

RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN SUSTAINABILITY DISCLOSURE

**A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY ON RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN
SUSTAINABILITY DISCLOSURES: ETHOS, LOGOS, PAHOS**

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Rhetorical strategies in sustainability disclosure: a multiple case study on rhetorical strategies in sustainability disclosures: ethos, logos, pathos

Abstract:

This thesis examines how companies portray themselves as sustainable and respond to stakeholders' sustainability concerns using rhetorical strategies. Drawing on rhetorical theory with a focus on Aristotle's rhetorical appeals to ethos (credibility), logos (reason), and pathos (emotion), we analyze five European companies' sustainability disclosures and investigate rhetorical strategies used in five sustainability dimensions. We find that companies prefer to use ethos in Environment, Business Model & Innovation and Leadership & Governance dimensions. In Social Capital and Human Capital dimensions, pathos and logos are the prevalent rhetorical strategies, respectively. This study complements discourse analyses of sustainability disclosure by providing a dimension-oriented perspective on how rhetoric shapes a company's sustainable image and gains legitimacy for it.

Keywords:

Sustainability disclosure, Rhetorical strategy, Sustainability dimension, Discourse

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Contents

1. Introduction	5
2. Theoretical development.....	7
2.1. Sustainability disclosure and legitimacy	7
2.1.1. Sustainability disclosure domain	7
2.1.2. Sustainability disclosure and legitimacy.....	8
2.2. Rhetoric of sustainability communication	9
2.3. Method theory	11
2.3.1. Rhetorical theory.....	11
3. Method.....	13
3.1. Research design	13
3.1.1. Multiple case study.....	13
3.1.2. Discourse analysis.....	14
3.2. Research setting.....	15
3.2.1. Selection of case companies.....	15
3.2.2. Selection of text.....	16
3.3. Data analysis	17
3.4. Research quality	17
4. Case findings	19
4.1. Glencore	19
4.1.1. Metal and Mining industry	19
4.1.2. Glencore	20
4.1.3. Empirical Analysis	20
4.2. Novartis	24
4.2.1. Biotech and Pharmaceuticals industry	24
4.2.2. Novartis.....	25
4.2.3. Empirical Analysis	25
4.3. STMicroelectronics	30
4.3.1. Semiconductor industry	30
4.3.2. STMicroelectronics	30
4.3.3. Empirical Analysis	31
4.4. Anheuser-Busch InBev	34
4.4.1. Alcoholic beverage industry	34

4.4.2.	Anheuser-Busch InBev	35
4.4.3.	Empirical Analysis	35
4.5.	Allianz.....	40
4.5.1.	Insurance industry	40
4.5.2.	Allianz	41
4.5.3.	Empirical Analysis	41
5.	Discussion	45
5.1.	Discussion on rhetorical strategies.....	45
5.1.1.	Logos.....	45
5.1.2.	Ethos	48
5.1.3.	Pathos	51
5.2.	Discussion on companies' rhetorical strategy preferences	53
5.2.1.	Rhetorical strategy preferences at five dimensions.....	53
5.2.2.	Rhetorical strategies preferences on CEO Letters.....	54
6.	Conclusion	55
7.	Reference	57
8.	Appendix.....	67

1. Introduction

“When it comes to sustainability accounting, Arthur Levitt’s statement is no less true: the “success of capital” depends critically on the quality of disclosure.” (Rodrigue et al. and Sustainability Accounting Standards Board, 2017)

For years sustainability disclosures have been a trend for companies. Actively participating in this practice, companies communicate the relevance of sustainability information for their business strategy and operations (Grewal et al., 2020). Sustainability disclosure is a necessary component of the communication between a company and its stakeholders (Michelon, 2011) and can be seen as a legitimizing device (Milne et al., 2006).

The definition of legitimacy in our paper is consistent with Suchman (1995) and many other researchers — legitimacy can be viewed as a resource that an organization receives from the external society (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Suchman, 1995; Deegan, 2019). In that sense, through sustainability communication, companies could change public attitudes and gain legitimacy for their behaviours (Adams & Larrinaga-González, 2007; Adams & McNicholas, 2007; Michelon, 2011). Further, a company can use sustainability disclosure to address potential legitimacy challenges (Woodward & Patten, 2016). As a result, sustainability disclosure study is of considerable interest and importance to academics.

In the domain of sustainability disclosure, there is much research conducted within management and organizational theoretical frameworks, applying method theory such as institutional theory, legitimacy theory, stakeholder theory, impression management and political economy theory (Gray et al. 1996; Lewis 2003; Matten & Moon, 2008; Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen 2009; O'Connor & Shumate 2010; Du et al. 2010, Higgins & Walker, 2012). In comparison to the above, the social accounting and management literature has paid less attention to analysis sustainability disclosures via the lens of rhetorical theory (Ihlen, 2008; Merkl Davies et al., 2017). Although a few pieces of literature have studied the relationship between corporate sustainability disclosure and rhetorical strategies, none analyzes the rhetoric according to different themes of sustainability concerns. Also, previous studies have found sustainability disclosure varies significantly across industries, and such variability is most likely driven by industry characteristics (Rodriguez et al., 2017). An analysis of rhetorical strategies for different dimensions of sustainability may vaguely reflect the rhetorical distinction among industries as sustainability concerns are industry-specific. Few qualitative studies explored the use of rhetorical strategies in multiple industries. Therefore, with the aim of adding new perspectives to the ongoing discussion, we seek to answer the following research questions:

How do companies portray themselves as sustainable and respond to stakeholders' sustainability concerns using different rhetorical strategies?

In each of the dimensions of sustainability, what rhetorical strategies do companies use in sustainability disclosure are most prevalent?

To answer the research questions and fill the gap within the current literature, we conduct a qualitative, horizontal analysis of five case companies' sustainability disclosures from websites. Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) Standards' Materiality Map categorizes a broad range of sustainability issues into one of five sustainability dimensions: Environment, Social Capital, Human Capital, Business Model & Innovation and Leadership & Governance. According to this framework, we selected five European companies: Glencore, Novartis, STMicroelectronics, Anheuser-Busch InBev and Allianz, which are considered representative in their respective industries. Each company places a distinct emphasis on sustainability dimensions depending on its materiality.

This study applies rhetorical theory as the theoretical lens for empirical analysis and adds to the body of knowledge about how companies utilize rhetorical strategies to gain legitimacy from stakeholders. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the domain of sustainability disclosure research, more explicitly to the stream that analyzes rhetorical strategies used in companies' sustainability discourse. First, to our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the rhetorical strategy in each of the five dimensions of sustainability discourse. The findings of this study have implications for academic research in the domain of sustainability disclosure. Second, we discuss the role of three rhetorical strategies in sustainability communication and the potential influence of each strategy on the company's recognition and legitimacy among stakeholders. The findings provide incentives for managers to consider how they want to portray their companies in public communications by combining the three rhetorical strategies. Third, given that our case companies are seen as leaders in their respective industries, their rhetorical strategy choices and preferences might be representative of that sector. Therefore, our results of the industry-specific empirical analysis can reflect the different rhetoric vision and persuasion styles by industries. Comparing the characteristics of these industries to the broader sectors sheds light on the drivers of notable disparities in the state of sustainability disclosure.

This study has six main sections. First, chapter 2 starts with the theoretical development, including a review of previous literature within the domain of sustainability disclosures. The chapter ends with a presentation of the method theory. This is followed by a complete description of the research methodology in Chapter 3. Then is a presentation of the empirical analysis in Chapter 4. A discussion is presented in chapter 5, elaborating on how empirical results contribute to the extension of previous literature. The last section, chapter 6, summarizes the study with conclusions, limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical development

The following section first introduces the existing research domain through a literature review. Section 2.1 presents previous literature on sustainability disclosure and its connection with legitimacy, followed by an overview of the research of the rhetoric of sustainability communication. Section 2.2 presents the method theory — rhetorical theory, the theoretical lens used to interpret data and develop our theoretical arguments.

2.1. Sustainability disclosure and legitimacy

2.1.1. Sustainability disclosure domain

Sustainability today is trendy. The growing interest among stakeholders in corporate sustainability performance has refocused attention on the significance of disclosure quality. The desire to better understand sustainability policies and their relevance to economic performance has resulted in many sustainability disclosure regimes and standards (Fisch, 2018). Sustainability disclosure, defined by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), is "the practice of measuring, reporting and being accountable to internal and external stakeholders for organizational performance towards the goal of sustainable development" (GRI, 2006).

Global corporations now face accelerated pressure on their sustainable developments. According to the Stakeholder Theory, companies disclose their sustainability performance as a sign of responsibility to their stakeholders (Caesaria & Basuki, 2017). Also, companies adopt sustainability reporting frameworks to better communicate with their stakeholders about their performance (Finch, 2005). A number of scholars have examined the linkage between corporate sustainability disclosure and financial performance. Corporate sustainability disclosure could motivate firms to be more socially responsible while simultaneously getting a higher return on investment (Wasara & Ganda, 2019). Correspondingly, larger companies and companies with better financial performance are more willing to report their sustainability performance (Vitezić, Vuko & Mörec, 2012). Companies are required to maximize shareholder profit and be responsible for achieving the broader interests of their stakeholders (Amran & Keat Ooi, 2014). Corporations are now under pressure from a variety of stakeholders to be transparent about their sustainability performance. Many scholars also highlight the importance of transparency in sustainability disclosure. Transparency aids stakeholders in comprehending the organization and could be seen as a method of information disclosure (Strathern, 2000). And the transparency of operational processes and results is critical for an organization to demonstrate accountability (Dillard & Vinnari, 2019). In their research, Amran and Keat Ooi (2014) find that sustainability disclosure is a tool to prove their accountability and

transparency. Nonetheless, many researchers point out that management can manipulate transparency (Schnackenberg, & Tomlinson, 2016).

To date, one of many possible motivations for disclosure is the need to legitimize the operation of an organization's activities (Deegan, 2002). Based on legitimacy theory, these responsibilities for corporations to the stakeholder generate because the "social contract" necessitates that all of the company's operations can be acknowledged as legitimate by outsiders (Caesaria & Basuki, 2017).

2.1.2. Sustainability disclosure and legitimacy

Legitimacy is a widely used political concept. Earlier legitimacy research usually focused on a national and state level, and then, research extends to organizations, communities and global society aspects (Deephhouse & Zhang, 2018). Weber introduced legitimacy into organization studies (Suchman, 1995; Ruef & Scott, 1998; Greenwood, Lawrence & Meyer, 2017). Over the last several decades, scholars have paid a lot of attention to organizational legitimacy (Moreno-Luzon et al., 2018), and legitimacy theory has appeared frequently in organizational research. Many scholars have defined legitimacy in various aspects (e.g. Parsons, 1956; Maurer, 1971; Knoke, 1985; Scott, 1995; Suchman, 1995; Bitektine, 2011). Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) introduced a 'negative definition' of legitimacy, arguing that criticism and attacks will arise when an organization's actions are perceived as illegitimate. The generally recognized definition in the academic sector is the idea put forward by Suchman (1995). He described legitimacy in a broad way: "legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions." The definition of legitimacy presented in this paper is consistent with Suchman (1995) and many previous scholars — legitimacy can be seen as a resource that an organization receives from the external society (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Suchman, 1995; Deegan, 2019). Organizations can gain legitimacy when they align behaviors with the shared beliefs of some social groups (Suchman, 1995). When there is a lack of congruency between organizations actions and social expectations, known as the legitimacy gap, legitimizing strategies are launched to manage the deviation (Deegan, 2019). Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) state that an organization can become legitimate through communication, and corporate sustainability disclosure is one of the communication strategies in achieving congruency and thus becoming legitimacy (Deegan, 2019). Corporate sustainability disclosure could alter public perceptions and expectations, thereby legitimizing corporate behavior (Adams & McNicholas, 2007; Michelon & Parbonetti, 2010). Additionally, corporate can also use sustainability disclosure to address potential legitimacy challenges (Vourvachis et al., 2016).

