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Transgressing CSR on the organizational value chain: How natural resource companies greenwash their processes

Transgrediendo RSE en la cadena de valor: ¿Cómo incurren las compañías extractivas en prácticas de "greenwashing" sobre sus procesos?

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Abstract

This work addresses the question of how companies belonging to the natural resource industry use to greenwash their processes. For this purpose, a multi-case approach with five different cases in the Colombian context is adopted. Through the data analysis, an exemplification of each value chain greenwashing transgression at the company level is provided. Besides highlighting a real-life problematic with several implications in a sensitive context, the contributions of this work are twofold. First, this work contributes to reinforcing the notion of greenwashing and related transgressions by clarifying a concrete way of identifying certain deceptive practices related to the organizational value chain under conditions. Second, this work promotes the transferability of the concepts used for elucidating the reality of the value chain greenwashing phenomenon at different levels and in various contexts.

Keywords: greenwashing; CSR; value chain; process management; Colombia.

Resumen

El presente trabajo aborda la pregunta de cómo las empresas de la industria de los recursos naturales implementan prácticas de 'lavado verde' (greenwashing) en sus procesos. Para hacerlo, se adopta un enfoque multi-caso en el contexto colombiano. A través del análisis de datos, se proporciona una ejemplificación de cada transgresión del greenwashing de la cadena de valor a nivel de la empresa. Además de destacar una problemática de la vida real con varias implicaciones en un contexto sensible, las contribuciones de este trabajo son básicamente dos. Primero, contribuye a reforzar la noción del greenwashing y las cinco transgresiones a la responsabilidad social empresarial al aclarar una forma concreta de identificación de ciertas prácticas engañosas relacionadas con la cadena de valor organizacional bajo condiciones particulares. En segundo lugar, promueve la transferibilidad de los conceptos utilizados para dilucidar la realidad del fenómeno del greenwashing en la cadena de valor.

Palabras clave: greenwashing; RSE; cadena de valor; gestión de procesos; Colombia.

1. Introduction

Taking advantage of a typical status of information asymmetry (i.e., when one party has different information than the other), the phenomenon known as

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greenwashing consists of misleading stakeholders regarding the corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices of a company [1], [2]. This phenomenon is of particular importance in the processes management framework due to the impact of the many activities and operations on the company's overall CSR performance [3], [4]. Therefore, the concept of the Organizational Value Chain (hereinafter OVC) approach is useful for the sake of rationally addressing such concern. Specifically, companies can claim to have a sustainable system in place for moving both products and data between suppliers and customers but not implement it sustainably. They tend to convey false or selective information intended to conceal the truth about their OVCs to appear in line with general expectations. Although the evidence demonstrates the existence of some greenwashed processes systems, more research is needed to illustrate the different ways of identifying them [5], [6].

In this work, the above issue is tackled by addressing the question of how companies in the natural resource industry greenwash their OVCs. To do so, the study draws on [7]'s scheme of five greenwashing transgressions at the company level and frames each within the Colombian context. Following [8], five different case studies are used to help illustrate how a company can adopt false-hearted behaviors related to its OVC system for the sake of projecting an appropriate image of its functioning. The findings obtained suggest that some companies can take advantage of the population's level of indulgence and the asymmetric information (meaning that the public possesses different information from the company) to manipulate the nature of their OVC systems, and ultimately commit greenwashing in several ways.

This manuscript is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the overarching theoretical framework in terms of relevant topics. In section 3, a summary of the study method is presented, followed by a brief description of each case separately. Section 4 contains results derived from the analysis of the cases. Finally, together with a conclusion, section 5 includes the discussion of results, limitations, and proposed future research directions.

2. Organizational Value Chain

The surface oxide waste from reinforcing steel bars was The OVC is a set of activities that a firm operating in a specific industry engages in while doing business. It is meant to depict all the processes a company performs to deliver a valuable product (or service) for the market [9]. The purpose of the OVC approach consists of categorizing the generic value-adding activities of a business. Primary activities include inbound logistics, operations, outbound logistics, marketing and sales, and after-sales service. Moreover, support activities include firm infrastructure management, human resource management, R&D, and procurement. Finally, the costs and value drivers are identified for each value activity. Their ultimate goal is to maximize value creation while minimizing costs.

