested practices. In parallel, ecolinguistics has emerged as a complementary paradigm that focuses specifically on the ecological implications of discourse. It asks whether the “stories we live by” in language encourage environmentally beneficial relationships or reinforce destructive ways of relating to nature. Bringing these two strands together allows the present study to interrogate greenwashing as a discursive phenomenon in which environmental narratives, metaphors and framings are strategically mobilized to legitimize the textile industry’s activities in Faisalabad.

From a methodological point of view, ecological discourse analysis is increasingly multimodal and mixed-methods. Song’s (2025) systematic review notes that recent EDA studies often combine corpus linguistics, systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and multimodal discourse analysis to capture both the quantitative distribution of ecological keywords and the qualitative evaluation of stories, identities and metaphors. Zhu’s (2025) study of Apple and Huawei exemplifies this integrated approach: frequency lists and concordances reveal high-salience sustainability terms, while qualitative ecolinguistic coding interprets those patterns in terms of “diversity and harmony” and “interaction and co-existence”, two key ecosophical principles. The present study draws inspiration from this dual orientation by combining close qualitative reading typical of CDA with attention to recurring lexical and semantic patterns that can indicate systematic greenwashing strategies in textile firms’ reports and promotional materials.

While ecolinguistics provides the ecological lens, CDA contributes a strong focus on power, ideology and legitimation. Discursive legitimation refers to the ways in which texts and talk justify, normalize or naturalize particular social arrangements, policies or corporate practices. Vaara and Aranda-Etcharren (2024) synthesize decades of research in an integrative framework, showing that legitimation strategies are central to how organizations respond to contestation, manage reputational crises and construct their identities in stakeholder-facing communication. In their overview, they summarize widely used categories of legitimation such as authorization (appeal to authority), moral evaluation (appeal to values), rationalization (appeal to usefulness or efficiency) and mythopoesis (appeal to stories and narratives) which have their roots in earlier work but

have been extended and refined in recent years. Applied to sustainability communication, these strategies can be seen when firms justify environmentally harmful practices as necessary for economic growth, portray incremental improvements as moral achievements, or narrate success stories that downplay ongoing harms.

Recent empirical work illustrates how these legitimation strategies operate in environmental discourse. ecolinguistic study of Pakistani climate-change visuals shows how the state draws on moral evaluation (e.g., framing tree-planting as a patriotic duty), authorization (invoking international climate agreements) and mythopoetic narratives (stories of “green revolution” and “resilience”) to legitimize its climate policies and project a progressive identity. Zhu (2025) similarly shows that Apple and Huawei legitimize their sustainability narratives through rationalization (linking green initiatives to innovation and efficiency), moral evaluation (emphasizing care for communities and future generations) and authorizing references to global standards and third-party certifications. These findings suggest that greenwashing can be understood as a particular configuration of legitimation strategies, where discursive emphasis on responsibility, innovation and care coexists with limited structural change.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Conceptual Framework

The research framework operationalises the conceptual model into a set of analytical steps that can be applied to a bounded corpus of corporate texts. Drawing on CDA traditions (Fairclough, 2015) and ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2020), the framework treats each text as a site where linguistic choices, intertextual references and visual resources construct particular “stories” about environmental responsibility and sustainability. At the core of the framework is the relationship between discursive strategies, greenwashing typologies and textual environmental legitimacy. First, selected corporate texts are examined for discursive strategies, including lexical choices, evaluative adjectives, modality, nominalisation, passivisation, presuppositions, and key metaphors, as well as explicit legitimation moves such as authorization, rationalisation, moral evaluation and mythopoesis (Vaara et al., 2024). These strategies constitute the input layer in the conceptual framework.

Segments of text that make environmental claims are coded against an adapted greenwashing typology based on (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020), Yang et al. (2025) and Spaniol et al. (2024), including categories such as vagueness, lack of proof, irrelevance, hidden trade-off, “lesser of two evils”, fibbing and false labels. Each text is thus assigned a greenwashing typology score that reflects the density and severity of these tactics. This mediating layer captures how discursive strategies translate into specific forms of greenwashing identified in the literature. Third, the texts are evaluated for textual environmental legitimacy, using criteria derived from sustainability-reporting and

impression-management research (Koch et al., 2025) (Sneideriene, et al., 2025). Key indicators include clarity of claim scope, explicitness of baselines and time-bound targets, transparency of evidence paths (e.g., data, standards, certifications) and the overall coherence and credibility of environmental narratives. Rather than treating legitimacy as an objective state, the framework sees it as a textually constructed impression that can be more or less justified.

Two sets of contextual moderators are integrated into the framework. Moderator A is genre and audience (sustainability report vs website vs social media; investor-oriented vs buyer-oriented vs. general-public communication). Moderator B is the governance/verification context, including SECP/PSX ESG guidance, provincial environmental quality standards and third-party schemes such as ZDHC or buyer codes. These moderators recognise that the same discursive strategy may carry different implications depending on where and under what regulatory expectations it appears. The framework incorporates control variables listing status, firm size, product segment and report year to situate findings and allow cautious comparison across cases. In combination, these elements provide a structured yet flexible architecture for the CDA-ecolinguistic analysis presented in later sections of the thesis.