2.2. Rhetoric of sustainability communication

As mentioned above, a company gains legitimacy by operating within the norms and expectations of the society in which it operates (Suchman, 1995). From the stakeholder perspective, a company does not solely interact with shareholders but connects with multilateral stakeholders' relationships. Therefore, a company needs to engage in sustainability disclosure so as to gain legitimacy from, maintain legitimacy with, or repair legitimacy with relevant stakeholders (Deegan, 2002; O'Donovan, 2002). Corporate communication serves as a critical mechanism for making its sustainability activities visible and accessible to stakeholders (Maignan et al., 2002). It is worth mentioning that Branco and Rodrigues (2006) found that large companies are more visible and subject to public scrutiny as they face greater social and political pressure to behave more socially desirable. Communication problems arise in establishing which and how corporate should communicate sustainability messages to satisfy the information needs of stakeholders and thereby legitimate corporate behavior (Arvidsson, 2010). These difficulties are amplified when CSR and its degree of integration into a company's strategy are not perceived as desirable by all stakeholder groups. Therefore, a continued and active dialogue with different stakeholders as well as other stakeholder groups appears to be necessary for the continued success of a company (Boesso & Kumar, 2007). The theoretical lens of stakeholder theory illuminates several intriguing insights of corporate communication research, focusing on which groups of stakeholder's merit or demand managerial attention. Freeman (1984) defines a stakeholder as any individual or group who can influence or be influenced by the organization's actions, objectives, and policies. Mitchell et al. (1997) further developed the stakeholder theory, defining stakeholder salience as the degree to which companies prioritize competing stakeholder claims and identify stakeholder attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency. Those who exhibit all three of these characteristics are definitive stakeholders, and companies prefer to prioritize the demands of such stakeholders and have strong incentives to resolve conflicts with them as quickly and satisfactorily as possible (Brennan & Merkl-Davies, 2014). Our paper draws on the indications suggested by this theory that different stakeholders have different priorities, which therefore affect the content and quality of communication to their various stakeholders.

As stakeholders continue to expect greater transparency regarding a company's sustainability performance and initiative, the communication, specifically, rhetoric, is increasingly critical for both stakeholders and management. Rhetoric not only retrospectively responds to existing rhetorical situations but also proactively shapes or frames future rhetorical situations (Grant et al., 2004). Livesey (2002) has compared two methodologies known as rhetorical analysis and discourse analysis, which were inspired by Kenneth Burke and Michel Foucault, respectively. In his rhetorical study of the

ExxonMobil texts, Livesey (2002) employed Burkean-influenced methodologies to demonstrate how the corporate rhetor utilizes language to redefine key components of the climate debate and therefore create a distinct "reality" about this facet of the environmental catastrophe. Further, he used Foucauldian analysis to demonstrate the dynamic and political impact of language on broader social transformation processes (Livesey, 2002). Similarly, Wæraas et al. (2009) conducted rhetorical analysis on corporate climate response focusing on an adaptation of Aristotelian topics, which is a more general strategy for locating arguments (Herrick, 2001). Common topics include statements of definition, comparison, relationship, circumstance, or testimony (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Special topics are related to three main types of rhetoric: deliberative (political), epideictic (demonstrative or ceremonial), and judicial discourse (Wæraas et al, 2009). Additionally, Onkila's (2009) research discovered three rhetorical styles corporations use to justify their environmental legitimacy. First, he defined dominance rhetoric by examining how companies portray themselves as dominant by projecting an image of an environmentally responsible actor. Second, he explained subordination rhetoric by emphasizing the corporation's limited influence over other significant external influences that drive environmental behavior. Finally, he discussed the rhetoric of collaborative action and how the corporation forms alliances and works toward a common objective (Onkila 2009). Some studies stated that, ethos, logos, pathos, and any other legitimacy tools are not necessarily directed toward genuine concerns but rather toward the effectiveness of sustainability communication (Waeraas & Ihlen, 2009). However, from the view of public relations, Heath (2001) argued that organizations that depend on successful sustainability disclosure are not necessarily terrible companies. On the other hand, he asserted that successful enterprises must be able to communicate well through an interactive dialogical process (Heath, 2001). As Duska (2014) demonstrated, rhetoric can be used to express a company's mission of morals and ethics and communicate that the company has embraced a significant and highly appreciated society role.

A few past studies have explored the use of rhetoric in the domain of accounting (Arrington & Schweiker, 1992; Warnock, 1992; Hooper & Pratt, 1995; Brennan & Gray, 2000; Aerts, 2001; Young, 2003; Clatworthy & Jones, 2006). Arrington & Schweiker (1992) examined the impact of rhetoric on peer-reviewed accounting research concepts. Warnock (1992) investigated the use of rhetoric in accounting standards (Young, 2003; Masocha & Weetman 2007). Hooper and Pratt (1995) described rhetoric as an ideological manifestation that fostered discussion between shareholders and directors. Brennan and Gray (2000) regarded rhetoric as the art of persuasion and examined rhetoric and reasoning in profit forecasts and takeover papers. They observed that companies went to great lengths to persuade key stakeholders. In some studies, the metaphor was used as a rhetorical technique to analyze business communications (Amernic, 1996). Amongst that, sustainability discourse studies have prioritized the use of metaphor and the importance of applying case studies (Masocha & Weetman, 2007; Spence, 2007; Laine, 2010; Tregidga

et al., 2014). Spence (2007) argued that that sustainability disclosure may be both constitutive and hegemonic in the sense that it provides 'ideological consent' to benefit dominant groups within society. Banerjee (2008) defined corporate citizenship, corporate social responsibility, and sustainability discourses as ideological movements aimed at legitimizing and consolidating the dominance of large corporations. Tregidga et al. (2014) used Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory to comprehend the changing nature of identity construction and analyzed identity renegotiation and (re)articulation to resist challenges and retain hegemony. Researchers were concerned that, while organizations can communicate an adaptable and 'changed' identity to meet the demands of a swift social and political context, and thus maintain legitimacy and avoid more stringent regulatory reform, the nature of that 'change' is insufficient to benefit social and environmental in the absence of such regulatory reform (Tregidga et al., 2014).

In summary, previous academics have used discourse methodologies to examine how sustainability is conceived and how such conceptualizations impact corporate business and social activities. However, a few studies in the accounting domain have focused on a rhetorical perspective. Therefore, research that considers large companies from various industries with a focus on different dimensions of sustainability would be a significant advance in examining how companies employ rhetorical strategies in their communication to stakeholders and achieve legitimacy in general.

2.3. Method theory

2.3.1. Rhetorical theory

Green's (2004) perspective on *A Rhetorical Theory of Diffusion* establishes a novel analytical framework for studying organizational behavior. According to the rhetorical theory, actors shape the legitimacy of practices by making persuasive arguments that justify and rationalize practices; as the persuasiveness of discourse increases, the production of cognitive legitimacy—taken-for-granted-ness increases. Rhetorical theory sheds light on explaining and describing a linguistic conception of institutionalization. Based on this theory, we examine how a company employs discursive arguments in respect of sustainability to justify its actions.

While justifications can take a variety of forms, rhetorical researchers developed rhetorical strategies mainly based on Aristotelian elements of 'proofs' (Schwartz, 1966; Green, 2004). Aristotle (1991) proposed three main types of justifications: logos (logic and rationality), ethos (authority and credibility), and pathos (emotion). Logos appeals impact the rational mind by constructing a logical argument or reasoning through the text; they frequently evoke methodical calculation of means and ends to attain efficiency or effectiveness. Ethos appeals impact moral or ethical sensibilities by establishing the speaker as a 'trustworthy'

character; they may entail surrendering self-interests for the sake of honor, tradition, or justice and are frequently triggered by the character or trustworthiness. Pathos appeals impact emotions by arousing the audience's feelings toward their own concerns and interests. Emotional justifications can capture an actor's limited attention, stimulate the imagination, and sway behavior away from the status quo (King & Kugler, 2000). Additionally, pathos and logos appeals establish pragmatic legitimacy and plea to the audience's self-interests, while ethos appeals establish moral legitimacy and plea to normative approbation and moral propriety (Suchman, 1995).

In *A Rhetorical Theory of Diffusion* (Green, 2004), each appeal has a different effect on the speed and extent of diffusion. Pathos appeals are found to have transient persuasive power that may exhibit fad-like characteristics (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999). Compared to pathos, logos appeals have a more minor but more prolonged effect on diffusion, yet their social acceptance is lower than ethos appeals. Ethos appeals are probably the most potent, having the longest-lasting impact on taken-for-granted-ness (Aristotle, 1991; Herrick, 2001). Whereas pathos and logos justifications focus on individual concerns and interests, ethos justifications emphasize societal and community concerns and interests. As ethos appeals often demand more complicated cognitive processing than straightforward appeals to individual interests, it takes a longer time for them to show persuasive effects. Also, ethos appeals sometimes require the sacrifice of individual interests for social welfare. But, once an ethos-supported practice is adopted, it becomes difficult to abandon.

3. Method

The following chapter constructs the research methodology. The first section is a research design, which explains how we chose a multiple case study and indicates how the discourse analysis approach was adopted. Section 3.2 is the research setting, including the selection of case companies and the text collection, followed by section 3.3, a data analysis, and then a discussion of the research quality under section 3.4.

3.1. Research design

3.1.1. Multiple case study

To address the research questions, we perform a qualitative, multiple case study. As suggested by Chua (1986), social reality is emergent, subjectively created, and objectified through human interaction. Building on such assumption, qualitative researchers' methodological and theoretical task is to express the field as social and not simply describe or clarify it to the reader as if part of a given nature (Ahrens & Chapman, 2006). Studies relating to corporate sustainability found in literature in the field of accounting are mainly descriptive or qualitative in nature. Many researchers have focused specifically on environment dimensions of sustainability, while other dimensions such as social and community, employees, business model, ethics and governance are less addressed in the sustainability disclosure field. Qualitative approaches are preferable for nascent theory, which relates to less studied study domains (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). We address a fit between the research question and the theoretical contributions to assure internal consistency (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). Rather than describe the phenomenon of interest in this study, we seek to articulate corporate management's theories-in-practice and motivations as well as the ways in which they disclose sustainability through a qualitative approach (Ahrens & Chapman, 2006).

Case studies have widely been used in prior qualitative research on sustainability disclosure, however, there is little existing research applying a multiple case study within this domain. Multiple case studies provide a more comprehensive understanding of theoretical evolution as the research findings are more intensely grounded in diverse empirical evidence according to Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007). Multiple cases permit replication and extension among single cases and thus are a powerful means to create theory (Eisenhardt, 1991). Though the multiple case articles often emphasize theory, similarities between single- and multiple-setting researches are vastly more important than the differences (Eisenhardt, 1991).

3.1.2. Discourse analysis

According to Phillips and Hardy (2002), discourse is defined as an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, that brings an object into being (Parker, 1992). Thus, texts may be seen as a discursive “unit” and a representation of speech (Chalaby, 1996). Through discourse analysis, we were able to explore the relationship between discourse and reality as this method examines how discourse practices contribute to the construction of social reality by giving meanings to texts (Phillips & Hardy 2002). In our study, we use this scientific approach to improve our understanding of how a company portrays itself as sustainable and responds to stakeholders’ sustainability concerns to gain legitimacy. Most of the discourse analysis is conducted from one of the following six perspectives: poststructuralist discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, narrative, rhetoric, conversation analysis, and metaphor analysis (Balogun et al., 2014). Our discourse research has a focus on rhetoric analysis. Rhetoric analysis ‘is specifically concerned with argumentation, justification and persuasion’ (Aristotle, 1991) and has a strategic characteristic. More specifically, rhetoric emphasizes on persuasive texts and assumes a direct and dynamic link between rhetorical structures of speech or argument and the cognition and action of actors (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). This strategic form of discourse analysis is suitable for our study as companies endeavor to use sustainability speech to have effects on their audiences. According to Balogun et al. (2014), the objective of rhetorical analysis is not to analyze the truth claims of specific arguments, but to investigate the ways in which various rhetorical strategies are employed to justify actions or decisions. This is in line with our research question of *How do companies portray themselves as sustainable and respond to stakeholders’ sustainability concerns using different rhetorical strategies?*

We focused on Aristotle’s three main types of justifications: pathos (appealing to emotion), logos (appealing to logic) and ethos (appealing to authority). Detailed definitions of each type of rhetorical strategy are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Definition of rhetorical strategies

Rhetorical Appeals	Definition
Logos	Use logical and reasonable arguments to provide convincing truth, including appeals to facts, numbers examples and statistics
Ethos	Use authority or professionals to prove the credibility of the information
Pathos	Use emotional words to impact the audience
Sources: Definition adapted from Aristotle (1991); Waeraas & Ihlen (2009); Gauthier, & Kappen (2017)	

3.2. Research setting

3.2.1. Selection of case companies

The priority of certain sustainability issues varies across companies and industries (Eccles & Serafeim, 2013). Nowadays, many organizations that provide guidance on corporate sustainability reporting, such as Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB), are increasingly concentrating on their efforts on identifying industry-specific material concerns (Khan et al., 2015). According to SASB, the value creation models of companies in the same industry tend to be similar, while the models of companies in different industries are diverse. SASB has created a Sustainable Industry Classification System® (SICS®) to classify companies based on shared sustainability risks and opportunities and has found that certain industries face more sustainability risks and opportunities, while others face less. Above all, we considered the SASB Standards' Materiality Map a suitable tool in the selection process.