This model rapidly made its way to the foreground of management thought as a powerful analysis instrument for strategic planning and other fields of study. In that order of ideas, the OVC approach relates to several representations of how a company is. For instance, for some researchers, the OVC analysis is the source of inspiration for conceiving both the Organizational Processes Map in the field of Quality Management and the Business Model Canvas in the Innovation Management body of knowledge.

Within the CSR arena, the fact of visualizing a company through the lens of the OVC approach represents a comprehensive task, which is worthy of examination: "When a company uses the [OVC] to chart all the social [and environmental] consequences of its activities, it has, in effect, created an inventory of problems and opportunities—mostly operational issues—that need to be investigated, prioritized, and addressed. In general, companies should attempt to clear away as many negative value-chain social impacts as possible" [4, p. 86] Some company activities will prove to offer opportunities for social, environmental and strategic distinction. In that order of ideas, the OVC analysis can be applied as a framework to identify the positive and negative impact of those activities. See Figure 1.

However, one thing is the identification of such problems and opportunities, and a different thing is a way the company addresses them for the sake of dealing with the public's organizational perception. Naturally, the ideal scenario consists of the alignment of both events [10]. However, sometimes, there is no correspondence between them, representing a mismatch between what is done and what is projected (in terms of CSR thought the OVC of a company). The latter phenomenon has been labeled in the literature as decoupling [11].

3. CSR and Greenwashing

Since the organizational decision-makers have started to understand that companies must be good citizens and to 'do the right thing' with their stakeholders, the CSR concept has been linked to the efforts of searching results beyond the mere financial facts [12]. Moreover, in fact, since the influence of this concept has been highly relevant during the last years, some authors have been even cataloged it as the new dominant paradigm in terms of evaluating a firm's performance [13]. In consequence, CSR can be defined as the integration of "social and environmental concerns in their business operations and their interaction with the [firms'] stakeholders voluntarily" [14, p. 451]. In this sense, the CSR dynamics can include firms' community, philanthropic, and environmental programs and activities.

Nevertheless, research in the field of CSR has shown a recent trend towards assessing the authenticity of its adoption by organizations [15]. In this sense, the precise definition of CSR explicitly excludes from its domains aspects such as compliance with the law (including environmental or labor legislation itself). The payment of taxes and royalties, the attempt to compensate irresponsible action with other benevolent actions (of a quid pro quo type), the concealment or manipulation of the truth, conspiracies by specific sectors to increase profits at the expense of their clients and suppliers, and direct and indirect participation in industries of indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources [7].

The topic of greenwashing has increasingly drawn attention among researchers and practitioners, especially in the fields of marketing and public relations. However, in the last years, it has been acquiring different shapes in other fields of study at different levels [16]. From the perspective of OVC management, the examination of such a phenomenon is of particular interest in industries associated with natural resources because of the sustainability implications [17]. Moreover, any effort to address the study of greenwashing in the context of developing countries is always worthwhile due to their 'special' (read 'weak') regulatory policies [18].

Since companies have lately been encouraged to work on achieving sustainable OVCs, the concept of greenwashing has also gained relevance in understanding the different nuances of adopting sustainable OVC practices [19]. In particular, in this field, greenwashing has been identified as "the scenario of a company cultivating a positive public perception of its green credentials while not investing enough in greening its [OVC]" [20, p. 177]. However, the act of greenwashing an OVC goes beyond simply underinvesting in sustainable practices. In reality, it represents an ethical concern that affects the whole system of elements involved in moving a product or service between suppliers and customers [5]. Naturally, faking reality in transforming natural resources, raw materials, and components for the sake of gaining legitimacy infringes basic corporate principles such as honesty and transparency [21]. In conclusion, greenwashing in the field of OVC can be better defined as the selective disclosure of favorable information concerning the CSR performance of a company's OVC, without full disclosure of negative information on this dimension to create an overly positive image of the company in general and the company's OVC in particular.