3.1.1. Corpus Design and Data Collection

The empirical basis of this study is a purposively constructed corpus of corporate environmental communication produced by textile firms linked to Faisalabad. In line with qualitative CDA traditions, the aim is not statistical representativeness, but information-rich cases that allow in-depth analysis of greenwashing and legitimisation strategies.

3.1.2. Population and inclusion criteria

The population of this study consists of medium and large textile firms operating in Faisalabad that are actively engaged in export-oriented value chains, including yarn, fabric, home textiles, and garments. Both publicly listed companies on the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) and large private exporters identified through industry bodies such as APTMA and the Pakistan Textile Council form the sampling frame. Using purposive maximum-variation sampling, approximately 10–12 firms will be selected to ensure diversity in firm size, product segment, and listing status. To be included in the study, firms must have a clear connection to Faisalabad through their headquarters or major production facilities and must provide English-language environmental or sustainability-related communication in the form of sustainability reports, ESG disclosures, annual reports with dedicated sustainability sections, corporate website content, or official social media posts addressing environmental issues. Additionally, firms must have published at least one relevant communication between 2019 and 2025, reflecting the period of increasing ESG and climate-related scrutiny. Firms lacking accessible English-language environmental communications or whose digital content is unavailable will be excluded.

This sampling strategy is consistent with previous CDA-based research that emphasizes the selection of information-rich organizations for in-depth discourse analysis.

3.1.3. Genres and time frame

For each selected firm, the corpus will include a range of sustainability-related communication materials produced between 2019 and 2025. These materials will comprise one to three stand-alone sustainability, ESG, or integrated reports (preferably the most recent versions), relevant corporate website pages such as Sustainability, Environment, CSR, ESG, and HSE sections captured as static files, and a focused sample of official social media posts that explicitly address environmental or climate-related issues, including green campaigns, sustainability initiatives, certification announcements, and World Environment Day communications. The inclusion of multiple communication genres reflects the increasingly digital, multimodal, and dispersed nature of corporate sustainability discourse, while the 2019–2025 timeframe captures the rapid growth of ESG-oriented communication and post-pandemic sustainability repositioning without making the corpus unmanageably large.

3.1.4. Sources and collection steps

Data collection will be conducted through a systematic multi-stage process. First, a list of potential firms will be compiled from sources such as APTMA membership directories, Pakistan Textile Council publications, Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry records, and Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) sectoral listings, with each firm's connection to Faisalabad verified through company profiles and address information. The identified firms will then be screened for the availability of English-language sustainability-related communication by searching company websites and relevant terms such as sustainability, ESG, CSR, environment, and climate. Sustainability, ESG, and integrated reports published between 2019 and 2025 will be collected from corporate websites and disclosure portals, with up to three recent reports selected from each firm where available. Relevant website content, including sustainability and environmental pages, will be archived as PDF or HTML files, while official social media accounts will be examined for posts addressing environmental and sustainability themes, from which a focused sample of posts will be selected to capture recurring discursive patterns. All collected documents will be organized and imported into qualitative analysis software such as NVivo or MAXQDA, where each text will be assigned a unique identifier and tagged with relevant metadata, including firm characteristics, publication year, communication genre, and verification status, thereby creating a structured corpus suitable for systematic Critical Discourse Analysis.

3.1.5. Data Preprocessing

The collected data will be preprocessed to create a clean, consistent, and analyzable corpus for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Sustainability reports, annual reports,

website content, and social media posts will be converted into machine-readable text, with OCR applied where necessary and manual checks conducted to correct extraction errors. Non-relevant elements such as navigation menus, page numbers, repeated headers, footers, and purely financial content will be removed, while environmental and sustainability-related sections will be identified through keyword searches and close reading. These sections will then be segmented into meaningful discourse units (e.g., paragraphs, sentences, or clauses) and assigned unique codes to ensure traceability. The units will be imported into qualitative analysis software and organized according to categories relevant to the study, including discursive strategies, legitimation techniques, greenwashing typologies, and indicators of textual legitimacy. A pilot coding of approximately 10–15% of the corpus will be conducted to refine coding procedures and enhance analytical consistency. Any Urdu phrases appearing in the texts will be translated into English for contextual understanding. Finally, a comprehensive codebook and audit trail will be maintained to ensure transparency and reliability throughout the analysis process.

3.1.6. Text Selection and Coding Scheme

The analysis focuses on environmental or sustainability-related claims in which textile firms portray their products, processes, or future commitments as environmentally responsible. Relevant text units will be identified through keyword searches and close reading of sustainability reports, websites, and social media content, and each selected unit will be assigned a unique identifier. These units will then be coded across three dimensions: (1) greenwashing typologies, including vagueness, no proof, irrelevance, hidden trade-off, lesser of two evils, fibbing, and false labels; (2) legitimation strategies, such as authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation, and mythopoesis; and (3) indicators of environmental legitimacy, including scope clarity, time-bound commitments, evidence-based support, and overall narrative credibility. Coding will be conducted iteratively, beginning with a pilot sample to refine category definitions and coding procedures, while analytic memos and a detailed codebook will be maintained to ensure consistency, transparency, and reliability throughout the analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

The study draws on a purposively constructed corpus of corporate environmental communication from textile firms connected to Faisalabad. The focus is on information-rich firms that are active in export-oriented value chains and publish at least some form of English-language sustainability communication. For reporting and ethical reasons, the firms are anonymised using pseudonyms and IDs like F1, F2 and F3. The same IDs are used in the coding sheet and CDA excerpts. The corpus combines multiple genres: stand-alone sustainability reports, ESG or sustainability sections of annual reports, dedicated sustainability or environment webpages, and a small number of explicitly environmental social-media posts. These genres reflect the main channels through which firms

communicate “green” performance to investors, buyers and the wider public. In line with recent literature, sustainability reports and webpages form the richest sites of environmental discourse, while social media tends to feature shorter, more promotional messages.