Since SASB changed the accessible means to the Materiality Map during our research, we can only provide an example of how six (of SASB's 77 industries) industries have different sustainability risks and opportunities in the Appendix. According to SASB Standards, a broad range of sustainability issues fall into five dimensions: Environment, Social Capital, Human Capital, Business Model & Innovation and Leadership & Governance. And those sustainability issues are further divided into 26 General Issue Categories, which is an industry-agnostic version of the Disclosure Topics, represented by 26 rows in the Materiality Map. First, we identified the industry most likely to have material issues at each of the five sustainability dimensions. In the Materiality Map, vertically, the more dark grids cluster in a certain dimension, the more likely it is for the industry to have material issues in that dimension. Then we sought the representative companies in chosen industries. We selected five large European companies with leadership in their respective industries, based on the argument that larger firms interact with a broader range of stakeholders, who would contribute to the complexity and multidimensionality of companies' sustainability actions (Hart & Sharma, 2004). Also, regarding sustainability disclosure, previous research suggests that larger companies interacting with the public more frequently and encouraging public criticism are in great need of the legitimacy benefits and would be more likely to participate in this activity to convey their sustainability policies to their constituents (Hart & Sharma, 2004). Table 2 shows the final list of five companies in our theoretical sample.

Table 2: Company List

	Glencore	Novartis	STMicroelectronics	Anheuser-Busch InBev	Allianz
Primary SICs Industry	Metals & Mining	Biotechnology & Pharmaceuticals	Semiconductors	Alcoholic Beverages	Insurance
Environment	★	○	○	○	
Social Capital	○	★		○	○
Human Capital	○	○	★		
Business Model & Innovation			○	★	○
Leadership & Governance	○		○		★

Note: ‘★’ = most material, ‘○’ = included in firms’ analysis

3.2.2. Selection of text

In order to understand how sustainability is portrayed by Glencore, Novartis, STMicroelectronics, Anheuser-Busch InBev and Allianz, we selected sustainability disclosures mainly from the companies’ websites. We also compiled texts from CEO’s and Chairman’s reviews in annual sustainability reports. We avoided standalone sustainability reports for the reason that organizations like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) have defined what should be included in the report (Stevenson & Steckler, 2015). This decision conforms to Maignan and Ralston (2002)’s argument that the website, unlike the other formal corporate documents that are deeply regulated and institutionalized, can be an effective material for assessing the company’s self-representation. Earlier research established that company websites serve as a platform for communicating several facets of their sustainability (Kim et al., 2010). Also, individuals seeking information about a company are most likely to begin by visiting the company’s website (Sullivan, 1999). Those texts from the sustainability section of websites and the CEO’s review provide us with a great chance to evaluate rhetorical strategies utilized to address sustainability concerns in five sustainability dimensions.

The research texts were collected during October 2021. Glencore’s total text consists of 12,246 words, Novartis 10,938 words, STMicroelectronics 7,037 words, Anheuser-Busch Inbev 4,988 words and Allianz 6,427 words. Two independent researchers conducted a reading of websites and extracted relevant data into working documents. Then researchers compared the documents with each other, re-read and revised the extracts.

3.3. Data analysis

The analysis does not automatically result in synthesis (Mintzberg, 1989) and the theory development is a synthesis process (Langley, 1999). In theorizing from data, we go through (1) induction (data-driven generalization), (2) deduction (theory-driven hypothesis testing), and (3) inspiration (driven by creativity and insight), in which “inspiration” draws indiscriminately on formal data, experience, a priori theory, and common sense (Weick, 1989). Given the nature of empirical data and our research design being discourse analysis, we apply rhetorical theory as our main method theory.

To begin, we identified the sustainability themes suggested by the texts of five companies. We agreed that a paragraph was a more appropriate coding unit than words or sentences, given that the majority of paragraphs were dedicated to a single theme (Stevenson & Steckler, 2015). The themes and nuances were categorized according to their primary focus on one of the five sustainability dimensions: Environment, Social Capital, Human Capital, Business Model & Innovation and Leadership & Governance. Then we explored the rhetorical strategies used by companies by coding the data according to the three appeals in classical rhetoric: pathos, logos, and ethos. We used an iterative strategy in which we processed from the empirical data to codes and back to the data and kept track of coding by making comments on working documents and noting on summary sheets. We also identified the discursive intent once we coded the texts. When many themes and rhetorical strategies were present, a forced choice method was employed for our classifications, as such the most prominent theme and rhetorical strategy were identified. We reckon that whichever analysis method is chosen, there will always be a step that depends on our insight and imagination (Weick, 1989).

3.4. Research quality

Traditionally, the validity and dependability of the data have been used to determine the quality of the data. Dubois and Gadde (2014), on the other hand, believe that these concepts were intended to judge the quality of quantitative data rather than qualitative data, and that this is the case. Qualitative investigations are now recommended as a means of determining the quality of research based on its authenticity and believability (Lukka & Modell, 2010). Readers need to know that "research results are legitimate and that explanations are feasible" in order to trust qualitative investigations. In order to be seen as more trustworthy, it is typical practice for researchers to speak for others (Lukka & Modell, 2010). This paper, therefore, aims to describe the empirical results in a thorough and informative manner. As a result of several direct quotes from the organization's publications, it is possible for readers to deduce some of the empirical inferences that have been drawn. When it comes to plausibility, it is decided to what extent a reader can grasp and interpret the results

offered in a study. By "making sense," Lukka and Modell (2010) mean the reader may trust that what they are reading is plausible. Since the method theory has been used throughout this study, we have provided an in-depth description of the data collection and interpretation process.

Our interpretative paradigm may provide in-depth explanations of the texts collected rather than 'law-like generalizations' because of its inclination to concentrate on the research question about 'how.' We are well aware that the study of rhetorical strategies and discourse analysis as a whole necessitates a certain amount of subjectivity on the part of the researchers. Therefore, we have devised a systematic research method to counteract the biases.

4. Case findings

Chapter 4 is divided into five sections according to five companies with different focuses on sustainability dimensions. Each section consists of an outline of the industry, a description of the company and a rhetorical analysis of its sustainability disclosure.

4.1. Glencore

4.1.1. Metal and Mining industry

The metal and mining industry could be traced back to thousands of years ago, and during most of our history, mining has had priority over most other activities. Not to mention everything we depend on is either made from metals and minerals or relies on metals and minerals for its production and distribution.

In 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic hit every aspect of business and economics, and the metal and mining industry has been no exception. With prices falling to the lowest since the commodity crisis in 2015 only to see a recovery trend for the industry (White & Case, 2021), the global metal and mining market would be expected to grow due to the companies recovering from the pandemic. Although the pandemic crisis continues, the research from White & Case highlights that only 7.5 per cent of respondents thought that Covid-19 demand destruction would be the biggest industry threat in the coming year. However, environment, social and governance (ESG) issues got 45.4 per cent of the vote, which means that ESG issues are the critical risk for the sector in 2021. Also, from EY's survey, one of the top three risks the industry faces is ESG issues.

The metal and mining sector is linked to extensive environmental and social impacts, including tailing management, gas emissions, water use, labor management and community relations. Mine tailings consist of toxic fine particles that have a negative impact on the environment by causing erosion and contaminating water supplies (Carvalho, 2017), and many examples have proved that the consequences of tailings dam failures are dreadful. The Brumadinho dam disaster killed more than 250 people, and many agricultural areas were totally destroyed, severely affecting the local economy, environment and society. (Nogueira, 2019; Owen, J. et al., 2020). Then, how to ideally respond to climate change is also an unavoidable concern in the mining and metal sector. Annual CO₂ equivalent (CO₂e) emissions from the mining sector range between 1.9 and 5.1 gigatons (McKinsey, 2020) and the metal industry also generates significant carbon emissions because of its energy intensity. From the WWF report, the metal and mining industry is also facing high levels of water risk, which may cause operational, regulatory and reputational risks. Water risks could lead to a sizeable financial impact because of their extremely high cost. However, the industry should account for not only water stress but

also operational water risk exposure, including regulatory and reputation dimensions. (WWF, 2019)

In addition to the above long-existing concerns from outside and inside stakeholders, child labour is an incurable issue in the metal and mining industry. Although with the strengthening of supervision and the company's increased attention to the issue of child labour, child labour still exists in the global supply chains. Casualties occur in this industry almost every year. Though every company in this industry wants to achieve zero harm in 2020, 44 people died while at work (ICMM, 2021). Metals pollution and dangerous machine hazards can harm the health of employees and threaten community relationships.

The International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), aiming to alleviate or even eliminate these issues, have established common goals and principles to manage the quality and credibility of annual disclosure. Nevertheless, companies in the metal and mining industry still have a long way to go before society highly recognizes them in terms of sustainability.

4.1.2. Glencore

Glencore is one of the largest globally diversified natural resource companies in the world. It was founded in 1974 (Glencore, 2020) and has grown to the world's top 300 by market cap in 2021. Glencore has revenue of USD 142.338 billion, and its operations cover about 150 mining, metallurgical and oil production assets. It now operates in more than 35 countries and has 135,000 employees and contractors. (Glencore Annual Report, 2020)

Glencore released its first sustainability report in 2010 and joined the International Council on Mining and Metals in 2013. Since then, Glencore has worked with its annual disclosure of sustainability. The company has been active in sustainability in the following years. It also initiated a Human rights policy in 2014 and joined the Plenary of the Voluntary Principles in 2015, and published its first Human and Water reports in 2019. However, the ESG rating of Glencore from S&P Global and Moody's are not high, BBB+ and Baa1, respectively. Also, Glencore has faced some allegations regarding the sustainability aspect. Some NGO reports stated that the safety and health of miners are threatened in Glencore's operation (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2019). Besides, child labor allegations was also a piece of bad news for Glencore in 2019. To respond to these allegations, Glencore rolled out the SafeWork programme to protect everyone's health and safety and follow the principles made by the UN and other authoritative international organizations, with the expectation of achieving a high level of sustainability.

4.1.3. Empirical Analysis

Environment Dimension

For Glencore, we identified several recurring stakeholder concerns regarding the environmental dimension of sustainability. Some stakeholders expressed concerns that Glencore is one of the biggest coal producers linked to millions of tons of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere. Besides, they questioned Glencore's ambition to reduce emissions in alignment with the Paris climate agreement goals as the company's plan has not included shutting down its vast coal mines. In this context, Glencore used logos to demonstrate its effort on environmental sustainability. In explaining their achievements on targets of reducing emission, Glencore said:

In 2017, we set a target of reducing our Scope 1 and 2 emissions intensity by 5% by 2020 against a 2016 baseline. I am pleased to announce that we have surpassed this target and reduced our emissions intensity by 13.2%. We achieved this reduction through a range of measures including abatement and process changes at our operations. (Glencore 2020)

The paragraph emphasizes data and evidence that are characterized by logos. The appearance of rationality can be useful to enhance a demonstration. However, logos in rhetoric account for the lowest proportion of all rhetorical strategies in Glencore's sustainability discourse. The result is in line with our expectations for Glencore's rhetorical strategy choice. The company might have little intention to disclose quantitative data on the website as most website readers are not environmental experts but rather prefer to use ethos to build authority.