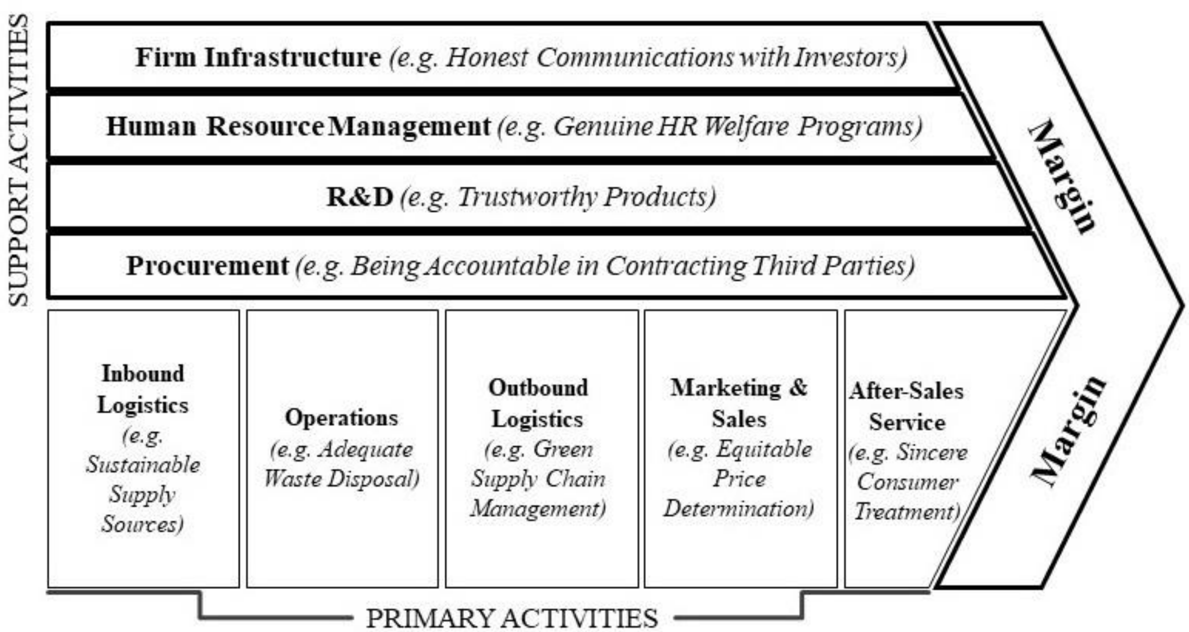

Figure 1. Examples of Non-Greenwashing OVC Practices. Source: The Author - Based on [4].

Understandably, the fact that constituencies possess less or inferior-quality information than the company constitutes a breeding ground for deception, and ergo for greenwashing. This information failure is usually known as information asymmetry [22], and it is part of every day's business environment in Latin American countries [23]. Furthermore, the latter singularity within the mentioned context is aggravated by the circumstance that there is not apparent remuneration for companies due to their CSR initiatives [24]. In consequence, the fact of possessing and controlling more or better material knowledge than the public and using it for its benefit (even by transgressing ethical principles) is what ultimately makes a company become an OVC greenwasher.

As an attempt to illustrate greenwashing practices at the level of the company, [7] drew on the Greenpeace typology, which classifies such practices based on a set of four transgressions [25]. Furthermore, he contributed to this categorization by adding a fifth and final transgression related to CSR reports and disclosures. The five ways in which a company can employ greenwashing are as follows:

- **Dirty business*:*** This concerns some companies that promote their CSR programs or the sustainability of their processes, while their core activity consists of any operations that pollute or remove natural resources (e.g., fluids, metals, minerals, and aggregates) from the earth. Even though their OVCs are, in nature, unsustainable, their statements permanently highlight their commitment to social and environmental causes.

- **Ad bluster:** This is the use of targeted advertising and public relations campaigns to exaggerate an environmental or social achievement and divert attention from CSR problems. It usually takes place in cases of organizational wrongdoing or misconduct, when the implicated company intends to defend its image and reputation. Most of the time, it consists of the fabrication of smokescreens to conceal a critical event that happened within the OVC or the causes that generated it.

- **Political spin:** The presence of political power is spread throughout the corporate environment in various nations around the world. It is widely known that corporations and trade organizations spend large sums of money every year to influence public policy. While this happens, some companies publicize CSR commitments while simultaneously lobbying against pro-CSR laws and regulations for their convenience.

- **It's the law, stupid!:** Real CSR refers to companies voluntarily going beyond what the law requires to achieve social and environmental objectives during their business activities CSR should then be considered a voluntary practice and beyond compliance with the law. In this sense, this transgression takes place when a company is forced by law to make changes in its OVC, yet makes claims that suggest it is acting proactively and voluntarily.