4.1. Greenwashing Typologies in the Corpus

This section addresses the research question on what kinds of greenwashing tactics are embedded in the firms’ environmental claims. Using the typology developed in Chapter Two (vagueness, no proof, irrelevance, hidden trade-off, lesser of two evils, fibbing, false labels), each green-claim unit in the coded subset was examined and flagged where a given tactic was clearly present. Claims could carry more than one type simultaneously, which reflects the way greenwashing often operates as a bundle of discursive moves rather than a single isolated feature. Across the ten illustrative green-claim units coded in detail, seven units contained at least one greenwashing flag, while three units were coded as free from identifiable greenwashing tactics because they were specific, evidenced and balanced. On average, claims carried 1.6 greenwashing flags each, with some units combining up to three different tactics. This confirms that even in relatively short corporate statements, greenwashing is often layered, for example combining vague adjectives with a lack of supporting evidence and a subtle hidden trade-off.

Greenwashing type	Number of green-claim units flagged	% of green-claim units
Vagueness	6	60.0%
No proof	6	60.0%
Irrelevance	1	10.0%
Hidden trade-off	3	30.0%
Lesser of two evils	0	0.0%
Fibbing	0	0.0%
False labels	0	0.0%

Table 4.1 Frequency of Greenwashing Typologies in the Coded Green-Claim Units (n = 10)

The most striking pattern is the dominance of vagueness and no proof, each present in 60% of the green-claim units. Vague claims typically relied on unspecified intensifiers such as “significantly reduced water consumption”, “eco-friendly fabrics”, or “commitment to a cleaner, greener Faisalabad” without indicating baselines, time frames or quantitative magnitudes. These wordings create a positive impression of environmental performance but leave open what has actually changed and by how much. Closely related is the prevalence of no proof, where claims invoke environmental benefits but provide no

accompanying evidence no data, certifications, third-party assurance or verifiable details. For example, statements like “our eco-friendly fabrics care for the planet” and “our dyes are 100% safe and do not harm the environment in any way” make strong environmental promises but are not tied to specific standards, test results or disclosure sources. The combination of vagueness and absence of proof makes it difficult for readers to assess whether the claims are credible, comparably to concerns in the literature that many corporate sustainability statements remain “aspirational” rather than demonstrably substantiated.

4.1.1. Hidden trade-offs and selective framing

The third most frequent typology is hidden trade-off, observed in 30% of the green-claim units. These are cases where the company spotlights one positive environmental aspect while remaining silent about other significant impacts. For instance, when a firm highlights “sustainable packaging for all export shipments” without mentioning ongoing issues in dyeing, energy mix, or wastewater, the text frames the organisation as environmentally responsible but narrows the lens to a single improved dimension. Similarly, references to alignment with the UN Global Compact or SDG 12 were coded as hidden trade-offs when no detail was provided on how the firm addresses other SDGs related to inequality, decent work or climate action. These claims appear ideologically powerful they attach the firm discursively to global norms but they risk diverting attention from unresolved environmental or social harms elsewhere in the value chain. This reflects a pattern noted in recent greenwashing research: companies often integrate high-prestige global frameworks as legitimising symbols while providing selective information about implementation.

4.1.2. Rare Irrelevance and absence of overt deception

Irrelevance appears only once (10%), in a generic statement that “compliance with all applicable environmental laws remains our top priority.” While compliance is important, the statement was coded as irrelevant because it is legally expected, not a distinctive environmental achievement, and it is presented as proof of environmental responsibility without elaboration. This kind of greenwashing is subtle: it uses routine obligations to imply proactive environmental leadership. Notably, there were no instances of “lesser of two evils”, fibbing, or false labels in the coded subset. No claim explicitly compared a harmful product to an even worse alternative (“less toxic than...”) and none made statements that could clearly be interpreted as objectively false based on the text alone. Likewise, there were no obviously fabricated eco-labels or fake certifications within the selected units. This absence of more overt forms of greenwashing is consistent with the idea that, under contemporary ESG scrutiny, firms are more likely to rely on discursive subtleties vague adjectives, general commitments, and selective framing rather than outright lies, which are easier to challenge legally and reputationally.

4.1.3. Differences by firm and communication genre

When the distribution of typologies is examined by firm, all three focal firms (F1, F2 and F3) show a similar dependence on vagueness and no proof: each has two claims coded as vague and two coded as lacking proof. This suggests that these tactics are not unique to one corporate profile, but rather a shared discursive repertoire across listed and private firms, and across composite, yarn and home-textile segments. However, there are some nuances. The private yarn producer (F2) is the only firm whose annual-report ESG statement was coded for irrelevance, using a broad compliance claim as evidence of environmental commitment. In contrast, the listed home-textile firm (F3) relies more on promotional website language (“100% safe dyes”) and symbolic social-media pledges around World Environment Day, both of which carry multiple greenwashing flags (vagueness, no proof, hidden trade-off).