Another long-concerned issue is related to water and waste management in this industry. Water plays an essential role in mining, extractive and oil production processes. Even worse, Glencore's oil exploration and production business is located in some of the most water-stressed regions. If stakeholders regard the business as an excessive water consumer or detrimentally affecting water quality, there can be conflict or discontent. Although governments and local authorities are responsible for regulating water, the company is under pressure considering it necessary to go beyond regulatory compliance, particularly where government capacity is limited. In some instances, however, Glencore has fallen below the level of water management performance that stakeholders expect. For example, in September 2018, a wastewater basin holding a crude oil by-product collapsed at Glencore UK's operations in Badila, southern Chad. At least 50 local people were harmed after bathing in or using the contaminated river water in the weeks after the leak. The company did not publish a positive response to the incident in its website statement, but they mentioned related management in the environment sector, invoking ethos to address validity judgments:

Our environmental management approach aligns with international and industry-specific environmental standards and guidance, such as ICMM Performance Expectations and supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. (Glencore, 2021)

We conduct our work with respect for legally-designated areas, such as International Union for Conservation of Nature category I-IV protected areas. We do not mine or explore in World Heritage Sites. (Glencore 2021)

In these quotes, Glencore's adherence to the rigorous standards and guidance crafted by the authoritative organization "ICMM" is cited to enhance the argument that they work to minimize the bad impact on the environment. Ethos can be a convincing logic to adopt, especially in circumstances when a company is perceived as lacking credibility among its stakeholders. We expected that Glencore would want to ease stakeholders' concerns by stressing that the company closely follows strict procedures created by credible entities responsible for maintaining the safety of our food supply. The dominance of the application of ethos suggests the discourse is aimed at persuading a reader that Glencore is credible and trustworthy in their commitment and that their approach is sound.

Social Capital Dimension

In the social capital dimension sector, ethos is the most used strategy over the other. With respect to the social capital issues, we found that Glencore was accused of "aiding and abetting" the mines exploiting child labour to source cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Even though Glencore managed to distance themselves from this case, stating that they do not purchase, process or trade any artisanally mined copper or cobalt, their actual actions were still suspected by stakeholders. The company were called into question whether they operated responsibly in the central African nation. From this context, Glencore applied pathos strategy associated with ethos strategy in the response:

We offer our condolences and sympathy to the families and the children injured or killed as a result of artisanal mining activities. (Glencore, 2021)

Kamoto Copper Company, our operation in the DRC, [...] working with our security providers to ensure they continue to uphold respect for human rights in a manner consistent with the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. (Glencore 2021)

A sincere and modest attitude may, in part, improve the impression of stakeholders on the company. Citing a recognized and authoritative standard may help to indicate the company's engagement to address security-related human rights abuses and violations. Nevertheless, without a tight coupling of logos with those of pathos (emotion) and ethos (credibility), the company's statement was not persuasive enough to make stakeholders believe that their actions in the DRC were legitimate.

Human Capital Dimension

Regarding the human capital dimension of sustainability, issues related to employee safety and labour relations are addressed. A recent example is that a copper and cobalt mine owned by Glencore collapsed in southeastern Congo, killing at least 41 artisanal miners in 2019. Safety concerns about artisanal mining on the edge of commercial mine sites are

inherent. The outdated and unregulated practices adopted by miners can often endanger safety: mine disasters in Congo alone can take dozens of lives a year. Consequently, stakeholders asked Glencore for preventative action and warned that it could impact Glencore's social license to operate. Glencore responded in an announcement that its subsidiary, Kamoto Copper Company (KCC), has observed the causes and is "doing what it can" to inform the communities of the dangers associated with illegal trespassing on mining sites:

KCC urges all illegal miners to cease from putting their lives at risk by trespassing on a major industrial site. [...] The safety and security of its employees, contractors and host communities is of paramount importance to KCC. KCC will take all possible measures to ensure their safety and will continue to engage with all relevant stakeholders. (Glencore 2019)

Concerning this background, stakeholder concerns about the potential safety hazards in the mining industry would be expected to generate strong emotional responses. Glencore's response used more pathos than the other two rhetorical strategies, mainly to address propriety judgments. The words "paramount importance" somewhat deliver a sincere attitude and might affect the audience's emotions. In the end, it is not unusual to invoke pathos to address such social concerns, as in the following extract from the websites of Glencore:

In line with our Values, our first priority in the workplace is to protect the health and wellbeing of all of our people. We are committed to operating safely and believe all fatalities, occupational diseases and injuries at work are preventable. [...] SafeWork aims to provide everyone within our business with the knowledge and tools to perform every task safely; the key message is that every individual has the authority to stop unsafe work. (Glencore 2021)

In this example, the company attempts to establish a connection with stakeholders' emotions in a manner directed toward individual concerns. Specifically, this message is conveyed to those who may be concerned about employees' safety and health. Strategies that address individuals' emotions are one mechanism that may promote propriety judgments but would not be expected to promote validity judgments (Bitektine and Haack, 2015). The company emphasizes a shared concern about the health and wellbeing of every employee. The use of "our people" constructs an image of the Glencore community where people are valued. In summary, Glencore shares the individual concerns of its stakeholders.

Leadership & Governance

In regarding the Leadership & Governance dimension of sustainability, we found ethos took a dominant position. In the following paragraph, they use the words "experts", "relevant authorities", and "full-time, skilled" to describe their programme and management team are objectively trustworthy.

We work with experts to ensure our programme aligns with international best practice, taking guidance from relevant authorities. [...] Full-time, skilled Compliance Officers in our Corporate Compliance team set the programme and provide us with dedicated compliance support. Our Regional Compliance Officers implement the programme in specific geographical jurisdictions. They also provide guidance to the business and to their Compliance Coordinators at our offices and industrial assets globally. Our Compliance Coordinators support employees needing advice on ethical and lawful behaviour, or policy implementation. (Glencore, 2021)

4.2. Novartis

4.2.1. Biotech and Pharmaceuticals industry

The global biotech and pharmaceuticals industry is considered to have a strong growth trend in the coming year. Though the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a considerable impact on many industries, companies in the biotech and pharmaceuticals industry have achieved higher market expectations. Companies that concentrate on COVID-19 have the best results with an average gain of 21% following the initial public offering, in May 2020, the total market capitalization of the 61 European biotechs on the Euronext markets increased by €4.5 billion, reaching a record high of nearly €29 billion (PATEGOU, 2020).

The global biotech and pharmaceuticals industry continues to develop and companies in the sector are well-positioned to benefit in the long run. Consumers are substantially more inclined to buy from and trust a company that has a high ESG score (Pharma Reputation Report, 2021), so companies have focused more attention on strengthening their sustainability initiatives in order to enhance their social impact and bolster their chance of long-term development (PharmExec., 2021). From Biopharma Investor ESG Communications Guidance, biopharma companies should priorities the following sustainability topics: “access to healthcare and medicine pricing; business ethics, integrity, and compliance; climate change; clinical trial practices; ESG governance; environmental impacts; human capital management; innovation; pharmaceuticals in the environment and antimicrobial resistance; product quality and patient safety; risk and crisis management; and supply chain management.” (ESG Trends and Practices in the Biopharma Industry, 2021; Schoichet, 2021)

For companies in the biotech and pharmaceuticals industry, they not only have to focus their attention on reducing harmful emissions but also have to deal with pharmaceutical effluents, which can result in additional costs associated with achieving environmentally friendly manufacturing processes (Milmo, 2017; Lalor, Fitzpatrick, Sage and Byrne, 2019). Pricing of medicines is a general but most pressing issue, especially with the increased wealth gap and inequality (Kumar and Elliott, 2021; Lalor, Fitzpatrick, Sage and Byrne, 2019). In 2017, Turing Pharmaceuticals made global headlines for its apparent exploitative

behavior that increased the price of pyrimethamine by 5000% (Lalor, Fitzpatrick, Sage and Byrne, 2019). Furthermore, one of the most frequent controversies is corruption. From V. E's industry report, the industry has a low score in preventing corruption, which means the industry has shown a limited ability to avoid corruption and the risks that come with it (V.E,2019). The COVID pandemic has highlighted the issue of racial disparity (Sile, 2021), and the biotech and pharmaceuticals industry have launched efforts to address racial inequity. Several companies have promised to increase patient diversity (Keown, 2021).

From ReaTrak's report, companies in this sector seem to have performed well in their ESG initiatives. They received a high reputation score of 72.8 and a strong overall ESG score of 71 (Pharma Reputation Report, 2021).

According to SASB Materiality Map, the major disputes the biotech and pharmaceuticals industry receives mainly arise at social capital dimension, we then choose Novartis for further analysis.

4.2.2. Novartis

Novartis is a Switzerland-based multinational pharmaceutical corporation that develops, manufactures and markets healthcare products. As one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, it was founded in 1996 and now has 25 years of history. Novartis operates through three segments: Innovative Medicines, Sandoz and Corporate and has around 108,000 employees of more than 140 nationalities in total. In the fiscal year 2020, Novartis had revenues of US\$49.89 billion, representing a 2.51 percent raise over the previous fiscal year.

Novartis achieves good ESG rankings across various ESG rating provides and Novartis' percentile score of 91 in the Dow Jones Sustainability World Index reflects its continued dominance. According to Novartis' website, Novartis is working to reduce emissions and has launched an energy and climate program to achieve its environmental ambition (Novartis, 2021). Novartis also gets much positive feedback from its employees, according to Glassdoor's Best Places to Work (2020), Novartis was named the 98th best company to work. Further, Novartis has set up Novartis Access Principles, implementing innovative approaches to pricing and gaining access.

4.2.3. Empirical Analysis

Social Capital dimension

In describing sustainable behavior at the social capital level, Novartis uses the rhetorical strategy of logos to demonstrate the sustainability concept integrated into the company's strategy by citing a wide range of practical actions and contributions, emphasizing that its actions are accountable and transparent. Through demonstrating its proactive attitude,

Novartis shows that the actions it implements at a social level and the concepts integrated into its corporate strategy can generate positive long-term benefits for its stakeholders, which is in line with the stakeholders' unified belief in the company's socially sustainable actions, thus gaining legitimacy (Suchman, 1995).

Novartis consistently employs the rhetorical tactic of logos in its relevant behavioral statements to indicate that the goal of improving health systems has been incorporated into the company's everyday strategic actions and that it can effectively plan for long-term sustainability. Novartis notes in its sustainability disclosures that the company has been delivering high-quality treatment to patients using ways that remove barriers to healthcare in low and middle-income nations.

Novartis demonstrates its detailed act of forming a Global Health Alliance to improve patient health in the following paragraph. Novartis places improved patient disease education and health system strengthening programs into its daily activities, demonstrating its ability and willingness to impact society positively. This action of Novartis is in line with the expectations of Novartis' stakeholder group - patients - and with the general expectation of society that healthcare companies should strive to provide high quality and long-term care to patients in different regions.

The Novartis Global Health Alliance helps support Novartis country organizations with targeted health system strengthening programs [...] We implement a number of programs to raise awareness on diseases, promote health-seeking behavior and educate on disease management. (Novartis, 2021)

The following quote refers to Novartis' NGS programme, which was in place in 2011 and has been ongoing for many years. Novartis once again demonstrate that it has always had long-term medical assistance in mind for patients, again echoing the needs of patients as one of the stakeholder groups.