- **Fuzzy reporting:** Companies have started to release and promote CSR reports, which are meant to project a sense of accountability over their OVCs. An authentic CSR report should demonstrate a company's ethos in action. It should outline the steps the company is taking to ensure it acts responsibly in every activity of its OVC. Nevertheless, lately, many of these reports are become fundamentally meaningless due to the manipulation of the information reported. As a result, stakeholders remain uninformed about the CSR performance of many companies.

As mentioned before, since this study represents a current contribution and addresses a potential topic for building on through further research, the focal point of this work is to illustrate how companies have engaged in each of these transgressions in the Colombian natural resource industry context. Following [8], this study uses a multi-case methodological approach.

4. Study Method

The case study methodology is used to examine one or more specific cases with rich contextualization and ideally provides a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the selected examples [26]. A multi-case study, in particular, implies the understanding of similarities and differences between cases. Also, it demands data analysis both within and across situations. Notably, the fact of examining more than one case has the advantage of enhancing the external validity of research [8].

The OVCs of particular natural resource companies in Colombia are demarcated as the general subject area of this work, and the particular subject of the study comprises the behavior of each company and further investigations of each case. This approach is appropriate for analysis due to the sensitivity of this context, and considering the many environmental and social implications that are at stake, because of various OVC activities. It should be noted that the national media has covered these cases widely, which allows direct data collection from credible sources in the public domain (press releases, trusted media outlets, official web pages, and sustainability reports). These were initially issued in Spanish.

Based on public sources (media items, research papers, corporate documentation, and CSR reports), the study examines individual cases, considering how companies manipulated information about specific issues concerning their OVCs' activities. This approach has the objective of validating the adoption of greenwashing as a legitimizing strategy. Finally, utilizing theoretical triangulation, this study identifies relevant details of each behavior, which can help in the designation of each case as representative of each greenwashing transgression. See Figure 2.

4.1 The cases

Colombia is a typical example of a hierarchical market economy, where state-owned companies, multinational firms, and business groups dominate the economic dynamics [27]. In this spirit, the country (like any other Latin American country) reports high levels of ownership concentration, which in turn, leads to the establishment of environments with significant information asymmetry between companies and the society at large [24]. Cases of oppressive labor conditions, corporate misconduct, and abuse of power are part of the economic history of this nation [28] - [30].

At the same time, the country's diverse natural resources are a determinant of the economic development of its people. Although more than 28% of the population has consistently remained below the poverty line [31], the country is ranked second among the world's most biodiverse countries [32]. Furthermore, the Colombian economy is still highly dependent on the exploitation of natural resources, with the most representative business models comprising the exploitation of oil, gas, thermal coal, and metallic minerals [33]. During the last few decades, both national and foreign companies have been attracted by the possibility of acquiring, exploiting, and trading these resources for their benefit, and at the same time have found the notion of CSR to be the best way of legitimizing their actions and decisions [34]. Nevertheless, from time to time, some of their communicational efforts concerning their OVCs' activities have been acknowledged as deliberate acts of misleading public opinion, namely misdirection from reality, and such companies have been, in turn, questioned concerning their activities and decisions. Therefore, they represent examples of how an OVC can be greenwashed in diverse manners. The five case studies are described in turn in the following paragraphs.

- **Case 1:** An iguana (oil & gas?) company

In 2006, as a result of several institutional and legal adjustments in national extractive policies, Ecopetrol, the only Colombian state-owned oil company, was aimed at being listed in the Colombian Stock Market. In this regard, it needed a new identity that was in line with this new scenario. Thus, it changed its corporate image from a static black-and-yellow pre-Colombian figure to a lively green iguana, representing an essential element of its corporate visual identity [35].

Dirty Business	• Promoting CSR programs or the sustainability of their products, while their core activity is contaminating or unsustainable.
Ad Bluster	• Using targeted advertising and public relations campaigns to exaggerate an environmental or social achievement and divert attention from CSR problems.
Political Spin	• Publicizing CSR commitments while simultaneously lobbying against pro-CSR laws and regulations.
It's the Law, Stupid!	• Being forced by law to make changes, yet makes claims suggesting it is acting proactively and voluntarily.
Fuzzy Reporting	• Manipulating the information included in CSR reports. As a result, stakeholders remain uninformed about the CSR performance of the company.

Figure 1. Examples of Non-Greenwashing OVC Practices. Source: The Author - Based on [4].