The distribution of greenwashing typologies varies noticeably across communication genres. Sustainability reports exhibit relatively lower levels of vagueness and lack of evidence, but a higher occurrence of hidden trade-offs, suggesting that these reports often highlight selected environmental achievements while downplaying less favorable aspects of performance. In contrast, website content and social media posts show a stronger reliance on vague and unsupported environmental claims, reflecting the promotional and marketing-oriented nature of these platforms, where concise and persuasive messaging often takes precedence over detailed substantiation. Similarly, environmental content embedded within annual reports tends to combine vague, unsupported, and sometimes irrelevant claims, indicating a more symbolic approach to sustainability communication. These differences demonstrate that greenwashing practices are not uniformly distributed across communication channels; while sustainability reports may provide relatively more evidence-based information, websites and social media platforms are more likely to employ promotional narratives with limited supporting evidence. This finding underscores the importance of analyzing multiple communication genres to gain a comprehensive understanding of corporate environmental discourse.

4.1.4. Intensity of greenwashing at claim level

Looking across the ten units, three claims carried no greenwashing flags and were instead characterised by clear, time-bound targets or quantified performance data (e.g., a 30% emissions-reduction goal with baseline and year, or a quantified waste-heat recovery outcome). These units suggest that firms are capable of producing high-legitimacy environmental communication when they choose to disclose specific actions and evidence. At the other end of the spectrum, several claims carry two or three greenwashing typologies simultaneously. For example, “eco-friendly fabrics care for the planet while offering unmatched comfort” was coded as vague and lacking proof, and also drew on emotionally charged adjectives (“eco-friendly”, “unmatched”) that foreground benefits

without specifying how they are achieved. The “100% safe dyes” claim similarly combines exaggerated certainty with lack of proof and the potential for hidden trade-offs (since other environmental dimensions, such as wastewater volumes or energy use, are not mentioned). These multi-flag claims exemplify high-intensity greenwashing, where semantic and rhetorical devices converge to present a very favourable impression in the absence of verifiable substance.

4.2. Legitimation and Discursive Strategies

This section examines **how** firms linguistically justify and legitimise their green claims. In line with the framework developed, each green-claim unit was coded for four main legitimation strategies **authorization**, **rationalisation**, **moral evaluation** and **mythopoesis** as well as for key discursive features such as evaluative adjectives, modality and intertextual references. This allows us to see not only *what* firms claim, but *how* they construct those claims as reasonable, ethical and credible in the eyes of their audiences.

Firm ID	Pseudonym	Green-claim units (n)	Authorization (count)	Rationalisation (count)	Moral evaluation (count)	Mythopoesis (count)	Total legitimation flags	Avg. strategies per claim
F1	Alpha Textiles	3	2	3	3	1	9	3.0
F2	Beta Spinners	3	1	2	3	1	7	2.3
F3	Cotton Home	4	2	3	4	2	11	2.8

Table 4.4 Legitimation Strategies Across Firms in Coded Green-Claim Units (n = 10)

Across all ten green-claim units, **moral evaluation** appears in every case (10/10), **rationalisation** in eight, **authorization** in five and **mythopoesis** in four. On average, each claim draws on between **two and three distinct legitimation strategies**, indicating that firms rarely rely on a single justification; instead, they weave together appeals to values, efficiency, authority and narrative to construct an aura of environmental responsibility.

4.2.1. Moral evaluation as the backbone of legitimation

The most pervasive pattern is the prominence of **moral evaluation**. All claims, irrespective of firm or genre, frame environmental actions in ethical terms using language that invokes *responsibility*, *care*, *fairness* or *future generations*. For example:

- “Compliance with all applicable environmental laws remains our **top priority**” (F2 AR21 P30 1) evaluates legal compliance as a moral obligation rather than a minimum requirement.

- “We reaffirm our **commitment** to a cleaner, greener Faisalabad” (F3 SM21 WED 1) positions the firm as a caring local actor aligned with collective environmental values.
- “Our eco-friendly fabrics **care for the planet** while offering unmatched comfort” (F1 WEB22 ENV 1) personifies the product as morally benevolent.

Such formulations resonate strongly with the moral-evaluative dimension of legitimisation discussed in Chapter Two: they construct the firm as *ethically good* and on the “right side” of environmental issues. Importantly, this moralisation is **not limited to genuinely strong claims**. Even highly vague or weakly evidenced claims (e.g., “100% safe dyes” or broad “commitment” statements) are wrapped in moral language, suggesting that **ethical framing is a default justificatory resource**, regardless of the actual robustness of underlying practices.

4.2.2. Rationalisation: efficiency, innovation and business-case logic

The second most common strategy is **rationalisation**, present in eight of the ten green-claim units. Here, firms justify environmental actions in terms of **technical efficiency, innovation, or economic rationality**. For instance:

- “Installation of waste-heat recovery saved 1.2 GWh of electricity and avoided 750 tCO_{2e} in 2022” (F2 SR22 P08 1) rationalises environmental action through concrete performance metrics, suggesting that energy efficiency is both environmentally and economically sensible.
- “By 2030, we aim to achieve 30% reduction in Scope 1 and 2 emissions compared to our 2020 baseline” (F1 SR23 P18 1) presents the emissions-reduction target as a planned, measurable transformation in line with expectations of rational management.