We also invest in the training and support of healthcare workers to expand their knowledge and improve their ability to help patients. And we facilitate programs and collaborations that can aid local research and clinical trial capabilities. For example, in partnership with the University of Basel we developed a novel fellowship training program called Next Generation Scientist (NGS). Launched in 2011, NGS invites talented young scientists and clinicians from developing countries to our Basel, Switzerland, and campus for a three-month research internship. In 2020, we brought our core scientific exchange programs (including NGS) together under a common framework called Global Health Scholars. (Novartis, 2021)

In Novartis' disclosure of drug affordability, Novartis demonstrates that it uses a value-based model and considers the economic level and affordability of different regions. Novartis gives examples of practical actions it has taken to reduce the burden on patients in different regions and has also achieved an increase in the number of patients. This data provides tangible evidence of Novartis' ability to align its commercial interests with

sustainable practices. By articulating the company's pharmaceutical considerations and other tangible results that enable Novartis' stakeholders, such as the investor community and the company's employees, could maintain confidence in Novartis, which is in line with investors' expectations of both sound financial returns and a responsible corporate image.

To help improve the affordability of our medicines, we strive to take into account income levels, local affordability barriers and economic realities [...] In developing countries, for instance, we have introduced local brands of many innovative therapies in an effort to address affordability issues, expand access, and help reduce the time lag between the availability of our innovative products in higher-income and lower-income countries [...] compared to traditional commercial models, this approach enables us to reach from three to five times more patients in low- to middle-income countries. (Novartis, 2021)

Novartis also uses the rhetorical strategy of pathos to communicate emotionally with its stakeholders, express its determination to help those in need around the world, and emphasize its strong sense of social responsibility to its stakeholders by using words that convey emotion.

Through our core business [...] we have helped prevent and treat diseases, ease suffering and improve quality of life for people worldwide[...]We are committed to bringing more of our medicines to more people, no matter where they are. (Novartis, 2021)

Human Capital dimension

Novartis frequently uses two types of rhetorical strategies, logos and ethos, in its Human Capital dimension disclosures. The company uses ethos to present its labor management system. Novartis constantly refers to its support and use of internationally authoritative labor principles, thus linking its actions to widely recognized principles of behavior and demonstrating that its behaviors are socially acceptable (Castelló and Lozano, 2011; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 1991).

In this part of disclosures, Novartis refers to the International Labour Organization, the UN Global Compact, the UN Guiding Principles, the International Bill of Human Rights and the International Labor Organization's Declaration and expresses itself as a strong supporter and follower of the protection of human rights by international organizations. Novartis has consistently demonstrated in its disclosures that all of its actions in the management of its workforce are always follow global principles, potentially conveying the message that the company's actions are in line with the general perceptions of society. The aim is to convince stakeholders that the company's beliefs about human capital are consistent with its own.

We are committed to upholding the core labor standards set out by the International Labor Organization[...]Novartis has been a signatory of the UN Global Compact[...]We are committed to

implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and incorporating all internationally recognized human rights – at a minimum those expressed in the International Bill of Human Rights and the principles concerning fundamental rights set out in the International Labor Organization’s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. (Novartis, 2021)

In addition to conducting employee human rights management activities following international principles, Novartis also proactively incorporates the views of multiple stakeholder groups into the development and monitoring of benchmarks for its work, such as the disclosure in the paragraph below. Novartis incorporates the recommendations of multiple stakeholder groups, including patients, community and health authorities, and supply chain partners, into developing and implementing human rights protections. The aim is to achieve its own goals in human rights management, and try to align its action in the human capital dimension as closely as possible with the beliefs of the majority of the stakeholder groups, thereby gaining stakeholder acceptance and thus legitimacy.

As we expand our efforts to protect human rights, we plan to conduct broader and more frequent consultations with patient groups, local communities, health authorities and supply chain partners throughout our operations. This will help us benchmark our efforts, measure our progress, and fulfill our ambition to become a leader in the healthcare sector for respecting and protecting the rights of people affected by our or our suppliers’ operations. (Novartis, 2021)

Novartis also makes extensive use of the rhetorical device of logos in its disclosures. When using logos, Novartis' strategy can be divided into two types: the first is citing numerous examples and elaborating on staff training systems and human rights monitoring systems. Novartis also requires third-party partners to complete the training course more assertively, for example:

Our global e-training curriculum provides relevant information to enable associates to make the right choices in the course of their work and to perform with integrity [...] all newly hired associates and contractors worldwide complete a mandatory onboarding e-Training course [...]. (Novartis, 2021)

The second is to cite a large amount of data to demonstrate the diversity and inclusiveness of the company in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.

Women currently make up 50% of our overall workforce, with 45% women in management and 25% women on our Board of Directors [...] We currently have 149 nationalities represented on our workforce [...] We have 20 LGBTQI Employee Resource Groups in 14 countries. (Novartis, 2021)

Through using logos, Novartis presents stakeholders with observable and quantifiable results in the human capital dimension. And combined with an illustration of examples carried out in workforce management, convince stakeholders that the company's actions in human capital can and has achieved results, thus trying to make stakeholders reduce or

even eliminate any possible concerns about the strategic management of the company's labor aspect.

Environment dimension

Novartis uses the rhetorical strategies of logos and ethos in its Environmental dimension disclosure, and the number of times the two rhetorical strategies are used is equal. The industry is confronted with the social concern that the production of pharmaceuticals as economic activity will inevitably hurt the environment, especially water resources.

In its environmental sustainability disclosures, Novartis also indirectly responds to social concerns about pharmaceutical contamination. When disclosing sustainable information with concerns about pharmaceutical pollution, Novartis mainly uses logos. The company combines daily economic activities with the implementation of sustainable practices and describes the introduction of new technologies for the purification of waste water and the establishment of water recycling programs at the production stage of its products.

[...] we have built a new wastewater treatment plant, equipped with the latest carbon-filter technology to better purify water from active pharmaceutical ingredients [...] Novartis Technical Operations (NTO) is installing new technologies at our production sites to use water efficiently and safely. For example, in Singapore, recycling solutions have been implemented to enable production in water-stressed areas. (Novartis, 2021)

In addition, Novartis showed itself to be a good achiever in water management, achieving a high rating of A in the CDP Water List.

Throughout the environmental disclosure, Novartis uses ethos, which is reflected in combining its actions with global initiatives. Its progress in the environment is also included in the reports of various international organizations. This disclosure intends to show that Novartis's activities are recognized by international authorities and that its future actions align with the Global Goals. The Global Goals are a concept that has gained widespread acceptance in society. Novartis tries to gain legitimacy by linking its current and future actions to the Global Environmental Goals, aligning the stakeholders' goals with the goals of Novartis' actions in the environment.

[...] we have joined Business Ambition for 1.5°C and have also become part of Race to Zero, the UN-backed campaign led by the High-Level Champions for Climate Action [...] We are also a member of RE100 [...] Our progress in this area is included in the CDP Water Security Report, AMR Industry Alliance report and the Access to Medicine Foundation AMR Benchmark report. (Novartis, 2021)

4.3. STMicroelectronics

4.3.1. Semiconductor industry

The development of semiconductor technology has benefited millions of people all over the world. With the rapid development of interconnection, automatic driving, virtual reality and artificial intelligence technology, semiconductors are increasingly playing a part in people's lives, even while we are unaware of it. The semiconductor is fundamentally a converter between the physical and digital worlds. Without semiconductors, many of the products and applications we are accustomed to will be castles in the air. For instance, smartphones are equipped with digital imaging capabilities. The semiconductor sensor of the camera converts the physical images captured by the lens to digital data, which is then converted into image files by other software, allowing users to share them on social media, send them to relatives and friends via SMS, e-mail and other methods, or keep them permanently.

According to SASB, the main sustainability disclosure topics for the semiconductor industry are from human capital, environment, business model & innovation and leadership & governance dimensions. Our paper focuses on the human capital dimension for STMicroelectronics as employees' health and safety have long been a significant concern for the industry. Workers at fabrication plants, particularly maintenance personnel, are exposed to substances known to be dangerous to human health (SASB, 2018). Another sustainability topic related to human capital is recruiting and managing a global and skilled workforce. Employees are critical to the semiconductors industry's value creation, whereas qualified technical employees are in pressing demand (SASB, 2018). Likewise, semiconductor companies are more prone to hiring foreign nationals to address local labour shortages, which could cause societal ramifications in employees' host and home countries. Regarding the environmental concerns, water and hazardous waste management are principally highlighted. More topics are discussed in the following analysis part.

4.3.2. STMicroelectronics

It's nothing new to STMicroelectronics to develop innovative technologies for a sustainable world in a sustainable way (STMicroelectronics, 2021). Indeed, the company has been doing so since founded in 1987. Jean-Louis Champseix, Group VP and Head of Corporate Sustainability at STMicroelectronics said sustainability is at the top of ST's value. ST currently has over 8000 technical R&D and product designers and owns over 18000 patents. Additionally, it files over 500 new patent applications each year and invests 15% of its revenues in research and development efforts. Simultaneously, to foster innovation, ST has built collaboration centres with numerous start-ups and formed and maintained R&D agreements with over 140 universities worldwide.

ST is included in a number of leading sustainability indices, including the Dow Jones World Sustainability Index, the FTSE4Good Index, Ethibel, Euronext Vigeo, ISS ESG Prime, and the Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index. ST was recognized for business sustainability leadership in 2020 by worldwide environmental non-profit CDP, earning a spot on the renowned 'A List' for addressing climate change. In addition, ST is a member of the Responsible Business Alliance (RBA) and a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact (STMicroelectronics, 2021).

ST's technologies are enablers of intelligent mobility, advanced power & energy management across all types of systems. They are at the heart of next-generation devices and communication infrastructure (STMicroelectronics, 2021). "We are the only enterprise in the semiconductor industry that openly discusses how to enable responsible procurement, ecological product design, advanced manufacturing process and use in the whole product life cycle, as well as how to collaborate with customers to solve the end-of-life cycle problem," Champseix (2021) claims that new items certified as sustainable development technology will contribute for at least 20% to 50% of all ST products in the future. Also, by 2025, ST's revenue from responsible products will have doubled from 2016 levels and will account for one-third of overall sales in 2027 (STMicroelectronics, 2021).

4.3.3. Empirical Analysis

Human Capital Dimension

ST use appeals to logic (logos), authority (ethos), or emotion (pathos) in effort to convince audiences of the validity and legitimacy of their claims in human capital dimension. The frequencies of these three rhetorical tactics are comparable.

ST declare that their employees are their "biggest asset", in which a metaphor is used. As Walters (2004) revealed, metaphors function as a means of perception engineering. In this example, the metaphor gives the reader a responsible impression that ST have always put labour at the company's first. The use of pathos aids in expressing ST's attitudes toward this dimension of sustainability and clarifying a position — "Labor and human rights are at the core of our people values." It's interesting to notice that ST use second-person narrative to direct talk to the reader by treating the reader as one of their own employees, and the information becomes more immersive and emotional.

Our aim is that at ST you can be the true version of yourself, meaning that we foster an inclusive culture where you can reveal your true identity. Indeed, your difference is our strength. (ST, 2021)

ST mainly use ethos appeals to state their focused efforts in this part. They strengthen their image of being responsible to employees by giving examples to support the human rights

standards and joining relevant organizations such as the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) and Responsible Business Alliance (RBA).

We support and promote the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all other major international human rights standards, and we were one of the first companies to sign the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) in 2000. (ST, 2021)

We have been a member of the Responsible Business Alliance (RBA), since 2005 and we are committed to implementing the RBA code of conduct. (ST, 2021)

ST also devote a large number of paragraphs on their webpages to experts and compliance, claiming to have a high degree of competence and understanding in relevant areas.

Our Health and Safety strategy is supported by: [...] Health and safety visits by external experts. [...] ST's adopts ISO 140011 and OHSAS 180012 standards throughout its manufacturing activities and supply chain in order to guarantee compliance with applicable regulations on chemicals use and product chemical content. (ST, 2021)

ST make use of logo appeals. To illustrate this, they utilize ratios to represent employee happiness with the organization, and they provide a precise amount of training hours per hour of work performed. Also included in this area are a variety of numbers, case studies, and facts that serve to show the company's human-related sustainability operations.