Furthermore, the brand ‘Ecopetrol,’ which formerly stood for *‘Empresa Colombiana de Petróleos’* (i.e., *Colombian Oil Enterprise*), was then transformed and tinted using green tones. This modification was made for the sake of projecting an "ecological" look for its main activities and product (a sort of ‘ecological green oil’). As a representation of the West-Santandereano region, where the company’s petrochemical downstream process takes place, the new corporate image at that point was intended to meet a two-fold aim: putting a dynamic green complexion on its activities and emphasizing the meeting of the needs of the operation’s surrounding community [36]. In order to attract potential stockholders, extensive promotion campaigns were subsequently deployed to portray a new 'environmentally friendly and socially committed' Ecopetrol. However, although the company claimed the implementation of greater rigor in processes and product diversity throughout the OVC, the truth is that there was no change in the essence of the Ecopetrol core business-oil extraction-with all its conventional (and harmful) implications for the environment and society. The result: an attractive financial performance with the capability of overshadowing a questionable environmental performance [37].

- **Case 2:** The world’s most sustainable cement company…with a “twist”

For five years in a row, a time in which the construction industry was an essential driver of economic development in Colombia, and thanks to its position on the Dow Jones Sustainability Index, Argos S.A. was proud to be nominated as the world’s most sustainable cement company [38]. This statement was the subject of significant advertising investment, especially after the change in the company's corporate identity in 2007, which was meant to project a company based on an honest and respectful culture [39]. Nevertheless, in December 2017 (ratified in August 2018), and after a four-year investigation, Argos, together with two other companies (Cemex and Holcim), was declared guilty of performing tacit collusion [40]. Tacit collusion is considered a practice harmful to customers insofar as instead of competing, competitors collaborate to manipulate the market in a non-explicit manner with the expectation of obtaining higher profits [41]. In many countries, including Colombia, such practice is penalized. These three companies comprised 96% of the Colombian cement industry by the time the national competitiveness regulatory agency (named Superintendencia de Industria y Comercio [SIC]) found them responsible for adopting this practice over four consecutive years. The output of such agreement was to increase their prices exaggeratedly and ultimately sharing the distribution channel among them [42]. A fine was imposed on these companies but was only accepted by Cemex and Holcim. In contrast, Argos has been eager to file appeals. However, in the meantime, it is officially pointed to as working against free trade and competition and having a deleterious effect on the quality of life of thousands of Colombians, by increasing the costs of acquisition of their homes [43].

- **Case 3:** A Nobel Prize winner’s agreement to pollute

In November 2017, the Colombian mass media reported what should have been good news: President Juan Manuel Santos (a former winner of the Nobel Peace Prize) had concluded an official visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), obtaining agreements concerning political and economic matters [44]. The most important announcement was the monetary contribution of USD 45 million for humanitarian purposes related to the recently signed peace agreement between his government and the terrorist group named Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). However, just after this announcement, Mr. Santos highlighted the intention of the UAE to invest up to USD 1000 million in the Colombian economy through several productive and profitable investment projects. Together with his Mining Minister, he explicitly referred to a gold mining project on a vast scale on its way to being developed in the vicinity of a rare ecosystem exclusive to the South American Andean territory called the "Páramo de Santurbán” [45]. The giant UAE-owned company Minesa S.A. had been looking forward to obtaining an environmental license to carry out a massive process of gold extraction, with several implications for the long-term sustainability of a considerable portion of the Colombian territory and its population [46]. However, with technical support that discredited the project based on the negative impacts on the future water supply to the region, massive protests against the project’s potentially harmful effects had taken place in Bucaramanga, Colombia’s fifth most populated city [47].

- **Case 4:** Ratifying commitment (and at the same time avoiding fines and infringements)

Colombia is among the world's five largest producers of thermal coal, and the mining company Drummond Ltd. holds the rights to around a third of the extraction of this mineral in the country. Drummond, a US-based company, continuously reports its responsible purpose and displays a strong commitment to Colombia’s goals of sustainable development, especially in environmental and societal matters. One of its most highlighted and advertised environmentally friendly activities is focused on its delivery process at its deep-water ocean port. During the last days of March 2014, Drummond started to replace a barge-based loading system and inaugurated an expensive, but renovated and cleaner technique, based on conveyor belts [48]. Drummond stated that the new direct loading process was safer and more efficient in terms of environmental damage, taking into account that it "reduces the risks associated with the operation and avoids the weather and sea restrictions that affected the previous system" [49]. However, the real reason for its implementation was the enforcement of a law in place since 1993, which led to several postponements in the granting of permissions by successive Colombian governments and several wrongdoings perpetrated by the company in previous years [50]. Indeed, the company's supply process in port had been suspended for more than a year because of a major coal spillage that occurred in January 2013 and the company's attempt to reinstate it without official permission in January 2014.