Even more promotional claims often contain implicit rationalisation. The idea of “moving towards zero discharge to ensure a greener tomorrow” (F2 SR22 P09 1) frames environmental investments as forward-looking and strategically necessary, even though no concrete pathway is given. In this sense, rationalisation serves a dual role: in some cases it genuinely documents environmental performance; in others, it uses the *rhetoric* of planning, targets and efficiency to lend plausibility to otherwise underspecified claims. Across firms, Alpha Textiles (F1) and Cotton Home (F3) each use rationalisation three times, while Beta Spinners (F2) does so twice. This suggests that **listed firms with more formal sustainability reporting** may be slightly more inclined to couch green narratives in managerial and techno-economic terms, potentially reflecting the expectations of investors and international buyers.

4.2.3. Authorization and intertextual references to standards and frameworks

Authorization appealing to authorities, rules, or recognised frameworks appears in half of the claims overall (5/10) but is particularly visible in reports and on specialist webpages. It manifests in multiple forms:

- **Regulatory authorization**, as in references to “compliance with all applicable environmental laws” (F2 AR21 P30 1), where the state and legal system are invoked to warrant responsible behaviour.
- **Standard-based authorization**, such as mentions of ISO 14001 certification or external assurance (“Third-party assurance has verified our Scope 1 and 2 emissions inventory for FY 2023”, F3 SR23 P22 1). Here, the authority is external auditors or certification bodies.
- **Global framework authorization**, evident when Cotton Home (F3 SR20 P15 1) claims to be “aligned with the UN Global Compact and SDG 12”. This invokes the moral and institutional authority of global sustainability regimes.

These authorising moves are closely linked to **intertextual references** mentions of SDGs, the UN Global Compact, local environmental laws, or ZDHC MRSL alignment. In the coding of discursive features, intertextual references were identified in half of the units (5/10), largely overlapping with authorization. This intertextual-authorising nexus strengthens legitimacy by situating the firm within broader normative systems, but it also opens space for **symbolic alignment**: firms may highlight membership or alignment without demonstrating deep implementation, thus intersecting with hidden trade-off greenwashing. Firm-level patterns show that F1 and F3 (the listed firms) rely more heavily on authorization (two claims each) than F2 (one claim), which aligns with their stronger engagement with international frameworks and assurance practices. However, even in these cases, authorisation sometimes co-occurs with vague or partial descriptions, indicating that the presence of external references does not automatically guarantee substantive performance.

4.2.4. Mythopoesis: stories of journeys, futures and celebrations

Although less frequent overall (4 instances), **mythopoesis** the use of stories and narrative structures to legitimise action is particularly salient in social-media and campaign-related contexts. Examples include:

- “This World Environment Day, we reaffirm our commitment to a cleaner, greener Faisalabad” (F3 SM21 WED 1), which constructs a **ritual narrative** of annual recommitment and positions the firm as a protagonist in a local environmental story.
- “We are moving towards zero discharge to ensure a greener tomorrow” (F2 SR22 P09 1), which frames environmental improvement as a **journey towards a better future**, even though the destination and steps are unspecified.

In these cases, mythopoesis is intertwined with moral evaluation and rationalisation. The narrative of progress (“moving towards”, “journey”, “reaffirm”) suggests directionality and resolve, while the ethical framing reinforces the idea that the firm is on the right side of history. However, because these stories are often **thin on concrete details**, they can become vehicles for **aspirational greenwashing**: the story of environmental transformation is told before, or instead of, the transformation itself. Cotton Home (F3) employs mythopoesis in both a sustainability-report context and in its social-media post, using narratives of alignment with global compacts and communal action on World Environment Day. Beta Spinners (F2) uses mythopoesis once in the zero-discharge journey claim. Alpha Textiles (F1) does so in relation to an emissions-reduction “by 2030” trajectory, where the storyline of long-term transition accompanies a specific target.

4.2.5. Discursive features: adjectives, modality and intertextuality

Beyond explicit legitimisation categories, the corpus shows systematic use of **discursive features** that support legitimisation indirectly:

- **Evaluative adjectives** appear in most claims (8/10), including “eco-friendly”, “state-of-the-art”, “sustainable”, “cleaner, greener”, and “100% safe”. These adjectives intensify positive evaluation and help moralise and aestheticise environmental performance.
- **Modal verbs** (“aim to achieve”, “will ensure”, “moving towards”, “remain our top priority”) occur in four units and are central in managing **temporality and certainty**. They enable firms to promise future performance (“will”, “aim to”) while retaining vagueness about delivery mechanisms thus linking to both legitimisation and greenwashing.
- **Intertextual references**, as noted earlier, connect corporate texts to broader discourses (SDGs, UN Global Compact, local laws). These not only authorise claims but also frame firms as embedded within responsible, global networks, further bolstering legitimacy.

Interestingly, **nominalisation and passivisation** were not prominent in this small sample; most claims are written in relatively active, company-centred syntax (“we have reduced”, “we reaffirm”, “we have introduced”). This active voice projects agency and responsibility, but combined with vagueness and limited proof, it can also function as **reputational self-branding** without proportional accountability.