81% of employees recommend ST as a great place to work (ST, 2021)

44 average training hours/employee in 2020 (ST, 2021)

Environment Dimension

The majority of the discourse in the environmental dimension is objective and straightforward, with the aim of demonstrating that ST has satisfied the prerequisites for long-term sustainability. Logos, "both in terms of accumulating 'scientific facts' and in posing solutions to environmental problems" (Everett & Neu, 2000), plays a crucial role in the discourse of the environment dimension. In addition, ethos is used to emphasize the scientific and reliable character of the efforts being made by ST. In addition, ethos is used to emphasize the scientific and reliable character of the efforts being made. Furthermore, ST's environmental disclosure relies heavily on data to illustrate their aims, allowing readers to get a clear image of what they are attempting to achieve.

We joined the world-renowned Science Based Target Initiative (STBi) which has validated ST's targets to be compliant with the 1.5°C maximum scenario as per the COP21 Paris agreement. This means reducing direct and indirect absolute carbon emissions by 50% compared to 2018. (ST, 2021)

In the above paragraph, ST makes ethos arguments to show that the company's emission ambitions are consistent with the 1.5°C maximum scenarios set out in the COP21 Paris

climate accord. After that, however, there's no description of measuring and evaluating actual efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

In ST's environment disclosure, science and scientific rationality are often used to highlight the company's successes in resource conservation and the reduction of environmental threats. For example,

our overall water footprint has been reduced by 72% through continuous improvement programs undertaken at all our manufacturing sites. (ST, 2021)

Semiconductor manufacturing processes use a number of chemicals that may present health, safety and environmental hazards. [...] We have focused our efforts in this area on anticipating legislation, reducing usage and substituting chemicals to ensure [...] and the environment are adequately protected. (ST, 2021)

Business Model & Innovation Dimension

In this dimension, the most frequently used rhetorical strategy is ethos. Sustainably managing supply chain and sourcing materials are of vital importance for the semiconductors company, mainly due to the natural resource scarcity constraints that affect the resiliency of sourcing materials (SASB, 2018). ST claims in the following quotation that all of their suppliers and subcontractors must comply with hazardous substance restrictions as well as relevant legal requirements. They also said that the materials were acquired in accordance with the most recent environmental and social guidelines.

ST's EHS regulated Substances list is compiled using several standards, regulations (REACH3, RoHS4) and customer requirements. It is updated on an annual basis. We perform detailed checks on all our suppliers and request compliance evidence in the form of certificates of analysis, material safety data sheets and due diligence surveys. (ST,2021)

Leadership & Governance Dimension

As stated by SASB (2018), while intellectual property protection is built into the economic models of semiconductors companies, their IP activities may sometimes collide with public interests. ST's websites of sustainability provide disclosures on this dimension, listing numbers and facts about IP. In fact, ST don't present major patent litigation cases as suggested by the SASB framework. Thus, it is difficult for the reader to evaluate the company's performance in protecting intellectual property rights using this data. Nevertheless, ST claim that they have a patent licensing program, which can somewhat reflect their balance protection of their intellectual property (IP) while ensuring its fair use.

Intellectual Property (IP) is a key aspect of innovation management at ST, as we frequently buy and license-out IPs. We have an active patent licensing program which provides third parties access to many of our patents and enables them to make wide use of ST technology.

Since our inception, ST has amassed a portfolio of over 18,000 patents in more than 9,400 different patent families.

4.4. Anheuser-Busch InBev

4.4.1. Alcoholic beverage industry

The alcoholic beverage market is made up of businesses that make and sell beverages containing alcohol derived from various sources. Beer, wine and spirits are the three most important sectors of the industry. The industry is considered to have a promising future. According to “Alcoholic Beverages Global Market Report 2021”, the global alcoholic beverage market is predicted to increase at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.3 percent from \$499.74 billion in 2020 to \$546.15 billion in 2021, representing a rise of 9.3 percent. The market is estimated to reach \$735.83 billion in 2025, growing at a compound annual growth rate of 8%. With an increase in population comes an increase in demand for alcoholic drinks. Crop output, agricultural operations, and commerce volumes will all need to expand in order to keep up with the growing human population. As a result, firms operating in this market are likely to gain from increased demand for alcoholic beverages products due to population growth throughout the forecast period (Alcoholic-Beverages Global Market Report, 2021).

The importance of sustainability in the alcoholic beverage industry has increased over the last decade as consumers demand it (Worldfavor, 2021) , and sustainability may be seen as a strategy to distinguish firms or goods in order to suit the needs of certain market segments (Rodriguez-Sanchez & Sellers-Rubio, 2021). According to the Drinks Industry Sustainability index- Trends Report 2020, the alcoholic beverage industry received an average of 4.8 points out of 10, indicating that the industry is now considered a high-risk sector (Worldfavor, 2021). From manufacturing to packaging and shipping processes, alcoholic beverages need a lot of energy. A single eight-ounce serving of beer requires around 20 gallons of water, whereas a five-ounce portion of wine requires 30 gallons. (Craig, 2021). And the production of beverage containers has the most considerable impact on the environment (Alko, 2021), and recycling is inevitable for companies in this industry to consider. According to FoodDrinkEurope annual report 2021, significant advancements have been made over the previous several decades.

The robustness of the supply chain is also one of the key risks that companies in this industry have been exposed to. Climate changes and various resource scarcity may have a detrimental effect on the price of ingredients required for effective brewing, thus affecting company profitability. Concerns about human rights also sometimes arise in this industry. A documentary, Bitter Grapes, reveals the harsh working conditions of South African

vineyard workers and large corporations in the rum industry blamed for poor working conditions for farmers in the ingredients supply chain (Worldfavor, 2021).

Concerns about alcohol misuse have become one of the issues that companies in the alcoholic beverage industry have to tackle head on. Companies in this industry are deemed to have the social responsibility of helping create a healthy and safe drinking culture. Many international initiatives and alliances have been supported by global leading companies in order to reduce harmful drinking.

The risks posed to the alcoholic beverage industry are predominately at the Business Model & Innovation dimension according to SASB Materiality Map. Next, we select Anheuser-Busch InBev, a leading company in the alcoholic beverage industry for further introduction and analysis.

4.4.2. Anheuser-Busch InBev

Anheuser-Busch Inbev, or AB InBev, is a multinational brewing company based in Leuven, Belgium. As the world's largest beer brewer in terms of both volume and revenue, it has around 630 beer brands in 150 countries. AB InBev generated global revenue of US \$46.88 billion in 2020 and is currently ranked 236 in the Global 500. In 2020, AB InBev held the largest beer market share in the world, controlling 25.7 percent of total beer volume sales.

AB InBev has ambitions on its global sustainability goals. Its 2025 sustainability goals are aimed at addressing climate changes, smart agriculture and recyclable packaging (AB InBev, 2021). The company signed a USD 10.1 billion Sustainability Linked Loan Revolving Credit Facility ("SLL RCF") (WBCSD Communications, 2021). AB InBev also set up a program named 100+ Accelerator in order to solve some sustainability challenges. AB InBev in its website claims that sustainability is "our business" and published a lot of sustainability information on its website.

4.4.3. Empirical Analysis

Business Model & Innovation Dimension

According to SASB's Materiality Map, AB InBev's primary sustainability issues are on its business strategy and innovation dimension. The majority of these issues are to the stability of the raw material supply chain and packaging recycling, both of which are detailed on its website.

The company's primary rhetorical strategy in the business model and innovation dimensions is logos. AB InBev displays how well it has performed in package recycling since 2012, assuaging stakeholders' worries and concerns about the company's packaging sustainability by turning outcomes into data in a clear and plain manner.

Our packaging sustainability journey accelerated in 2012 with a commitment to remove 100,000 metric tons of packaging material globally. We are proud that we were able to exceed this goal in 2016, removing 146,000 metric tons of material from our packaging while maintaining the quality our consumers expect. What's more, we've worked diligently in our breweries around the world to achieve an average 98% recycling rate. (AB InBev, 2021)

AB InBev uses ethos of expressing its ambitions to collaborate with a variety of organizations and stakeholders. This company tries to increase stakeholder satisfaction and confidence in its future activities on package recycling by displaying its cooperative approach.

[...] we're working with multiple partners, including the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the Closed Loop Fund, and the Glass Recycling Coalition, as well as our peers, our consumers, our vertical operations, local governments, and our suppliers. (AB InBev, 2021)

AB InBev largely employs the rhetorical approach of logos when discussing its attempts to ensure the stability of its raw material supply chain. The corporation has created a Smart Agriculture initiative, and the disclosure details all facets of the program. AB InBev is dedicated to guaranteeing the stability of its raw material supply chain by implementing long-term, sustainable strategic planning and execution both upstream and downstream of the agricultural supply chain.

AB InBev offers technical, intellectual, and financial assistance to the farmers' community, which is located downstream of the raw material supply chain. The organization proves the reliability of the raw material supply chain to stakeholders by strengthening the professionalism and financial assistance of farmers.

We take a farmer-centric approach in our commitment to supporting sustainable agriculture supply chains and leverage our direct, local connection through our agronomists and researchers on the ground to reach our goal that 100% of our direct farmers will be Skilled, Connected and Financially Empowered by 2025[...] we provide access to crop varieties, training, timely insights for better decision making and appropriate financial tools to build resilient supply chains across our sourcing regions. (AB InBev, 2021)

AB InBev has also adopted a corresponding monitoring system to track and report on actual results each year, so that stakeholders have access to transparent and reliable information.

Each year, we track our progress as the percentage of farmers we source from who meet the defined criteria for each goal pillar. Given that we track and report at the farmer level, transparency is foundational to our goal and the way we work with farmers. (AB InBev, 2021)

AB InBev has devised a specific plan for smallholder farmers in order to help stabilize the company's supply chain by assisting smallholder farmers, who make up the majority of the agricultural supply chain, in achieving long-term development. The firm not only helps

farmers enhance their agricultural capacity downstream in the supply chain, but also helps them create local markets, ensuring long-term supply chain sustainability upstream and downstream.

Through local sourcing and as a part of our Smart Affordability strategy, we are creating formal markets and new sources of income for crops that have historically been grown for subsistence [...] by producing local beers such as Eagle Lager in Zambia and Magnífica in Brazil using these alternative starches. (AB InBev, 2021)

Social Capital Dimension

The rhetorical methods of logos and pathos are primarily used by AB InBev. The corporation, in particular, employs the rhetorical strategy of pathos to elicit emotional empathy from its stakeholders. The corporation emphasizes that society is the cornerstone of its existence and the basis on which it can develop, and that it is willing and ready to do all in its power to help it recover. The corporation delivers a powerful emotional signal to the stakeholder via the pathos passage, persuading them that the company's activities are for the welfare of society.

We understand that our business thrives when our communities thrive. We will continue to do our part to support the people, organizations and businesses that make up these communities in the recovery. (AB InBev, 2021)

AB InBev also employs the rhetorical strategy of logos. By outlining actual initiatives that indicate a business strategy tailored to socially sustainable criteria, the firm projects a favorable image of responsibility to stakeholders. For example, by modifying its packaging, growing the market for its alcohol-free product line, and creating a foundation to lessen the negative societal effect of alcohol use, the corporation displays its efforts to limit the harmful use of alcohol. On its website, the firm also highlights its efforts in the COVID-19 epidemic and seeks to transmit its proactive approach to social responsibility to stakeholders so that they have a favorable impression of the company.

Our commitment to apply Smart Drinking Guidance Labels on the primary packaging of our beers [...] has shown global progress. We are [...] expanding our no- and low-alcohol beer (NABLAB) portfolio with innovations [...] Recent studies suggest that the availability of these products can help reduce harmful consumption [...] we launched the AB InBev Foundation and achieved notable progress [...] To address immediate needs brought on by COVID-19 [...] Our breweries moved from brewing beers to producing hand sanitizers; we utilized our distribution networks to deliver masks instead of kegs [...] and we used our marketing capabilities to drive public awareness and generate donations. (AB InBev, 2021)

Environment Dimension

The rhetorical strategies adopted by AB InBev are mainly focused on logos and ethos.