- **Case 5:** Being under investigation for corruption is not relevant to stakeholders

As part of the political agenda for stimulating national agro-industrial production, in 2007, the Colombian government of the time founded an attractive opportunity for diversification into alternative fuel sources. By this means, it was intended that Colombia's largest biofuel factory would be developed in the region of the eastern plains, specifically in the city of Puerto López, Meta [36]. In 2010, the state-owned company, Ecopetrol, became the most important sponsor of this project based on fermenting sugar cane fluids [51]. In consequence, facilities that appeared to represent state-of-the-art technology signed on with several contractors and suppliers to shape Bioenergy S.A., the most relevant actor in the renewable energy production chain in Colombia, within a space of four years. However, governmental authorities and executives engaged in several significant acts of corruption and the misappropriation of public funds in what came to be known as one of the most notable cases of management incompetence and illegality in Colombian history. The ensuing investigation had direct repercussions for Bioenergy's feasibility, highlighting the evident value destruction in the project resulting from delays, corruption, and embezzlement [52]. Surprisingly, Bioenergy's sustainability report for 2014–2015 did not mention anything about these issues, and instead highlighted only the positive aspects of its activities [53].

5. Results

Each of the five cases offers an overview of how certain Colombian natural resource companies engaged in reprehensible behaviors that are compatible with corresponding OVC greenwashing transgressions. This assertion can be illustrated in terms of the relationship between each case and the theoretical framework as follows:

First, in its attempt to projecting a green image and obtaining new investors, Ecopetrol defined some OVC practices as fully sustainability-driven. However, they simply were conventional polluting processes belonging to the oil and gas industry. Instead of being aligned with its core business, its corporative image is the very opposite of what a fully extractive company is. This misrepresentation is a typical case of *Dirty Business*, within the OVC support activities of *Firm Infrastructure.*

Second, while Argos was under investigation for engaging in harmful trading practices, the company presented itself as the most sustainable cement company in the world. For some reason, when advertising its achievement, the company managed to cover the fact of being part of a price-manipulation cartel. In other words, it diverted attention from sustainability issues in its OVCs through the use of advertising and public relations. This action constituted *Ad Bluster* to impact the OVC primary activities of *Marketing and Sales*.

Third, in the case of Minesa, the message was clear: While there is enormous potential for degradation and depletion of water sources for the region mentioned above in the future, the government of President Santos implicitly blessed the exploitation of the Santandereano soil for the sake of his political agenda. Furthermore, it was evident that both the company and the government did not care about the fact that the affected community (represented as the Santandereano society) was rightly in contradiction with the venture. This action is a typical case of *Political Spin*, included in the OVC primary activities of *Inbound Logistics.*

Fourth, after several ups and downs, Drummond was finally able to deliver a more 'sustainable' transportation system in port. However, instead of being a corporate initiative in line with the company's CSR commitment, as was claimed, it was, in fact, a legal obligation, which took the company longer than it should be. This action is a valid example of the transgression termed *It's the Law, Stupid!*, within the OVC primary activities of *Outbound Logistics.*

Finally, Bioenergy visibly avoided being accountable to its stakeholders for addressing possible management-linked cases of immorality within its OVC. The company blatantly concealed the truth when it took advantage of its sustainability reporting. Such reports devoted their pages to praise the positive management activities carried out by the company, instead of revealing the ongoing investigations for corruption. Thus, it is evident that Bioenergy engaged in *Fuzzy Reporting* within the OVC support activities of *Procurement.*

According to this analysis, in order to defend their legitimacy, these five companies adopted particular strategies that were fully compatible with the definition of greenwashing. As a consequence, the latter makes them deserve the infamous label of OVC *greenwashers*.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of undertaking this work was to recognize how companies in the natural resource industry take advantage of the presence of information asymmetry between them and their publics, and end up greenwashing their OVCs at the company level. In line with [8]'s recommendation to employ case studies, this work adopted a multi-case approach, which involved five different companies in the Colombian context. Furthermore, this work used [7]'s approach derived from [25]'s greenwashing transgressions at the company level. When examining the five cases, it was noticeable how each worked as an exemplification of a particular transgression, clearly demonstrating the companies' capacity for deliberately disclosing positive information about the CSR performance of their OVCs while failing to disclose adverse information.