4.2.6. Linking legitimisation to greenwashing intensity

Comparing the typology analysis in Section 4.2.2 with the legitimisation patterns here reveals an important finding: **the presence of multiple legitimisation strategies does not automatically correlate with lower greenwashing**. Some of the most problematic claims such as “Our dyes are 100% safe and do not harm the environment in any way” combine strong moral evaluation and rationalisation (implied superiority and safety) with

high-intensity greenwashing (vagueness, no proof, potentially hidden trade-offs). Similarly, symbolic World Environment Day posts show rich mythopoetic and moral language but almost no substantive evidence.

Conversely, a few high-legitimacy claims such as the quantified emissions-reduction target and the verified Scope 1 and 2 inventory also deploy multiple legitimization strategies, but in these cases they are anchored in **specific data, baselines and third-party verification**. This suggests that **legitimation is a neutral tool**: it can be used to support genuine accountability or to embellish weakly substantiated claims. What distinguishes the two is not the *presence* of legitimization strategies, but whether they are accompanied by **clear scope, time-binding and evidence routes**.

The pattern in Table 4.4 indicates that firms in this corpus rely heavily on **moral evaluation and rationalisation**, supplemented by selective authorization and occasional mythopoesis, to construct environmental legitimacy. These strategies are woven together with discursive features (evaluative adjectives, modality, intertextual references) that intensify positive evaluation and align firms with powerful global narratives. The next section builds on this overview by zooming into specific **case-study excerpts**, showing in detail how greenwashing and legitimization intertwine in the corporate communication of Faisalabad's textile firms.

4.3. Case Studies / Detailed CDA Excerpts

To deepen the understanding of how greenwashing and legitimization intersect in practice, this section presents a set of case-based CDA excerpts from the corpus. Before turning to the qualitative detail, Table 4.5 summarises the relationship between greenwashing intensity (number of greenwashing flags per claim) and overall textual environmental legitimacy.

For this cross-tab, greenwashing intensity is grouped into three levels:

- None – 0 greenwashing flags
- Low – 1 flag
- High – 2 or more flags

Textual environmental legitimacy	Greenwashing: None	Greenwashing: Low	Greenwashing: High	Row total
High	3	0	0	3
Medium	0	1	1	2
Low	0	0	5	5
Column total	3	1	6	10

Table 4.5 Cross-tabulation of Greenwashing Intensity by Textual Environmental Legitimacy (n = 10)

Table 4.5 shows a clear polarisation: all high-legitimacy claims have no greenwashing flags, while all low-legitimacy claims exhibit high-intensity greenwashing (two or more flags). Medium-legitimacy claims sit in between, with one carrying low-intensity and one high-intensity greenwashing. This pattern confirms that textual features which increase credibility clarity of scope, time-binding, and evidence tend to co-occur with the absence of greenwashing tactics, whereas vague and unevidenced claims cluster in the low-legitimacy category.

Case 1: High Legitimacy, No Greenwashing: A Quantified Emissions Target (F1 SR23 P18 1)

“By 2030, we aim to achieve 30% reduction in Scope 1 and 2 emissions compared to our 2020 baseline.” (Firm F1, Sustainability Report 2023, p.18; Text Unit ID: F1 SR23 P18 1)

This claim is coded as high textual legitimacy with no greenwashing flags. From a CDA perspective, several features contribute to this:

- Scope clarity: The object of reduction is specified (“Scope 1 and 2 emissions”), avoiding the common ambiguity about which emissions are included.
- Time-binding: A clear timeframe is given (“by 2030”) and tied to a specific baseline year (2020), which allows for future verification.
- Quantification: The magnitude of the target (“30% reduction”) is stated explicitly, moving beyond generic improvement language (“significant reduction”).

In terms of legitimation, the claim combines rationalisation (“30% reduction” as a planned, measurable change) with moral evaluation (implicitly aligning with climate responsibility norms) and mythopoesis (a narrative of transition by 2030). Modality (“we aim to achieve”) signals ambition without overclaiming certainty; the firm does not assert that the reduction has already occurred. Crucially, there is no vagueness or missing evidence at this level of description. While the text does not provide methodological details or intermediate milestones in this sentence, it offers enough concrete information for readers to understand what is promised and to hold the company accountable later. This case exemplifies how legitimation strategies can support genuine accountability rather than greenwashing.

Case 2: Medium Legitimacy with Hidden Trade-off: Packaging and SDG Alignment (F3 SR20 P15 1)

“Aligned with the UN Global Compact and SDG 12, we have introduced sustainable packaging for all export shipments.” (Firm F3, Sustainability Report 2020, p.15; Text Unit ID: F3 SR20 P15 1)

This unit is coded as medium textual legitimacy with hidden trade-off as its main greenwashing type. On the surface, the claim appears robust:

- It references high-profile global frameworks (UN Global Compact, SDG 12), providing authorization through intertextual links.
- It specifies an action area (“sustainable packaging”) and a scope (“all export shipments”).

However, the statement raises questions:

- No proof is supplied in this sentence: readers are not told what “sustainable packaging” means in material terms (e.g., recycled content, recyclability, elimination of plastics).
 - The focus on packaging may divert attention from larger environmental impacts such as dyeing, wet-processing effluents, and energy sources hence the coding as a hidden trade-off.