The three types of ethos utilized by AB InBev are as follows: the first is the presentation of the findings of an international non-profit organization's assessment of a company's environmental performance. By demonstrating AB InBev's high rating in the international organization's annual ratings, the company tries to convey the message that the company's actions in previous years have been reliable and have achieved significant results, so that stakeholders can develop trust in the company and possibly pre-empt other positive impressions of the company's actions in the future.

We are proud to have received an “A” rating from CDP for both climate change and water security. (AB InBev, 2021)

The second method is the one that most corporations use. On its website, AB InBev cites a number of industry associations and organizations, along with the activities it participates in and worldwide initiatives it supports. The firm seeks to show that it is taking a proactive role in international collaboration and that its goals are always aligned with globally recognized environmental goals. The corporation is attempting to communicate to its stakeholders that it is prepared to operate in the direction of the worldwide community's united will in order for its activities to be approved by society.

To continue strengthening a collaborative approach to sustainable development, we engage in industry associations and organizations such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), the World Economic Forum (WEF), the Beverage Industry Environmental Roundtable (BIER), AIM-Progress, BSR, the Climate Group, RE100, the 2030 Water Resources Group and Sustainable Food Lab as well as other regional and sector-specific associations. (AB InBev, 2021)

The third is to include outside experts and stakeholders in the decision-making process. According to AB InBev's disclosure, the company invites environmental experts and NGOs to participate in the development of its objectives and strategies in order to ensure that, as far as possible, a comprehensive sustainability strategy can be determined from multiple perspectives and in a prudent manner. The company also mentions its water risk assessment tool, claiming that it uses data from the WWF, an international authority, and that because it considers the opinions of external stakeholders in its decision-making process, the perception of sustainability decisions will be more comprehensive and will correspond to social reality, resulting in increased recognition of the company's actions and acceptance of stakeholder.

We consult regularly with an external group of experts as environmental advisors, as well as other key NGOs, to bring in a diverse perspective and to advise on decision making, target setting and program strategies and implementation across the four pillars of our Sustainability Goals. (AB InBev, 2021)

Incorporating publicly available water risk data from the World Resources Institute and The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) as well as internal data and expertise, we have developed a bespoke water risk assessment tool to review our operational risk on a quarterly basis. (AB InBev, 2021)

In terms of using logos, AB InBev is akin to that of the preceding firms. AB InBev uses data and clear examples to persuade stakeholders that the company's activities will match their expectations. The corporation shows the improvements it has made across the whole business level and at the strategic level. Companies demonstrate to stakeholders that their day-to-day operations are environmentally sustainable and can have a long-term positive impact by improving their actions in their day-to-day operations, so that their actions are recognized as being in line with societal perceptions in order to gain legitimacy.

AB InBev's actions with regard to water resources demonstrate considerable initiative and a positive attitude. In the information disclosed on the website, AB InBev has developed water management and solutions adapted to local realities, based on regional characteristics and with the participation of stakeholders.

Water security is very complex, and there is no single solution. To address the challenges specific to the local context, we have developed and implemented a comprehensive seven-step watershed management process at sites located in water-stressed areas. (AB InBev, 2021)

AB InBev also introduces technology and innovation at the raw material production stage to assist farmers in growing crops using a number of technologies that may boost crop output and quality while also achieving more effective water usage, resulting in a win-win scenario. The corporation proves to stakeholders its capacity and desire to assist third parties and manage water in a comprehensive way along the supply chain via this disclosure.

We also work with farmers to improve water use efficiency through technologies such as low-elevation sprinkler application, drip irrigation, and precision and variable rate irrigation systems. These efforts can have benefits for both the watershed and the farmer, including improved crop yield and quality, optimized land use, and de-risking of crop investments. (AB InBev, 2021)

AB InBev has grown more aggressive in sharing and discussing global water challenges, rather than only concentrating on sustainability at the strategic and day-to-day levels of the company's operations. The corporation not only discusses its commercial contribution to global environmental challenges, but also exhibits its leadership on water issues and desire to lead other businesses in tackling environmental crises in the website disclosures.

Through the Every Single Drop challenge in our 100+ Accelerator, we have identified, mentored, piloted and established contracts with promising startups focused on improving operational water efficiency and addressing the global water crisis. (AB InBev, 2021)

4.5. Allianz

4.5.1. Insurance industry

The insurance industry is comprised of companies that provide risk management services in the form of insurance contracts to customers. COVID-19 pandemic presents a massive hit to any industry, the insurance industry is no exception. However, according to the insurance industry outlook of Deloitte, despite persistent worries about COVID-19, insurers anticipate more rapid growth next year.

Climate changes around the world have an incalculable impact on all aspects of society and the frequency and intensity of natural disasters are gradually rising. As a role of underwriter, insurers must consider how to incorporate environmental factors into their underwriting process and manage environmental risk at the firm level. As climate-related catastrophic events become more difficult to forecast, insurers will need to improve their risk-modeling methodologies in order to prevent higher losses (OU YANG, 2021). According to the articles of Sherwood and Sullivan, in 2020, climate-related windstorms, wildfires and floods resulted in insured losses of US \$81 billion. As expectations of stakeholders are rising, insurers are being pushed to do more to help address sustainability issues. Therefore, environmental, social and corporate governance concerns are being examined by insurers not just in terms of how they affect insurance and investment portfolios but also in terms of their effect on the environment and society.

Companies in the insurance industry have a unique position in driving sustainability. Insurers could promote sustainability by investing in sustainable projects. According to Capgemini's report, ESG investments may offer greater returns than more traditional investments, and companies that integrate sustainability risks into their investing procedures may also be more competitive in securing third-party investment mandates.

Systemic risk is a significant risk that all financial institutions need to face. Systemic risk can be associated with the interconnectedness of financial institutions and can spread throughout the financial sector, causing a dramatic hit to the financial sector (Cummins & Weiss, 2014). Although the insurance industry plays a subordinate role in causing systemic risk compared to the banking sector, large-scale insurance companies engaged in diversified activities are more inclined to pose a greater systemic risk (Berdin & Sottocornola, 2015). Companies in the insurance industry should have a system of systemic risk management to cope with unforeseen situations and provide appropriate disclosure to stakeholders.

According to SASB Materiality Map, we choose the insurance industry for the Leadership & Governance dimension of our case study. Allianz, one of the largest companies in the insurance industry, will be further analyzed.

4.5.2. Allianz

Allianz is the largest insurance company in Europe and one of the leading insurance and asset management groups in the world. The Allianz Group was founded in 1890 in Berlin, Germany, and has a 130-year history. Allianz has more than 150,000 employees and over 100 million private and corporate customers in over 70 countries worldwide (Allianz, 2021). Allianz's total revenues in 2020 amount to €140 billion and operating profit to €10.8 billion.

Allianz receives high ratings from several sustainability rating agencies. Allianz's sustainability ambitions go beyond the company's products and services to lead the financial services industry in shaping a more prosperous society (Sustainability Fact Book from Allianz, 2021). To achieve its ambition, Allianz provides sustainable products and services to drive sustainability in the industry and is also an active member of social activities.

4.5.3. Empirical Analysis

Leadership & Governance Dimension

On its website, Allianz provides very little information on risk management. And within its disclosures, Allianz mainly employs rhetorical strategies of logos and ethos, with an emphasis on sanction risk in its risk management approach to disclosure.

To emphasize that it always follows global laws and regulations, Allianz employs the rhetorical strategy of ethos, which is paired with the logos to deliver more information to the stakeholders. By combining the two rhetorical strategies, Allianz hopes to demonstrate a portion of the sanction risk management system that it now has in place, giving stakeholders a favorable picture of Allianz's risk control assessment and control processes.

We have global policies and procedures in place for compliance with trade and financial sanctions. These include, among others, requirements for the screening of customer and counterparty names against the sanctions lists provided by the U.N., E.U. and the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). (Allianz, 2021)

Allianz also attempts to strengthen the trust of stakeholders in the ethical aspects of the company through the rhetorical strategies of pathos and ethos.

Our success is built on the trust our customers, investors, employees and the public have in our performance and integrity. This depends on the personal ethical conduct and capability of all Allianz management and employees, and their desire to create value for all stakeholders. (Allianz, 2021)

Allianz employs the rhetorical approach of pathos in the above disclosure to emphasize to stakeholders that the corporation understands the significance of corporate ethics. Allianz understands that its success is based on the confidence that its stakeholders have in it, and

that the company's reputation is crucial to its survival and development. Allianz seeks to convey to stakeholders the significance and clarity of the company's management's attitude to corporate ethics via this disclosure.

Allianz has also stated its attitude on topics such as corruption and bribery, which may harm its ethical image, by disclosing its position and using strong terms to indicate the company's hard stance against corruption and graft.

Allianz takes a zero-tolerance approach to fraud and corruption. (Allianz, 2021)

Business Model & Innovation Dimension

Allianz continues to make extensive use of the rhetorical strategies of logos and ethos in the disclosure of this dimension.

Allianz follows the rhetorical strategy of ethos in a fashion that is similar to the previous four firms. To illustrate its commitment to accountability, Allianz emphasizes its involvement in international organizations and campaigns on its website, and it also exhibits outstanding leadership in its online disclosures. Unlike some other companies that have taken a supporting and following stance on international regulations, Allianz uses the terms "driving force" and "founding member" in its disclosures to position itself in international alliances and demonstrate to stakeholders that it is a driving force and a founding member. This disclosure demonstrates the company's significant commitment to advancing sustainability.

we're one of the driving forces in the U.N.-convened Net Zero Asset Owner Alliance. (Allianz, 2021)

As a founding member of the U.N.-convened Net-Zero Asset Owner Alliance (AOA), we advocate for ambitious decarbonization strategies and financing by industry. (Allianz, 2021)

Allianz uses logos to provide a complete picture of how the firm screens and supports sustainable investing. Allianz incorporates environmental considerations into their whole business strategy. Allianz reveals the significant sustainability effects in its decision-making at the level of the company's investment portfolio and insurance policies, ensuring that its portfolio contributes positively to the development of sustainable social aspects.

Listed assets' ESG performance is systematically evaluated and companies with scores below a threshold require the asset manager's explanation or divestment. (Allianz, 2021)

We strictly prohibit investing in certain sectors like banned weapons, coal-based business models, or sovereign bonds offered by countries with documented severe human right violations. (Allianz, 2021)

Allianz has shown a strong sense of social responsibility and leadership by not only adjusting its investment strategies to society's expectations in terms of sustainability but also by actively encouraging other businesses to pursue sustainable strategies.

we're working with companies in every sector whose securities we hold in these portfolios. And we're supporting them in carrying out their own net-zero greenhouse gas strategies, provided those strategies are persuasive. (Allianz, 2021)

Allianz also demonstrates the economic benefits it has gained in pursuing its sustainability strategy. In its disclosure, Allianz demonstrates that the company's sustainability strategy has great potential for business development and discloses the economic profits the company has made in the direction of sustainability.

Reaching net-zero is not simply reducing emissions and carrying on with the business models of today [...] We see new business opportunities and strong wins for those ready to lead [...] In 2020, we generated revenues total 1878.9 million from 232 sustainable solutions through our Sustainable Solutions program. (Allianz, 2021)

Allianz employs logos in its disclosures to show stakeholders not just a proactive transformation in the company's business strategy, but also evidence of the company having demonstrated profitability in running a sustainable business model. Allianz transmits to stakeholders the confidence that the firm can produce a win-win scenario by displaying practical actions and economic benefits. Allianz not only exhibits a sustainable mindset in accordance with society by reporting its actual activities and results, but it also preserves and even expands the company's commercial footprint. Thus, Allianz attempts to gain legitimacy by demonstrating its ability to gain the acceptance of its stakeholders.

Social Capital Dimension

Allianz uses the logos rhetorical strategy in combination with the pathos rhetorical strategy. To convey to stakeholders that Allianz is proactive in its commitment to social responsibility, the corporation employs the rhetorical method of pathos.