Taken together, the examples mentioned above are insightful illustrations of how a significant management concern (i.e., the practice of greenwashing) is commonly present within the studied context. Blatant lies, cover-ups, distracting maneuvers, taking credit for following legal obligations, and the indiscriminate use (and abuse) of CSR disclosures and reports, among others, have become the daily bread of Colombian reality. The present work suggests that the absence of precise control mechanisms and the indulgence that characterizes its society [54] makes the problem more significant. For instance, it has been evidenced that the public tends to get cynical once a greenwasher addresses its CSR performance within its VS, which generates a detriment in its image and legitimacy. Nevertheless, as time goes by, there is an inertial restoration of such an image, which in the long run, makes the greenwashing strategy held limited implications for its legitimacy.

Considering the previous ideas, this work is following other studies that have found that companies belonging to mining and energy industries tend to "camouflage sustainability" through their communications [10], [17]. Apparently, these companies could take advantage of asymmetric information (meaning that constituencies possess different information than the company [22]) to manipulate the truth and 'persuade' their audiences. However, by many perspectives, stakeholders are becoming more aware of this organizational behavior, which could lead to a reduction of organizational credibility. For instance, recent corporate deceptions in developing countries reflect the interest of ordinary people, as well as institutions, in what companies claim and do [29]. Mainly, what this work suggests is the presence of a considerable risk of greenwashing practices proliferation throughout the other productive sectors, especially in countries like Colombia, which can bring self-defeating consequences for their development.

The theoretical contribution of this work is two-fold. The first contribution lies in further confirming the existence of the greenwashing phenomenon [2], [18] by clarifying a concrete way of identifying certain deceptive practices related to OVCs [19], [20] among some companies in certain industries and contexts. The second contribution is the representation of an effective empirical exemplification of this concept and related transgressions regarding real and specific cases in a sensitive and complex context. The relevance of this work is enhanced by the transferability and usefulness of the findings for elucidating further implications. Thus, the results of this study could encourage further research to complement the understanding of the OVC greenwashing phenomenon at different levels and in different contexts.

In terms of its practical implications, this paper addressed the idea that although different stakeholders have different expectations, managers must always be consistent with the messages they convey if they want to claim an ethical purpose. It is merely something that a company "should do": it is its moral obligation to society. Although this duty could represent enough of a reason, failure to do so also implies an enormous risk and unnecessary costs to the environment and society. Moreover, although it could provide apparent financial results for these companies [24], it can also be negatively associated with other organizational outputs like customer retention, reputation, credibility, and even employee engagement in the long run [7].

Also, from the practical point of view, it can be perceived that the multi-faceted practice of greenwashing, specifically in OVCs, can be considered standard practice in the context examined. This fact is problematic because of the importance of the adequate management of OVCs for cohabitation between the natural resource industry and the communities in which companies operate, particularly concerning the sustainability goals targeted in the Colombian context. Furthermore, from a more general perspective, since stakeholders are continuously becoming more aware of what companies do and say (and potential discrepancies), further indiscriminate engagement in deceptive strategies might harm the credibility of CSR efforts among OVCs.

The most logical limitation of this work is that it is a set of case studies; they focus on single events and conjunctures, and thus, the learning from this work cannot be generalized or applicable to all cases of a similar nature. However, one of the main aims of this work is to consider the possibility of transferring the understanding proposed here to other similar contexts [8], [26]. This practice can prepare the groundwork for further conclusions, which, in the long run, would create a substantial contribution, with both internal and external validity.

Finally, further studies can build upon the contributions of this research. Besides the use of this approach in future empirical studies, there are various possibilities to expand the knowledge gained through this work. On the one hand, greenwashing in general and its transgressions, in particular, are notions with enormous potential for development in unusual contexts, like developing economies or sensitive industries. On the other hand, countless approaches already address issues similar to the ones presented in this work in different ways (e.g., context comparisons, and causality studies). Furthermore, the proposed approach offers an attractive alternative to target practitioners more proactively, thus contributing to the harmonization between the managerial discourse and practice.

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