Discursively, the claim relies strongly on authorization (invoking UNGC and SDG 12), moral evaluation (implied responsibility through alignment with global norms) and a subtle narrative of progress (introduction of a new, “sustainable” practice). The term “sustainable packaging” is itself vague, but the presence of some scope detail and the association with recognised frameworks elevate the legitimacy rating to “medium” rather than “low”. This case illustrates how a claim can be partially credible yet strategically selective. The firm communicates genuine improvement in one area (packaging) but, by foregrounding this and tying it to global frameworks, risks giving readers an overly positive impression of overall environmental performance. It demonstrates how greenwashing may operate through emphasis rather than outright falsity.

Case 3: High-Intensity Greenwashing in Promotional Web Discourse: “Eco-friendly Fabrics” (F1 WEB22 ENV 1)

“Our eco-friendly fabrics care for the planet while offering unmatched comfort.”
(Firm F1, Environment Webpage 2022; Text Unit ID: F1 WEB22 ENV 1)

This web claim is a clear example of high-intensity greenwashing with low textual legitimacy. It carries multiple flags:

- Vagueness: “Eco-friendly” and “care for the planet” are undefined; no specific environmental attributes (e.g., organic cotton, reduced chemical use, lower emissions) are mentioned.
- No proof: There is no data, certification, or reference to independent verification.
- Potential hidden trade-off: The claim focuses on fabrics without discussing other parts of the lifecycle (e.g., dyeing, washing impacts, end-of-life).

Legitimation here is achieved mainly through moral evaluation (“care for the planet”) and evaluative adjectives (“unmatched comfort”), which combine to create an emotionally attractive brand image. The personification of fabrics as caring agents obscures the human decisions and industrial processes behind them, a classic move in ideological naturalisation.

Unlike the emissions target in Case 1, there is no time-binding or scope clarity. The statement operates as a slogan rather than a measurable commitment. From an ecolinguistic standpoint, it promotes a story of harmless consumption: customers can feel good about buying more because the fabrics supposedly help the planet. This story conflicts with the material reality of textile production and aligns closely with what ecolinguists call destructive stories of consumption masked as ecological care.

Case 4: Extreme Certainty and Risky Overclaim: “100% Safe Dyes” (F3 WEB23 CHEM 1)

“Our dyes are 100% safe and do not harm the environment in any way.”
(Firm F3, Chemicals Webpage 2023; Text Unit ID: F3 WEB23 CHEM 1)

This sentence is coded as low legitimacy with high-intensity greenwashing. While it does not contain a verifiable “fib” in the strict sense (we do not have external evidence), it uses several problematic discursive strategies:

- Totalising quantification: “100% safe” and “in any way” express absolute certainty, unusual in scientific or regulatory communication about chemicals.
- Vagueness and no proof: No information is given about which substances are used, which standards are followed, or what tests have been conducted.
- Moral evaluation: The claim appeals to safety and harm-avoidance, strong ethical values for both buyers and end consumers.

This combination makes the statement high-risk from a greenwashing perspective. It suggests a level of safety and environmental innocuousness that is extremely difficult to guarantee in complex supply chains. The absence of any reference to recognised frameworks (e.g., ZDHC MRSL, REACH compliance, OEKO-TEX certifications) further undermines credibility. From a CDA viewpoint, the strongly assertive modality (“are 100% safe”, “do not harm”) contrasts with the lack of evidence, indicating a discursive overreach. Instead of hedging or contextualising (“tested according to...”, “do not exceed... limits”), the firm presents an idealised narrative of chemical innocence. This is a powerful but problematic form of moral and rational legitimisation: the dyes are not only good, they are presented as risk-free.

Case 5: Symbolic Environmental Commitment on Social Media: World Environment Day (F3 SM21 WED 1)

“This World Environment Day, we reaffirm our commitment to a cleaner, greener Faisalabad.” (Firm F3, Social Media Post – 5 June 2021; Text Unit ID: F3 SM21 WED 1)

This short post represents a typical symbolic green communication. It is coded as low textual legitimacy with high-intensity greenwashing (vagueness and no proof, plus potential hidden trade-off). The key features are:

- Event-based mythopoesis: The reference to World Environment Day situates the firm within a global ritual of environmental concern.

- Moral evaluation: The phrase “cleaner, greener Faisalabad” appeals to local pride and shared environmental values.
- Absence of concrete action: No specific initiatives, targets or results are mentioned; “reaffirm our commitment” remains entirely discursive.

From a CDA and ecolinguistic angle, this post constructs a narrative in which the company and the city are united in a shared green future, but it does not specify what the firm actually does beyond symbolic participation in the day. In the broader context of the corpus, where factual claims are sometimes made elsewhere, such posts may reinforce a positive environmental brand image disproportionate to actual performance, contributing to what some authors call “ambient” or “aesthetic” greenwashing. These case studies illustrate the main pattern hinted at in Table 4.5: when claims are precise, time-bound and supported by evidence, legitimization strategies help build credible environmental narratives. When claims are vague, unevidenced and absolute, the same legitimization resources moral evaluation, rationalisation, authorization and narrative can be mobilised to produce high-intensity greenwashing, especially in promotional webpages and social-media campaigns.

Findings of this research show that Green claims are concentrated in sustainability reports and webpages, with social media used for symbolic signaling across the small corpus, the majority of identified green-claim units appeared in **stand-alone sustainability reports and dedicated sustainability/environment webpages**, with fewer substantive claims in annual-report ESG sections and social media. Social-media posts tended to be short, event-based and highly symbolic (e.g., World Environment Day messages), focusing on reaffirming “commitment” rather than detailing specific actions. This distribution supports the view that firms treat sustainability reports and webpages as primary vehicles for structured environmental narratives, while social media is used mainly to **reinforce green identity** in a more promotional register.

Additionally, Greenwashing is dominated by “soft” tactics vagueness and lack of proof rather than overt deception. Analysis of greenwashing typologies showed that **vagueness** and **no proof** were each present in around 60% of coded claims, often appearing together. Companies frequently used broad terms such as “eco-friendly”, “significantly reduced”, “sustainable packaging” and “greener Faisalabad” without providing baselines, figures or references to independent evidence. **Hidden trade-offs** appeared in about one-third of claims, especially where improvements in a single area (e.g., packaging) were highlighted while other significant impacts remained unmentioned. In contrast, there were **no clear cases** of fibbing, false labels or “lesser of two evils” in the illustrative subset. This suggests that, under current ESG scrutiny, greenwashing in this context is more likely to take the form of **discursive inflation and selective disclosure** than outright lies.

Furthermore, **moral evaluation and rationalisation are the backbone of legitimization**. Across firms and genres, green claims almost always invoked **moral evaluation** framing environmental actions as “responsible”, “caring”, “safe” or “for a greener future” and often combined this with **rationalisation**, presenting actions as efficient, innovative or strategically necessary. Even weakly evidenced claims were wrapped in ethical language, suggesting that moral framing has become a **default justification**, regardless of the depth of environmental change. Stronger claims, such as quantified emissions-reduction targets or verified emissions inventories, also used rationalisation (targets, baselines, metrics) but in ways that supported genuine accountability.

Authorization and mythopoesis add symbolic weight but can mask selectivity. Firms used **authorization** by referring to laws, standards, external assurance and global frameworks (e.g., UN Global Compact, SDGs) to strengthen their legitimacy. These intertextual references positioned the companies within respected governance regimes. At the same time, referencing prestigious frameworks without clear evidence of implementation risked becoming a form of symbolic greenwashing. **Mythopoesis** stories of journeys, future transitions and ritual reaffirmations (e.g., World Environment Day posts) was evident especially in social-media and campaign-related discourse. These narratives reinforced positive identities but often lacked detail on concrete environmental actions.

High textual legitimacy co-occurs with the absence of greenwashing flags, while low legitimacy clusters with high-intensity greenwashing. The cross-tab of greenwashing intensity and textual legitimacy showed that **all high-legitimacy claims** in the corpus had **no greenwashing flags** and included clear scope, time-binding and evidence (e.g., a 30% emissions-reduction target by 2030 from a 2020 baseline, or quantified energy savings with tCO_{2e} figures). Conversely, all **low-legitimacy claims** exhibited **multiple greenwashing flags**, such as being vague, unevidenced and highly promotional (“100% safe dyes”, “eco-friendly fabrics care for the planet”). Medium-legitimacy claims typically combined some credible elements with selectivity or lack of proof. This pattern suggests that textual legitimacy and greenwashing are not independent: high-quality, transparent claims tend to be substantively stronger, while promotional slogans cluster with higher greenwashing risk.

Genre and firm profile shape, but do not fully determine, discursive practices. Listed firms used more references to global frameworks and assurance, and their sustainability reports contained some comparatively robust, data-based claims. The private firm relied more on generic compliance and a narrower set of topics. However, all firms, regardless of listing status or product segment, drew on similar repertoires of **vagueness, moralisation and partial evidence**. Genre dynamics were clearer: sustainability reports

mixed strong and weak claims; webpages favoured promotional, weakly evidenced language; social media relied heavily on symbolic commitment without details.

The study indicates that **corporate environmental communication in the Faisalabad textile context is characterised by a tension between accountability and impression management**. On one hand, firms are capable of producing relatively high-quality environmental disclosures, especially in relation to energy efficiency and emissions targets, where quantified data and time-bound goals are provided. On the other hand, a substantial portion of their green claims rely on **discursive strategies that inflate environmental credibility** without offering sufficient detail or proof. By combining **CDA, ecolinguistics and legitimation theory**, the thesis shows that greenwashing should not be understood as a purely factual problem (“true” vs “false” claims), but as a **discursive practice** embedded in particular stories, values and power relations. Moral evaluation, rationalisation, authorization and mythopoesis are not inherently problematic; they are necessary resources for telling persuasive environmental stories. However, when these strategies are used to decorate vague, unsubstantiated or selective claims, they contribute to **“soft” greenwashing** that can mislead stakeholders and undermine trust in genuine sustainability efforts. The thesis thus contributes to broader debates on **corporate environmental legitimacy** in three ways: it brings a critical-discourse perspective to greenwashing in a Global South textile hub; it demonstrates how greenwashing typologies and legitimation strategies can be analytically integrated; and it offers an operational framework for examining how environmental responsibility is constructed in texts across multiple genres.

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