In the following quote, Allianz expresses a strong sense of responsibility for society's future generations and a desire to actively support social cooperation and cross-industry collaboration to create a positive social environment for the next generation.

We must come together to create and scale our positive societal impact through collaboration and engagement, especially for next generations as part of an equitable and more resilient society. (Allianz, 2021)

In the text of the logos, Allianz demonstrates its social responsibility by disclosing its support for youth development and employment programs and its support for sports. Allianz discloses its efforts to increase the company's social impact, for example, by establishing international foundations.

Allianz has established a total of 12 international foundations that work together to help local communities and projects around the globe. (Allianz, 2021)

All of Allianz's social collaboration programs have a long-term perspective. Allianz unveils its long-standing cooperation with SOS Children's Villages International (CVI), which promotes the best possible environment for the next generation by giving financial and professional technical assistance to SOS CVI's programs. The aim of Allianz's social support activities may be to display the company's sense of ethics and duty to the community, so that stakeholders recognize the company's corporate ethics, and so achieve legitimacy.

With the support of Allianz, SOS Children's Villages International developed an emergency Preparedness Program [...] Since 2017, we have supported YouthCan!. (Allianz, 2021)

Allianz also reveals its long-standing relationships with global sporting events and its future plans for multifaceted activities that will leverage the company's social impact and drive through its partnerships with sporting events to benefit multiple groups such as athletes, employees, and the youth. The company's partnership with sporting events will make a difference to multiple groups, including athletes, employees, and the youth.

From 2021, Allianz will expand local initiatives to connect with athletes and fans across the world[...] we'll engage youth with the spirit and values of the Movements at Allianz Sports Camps through trying sports, building friendships and learning from athletes. We also announced the Support Dog Squad on Olympic Day, providing emotional support dogs to help this year's athletes. Additionally, we introduced "The Pause" [...] a podcast that will put a spotlight on those supporting athletes' mental health. We're also hiring athletes in countries across the world and running Athlete Buddy Programs in different markets... (Allianz, 2021)

5. Discussion

The following section separates into two different sub-sections. Section 5.1 summarizes different ways of each rhetorical strategy when companies use it. Section 5.2 presents the companies' preference for using rhetoric on the five dimensions and the preference for using rhetorical strategies on the CEO letter.

5.1. Discussion on rhetorical strategies

Employing discourse as a strategic technique, firms could legitimize their behavior (Castelló & Lozano, 2011; Hardy et al., 2000), and rhetorical strategies are structural features of discourse (Castelló & Lozano, 2011). The terms logos, ethos, and pathos refer to three distinct sorts of rhetorical appeals that trace all the way back to Aristotle. These rhetorical methods are employed to elicit an audience's response, so accomplishing the goal of persuading the audience to agree with the argument or point.

5.1.1. Logos

Logos appeals to rationality and logical thinking (Castelló & Lozano, 2011; Gauthier & Kappen, 2017). The contents of logos include evidence, cause-effect thinking, and data and so on (Gauthier & Kappen, 2017). According to whether numbers and percentages are used in the text of logos, we divide this kind of text into two categories.

One type of the contents includes numbers or percentages. For the most part, these five companies provide quantitative results when disclosing relevant sustainability information in five dimensions. Among these, the data can be further divided into three categories depending on what they present.

Specific statistics are utilized to illustrate the efforts and performance of the firm. For some sustainable behaviors, it is possible to measure the outcomes and endeavors. For instance, Glencore in its website disclose one of their contributions at the Social Capital dimension: “\$95 million on initiatives supporting local community development” (Glencore, 2021). ST mentions its effort on supporting gender equality: “In 2020 we recorded an overall gender pay ratio of 99.6%, averaged across job grades and normalized by country” (ST, 2021).

Data is also used to highlight how successfully the corporation is reaching its present goals. The beer company, AB InBev, uses data to demonstrate its outstanding package management capabilities: “we were able to exceed this goal in 2016, removing 146,000 metric tons of material from our packaging while maintaining the quality our consumers expect” (AB InBev, 2021). Glencore showcases its good performance on the Environment dimension: “we have surpassed this target and reduced our emissions intensity by 13.2%”

(Glencore, 2021). The benefit of using data this way is that companies may give stakeholders a more visible and clear picture of what the firm has achieved in its sustainability goals by sharing detailed statistics. The data also allows the stakeholders to compare performance of different companies, providing them a method of measuring the sustainability process for companies.

Additionally, some corporations implement numbers to prove the economic advantages they have derived from sustainable business practices. Allianz on its website reports the revenues the company generated by providing sustainable solutions:” In 2020, we generated revenues totaling 1878.9 million from 232 sustainable solutions through our Sustainable Solutions program” (Allianz, 2021). ST also cites the profit it earns from the sustainable innovation of its products:” We are also improving our social and environmental footprint at every stage of the product lifecycle, with 63% of new products identified as responsible and 18.5% of total revenue derived from responsible products” (ST, 2021). Rather than merely demonstrating sustainability performance through statistics, companies that provide data on the economic advantages of sustainable business operations demonstrate to stakeholders that they can balance sustainable behavior with business interests. From the view of agency theory, corporate social responsibility is considered as a waste of corporate resources and a hazard to shareholders’ value (Ferrell et al., 2016). By demonstrating its ability to balance social responsibility and economic returns, the company tries to prove it is well-governed and make stakeholders develop greater confidence in its business. Consistent with the good governance and Ferrell et al. (2016) finding that “CSR in general is not inconsistent with shareholder wealth maximization”.

The other type of the contents is text-only and it could be broken down into two levels. The first type of text is the disclosure of sustainable behavior centered on the firm level. Companies often integrate the sustainability concept with their internal activities such as production processes, internal regulations and investment decisions. Novartis built a new

Table 3: Logos---Classifications of contents

Type	Purpose	Example
Numbers or Percentages	To illustrate the efforts and performance of the firm	Glencore: \$95 million on initiatives supporting local community development. ST: In 2020 we recorded an overall gender pay ratio of 99.6%, averaged across job grades and normalized by country.
	To show the success of a firm in reaching its sustainability goals	AB InBev: we were able to exceed this goal in 2016, removing 146,000 metric tons of material from our packaging. Glencore: we have surpassed this target and reduced our emissions intensity by 13.2%.
	To prove the ability of a firm to achieve a win-win	Allianz: In 2020, we generated revenues totaling 1878.9 million from 232 sustainable solutions through our Sustainable Solutions program. ST: We are also improving our social and environmental footprint at every stage of the product lifecycle, with 63% of new products identified as responsible and 18.5% of total revenue derived from responsible products.
Text-only	To demonstrate internal sustainable behavior of a firm in line with social expectations	AB InBev: We leverage our internal data management system Voyager Plant Optimization (VPO) to monitor and manage our water use on a routine basis and cascade best practices across the business.
	To display a firm's devotion at the social level	Allianz: With the support of Allianz, SOS Children's Villages International developed an emergency Preparedness Program. AB InBev: Our breweries moved from brewing beers to producing hand sanitizers; we utilized our distribution networks to deliver masks instead of kegs [...].

wastewater treatment plant with new technology in order to better manage pharmaceutical discharges. Allianz embeds climate-specific considerations in its insurance and investment decision stage. ST establishes a regulatory process to address any human rights problem that may emerge in its operations. A corporation displaying sustainable behavior at the firm level may be aimed to demonstrate to stakeholders that the management believes in sustainable development. The description of the firm's internal behavior in its website may also be interpreted as a demonstration to stakeholders that the company complies with society's expectations for completing its sustainability duties in all parts of its business operations and at the strategic level.

The second type of text consists of sustainable activities focusing on the social level. Companies sometimes provide evidence unrelated to internal sustainable development, primarily displays of corporate dedication at the social level. AB InBev reveals what it did to assist local communities during the COVID-19 pandemic: "Our breweries moved from brewing beers to producing hand sanitizers; we utilized our distribution networks to deliver masks instead of kegs [...]" (AB InBev, 2021). Allianz reports a worldwide endeavor that aided in the implementation and operation of: "With the support of Allianz, SOS Children's Villages International developed an emergency Preparedness Program" (Allianz, 2021). Actions that actively contribute to society's welfare help stakeholders to perceive a strong, proactive sense of responsibility and corporate attitude on the part of the company. A company's contribution to external society is a strong sign of its positive attitude towards achieving social expectations than its internal sustainable actions. For most stakeholders, the disinterested contribution of a firm may be more consistent with what they expect from the firm.

5.1.2. Ethos

Ethos appeals to the credibility of the information (Gauthier & Kappen, 2017). Credibility could be determined by experts, authorities, and international standards. In the coding text of five companies, we classify the content using ethos strategy into three categories.

The first type of content mentions international organizations, international initiatives, programs or international principles. Companies specify in their disclosures the international organizations, campaigns, initiatives or principles to which they are members or which they have signed. Moreover, depending on the words used by companies, the position of companies within these organizations, campaigns or principles could be classified into three broad categories. First, companies can be considered followers of international authorities and principles. When a company uses words, such as "a part of" "follow" "support" "guided by" "respect" "endorse", to describe its relationship with the organization, we put it under the follower category. Glencore states the following in proving its approach to environmental management: "Our environmental management approach aligns with [...] ICMM Performance Expectations and supports the United

Nations Sustainable Development Goals” (Glencore, 2021). Allianz cites a series of international guidelines and declarations to indicate that it acts in accordance with social norms on human rights: “The Allianz Group is committed to respecting human rights including [...] Universal Declaration of Human Rights [...] Core Labor Standards of the International Labor Organization (ILO) [...] U.N. Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights” (Allianz, 2021). As a follower, the corporation wishes to indicate to its stakeholders that it is obligated by the world community's obligations for action. And the company's sustainability concept is consistent with international organizations' expectations.

When a company uses words like “contribute” “partner with” “long-term partnership” “participant”, the company is a participant in these international organizations and campaigns. In ST's disclosure of managing its supply chain, the company mentions that “We participate in the Responsible Minerals Initiative” (ST, 2021). In Novartis' demonstration of its role in upholding the rights of disabled employees, the firm refers to itself as “a member of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network” (Novartis, 2021). Participants have a more aggressive demeanor than followers. By participating in international organizations and initiatives, as well as establishing international standards, corporations demonstrate their commitment to taking a proactive role in fostering a sustainable society.

Sometimes, the company may locate itself as a leader. Companies describe their relationship with international organizations using terms that include “driving forces” “founding member”. AB InBev refers to itself as a founding member of the Water Resilience Coalition in its action to improve water quality. Among Allianz's statements of its effort on promoting responsible investment and insurance, Allianz considers itself as “one of the driving forces in the U.N.-convened Net Zero Asset Owner Alliance” (Allianz, 2021). As a leader, the company's actions is going beyond sustainability compliance in order to earn the title of sustainability leader in the eyes of the stakeholders. It aspires to not only assist organizations in implementing sustainable growth for society as a whole, but also to spread its impact and guide other firms or organizations toward a sustainable future.

The second type of content in ethos includes expert or specialist knowledge. Glencore implements its ethics and compliance program in consultation with professionals and relevant authorities. AB InBev consults with external experts on a regular basis in the process of setting and implementing sustainability goals. By declaring its own collaboration with experts or authorities, the company tries to convey the credibility of its activities. Through the assistance of external expertise, the company's actions may be more precisely and effectively fulfill its sustainability goals.

Table 4: Ethos---Classifications of content

Type	Purpose	Example
International organizations/ Initiatives/ Programs/Principles	Follower: to demonstrate sustainability concept of a firm in line with the global community	Glencore: We follow the UN globally harmonized system for classification and labelling of chemicals (GHS). Allianz: The Allianz Group is committed to respecting human rights including [...] Universal Declaration of Human Rights [...].
	Participant: to present a more proactive attitude	Allianz: we have been a participant in the U.N. Global Compact (UNGC). ST: We participate in the Responsible Minerals Initiative.
	Leader: to demonstrate strong influence on the industry and willingness to lead the industry towards sustainability	Allianz: one of the driving forces in the U.N.-convened Net Zero Asset Owner Alliance. AB InBev: AB InBev is also founding member of the Water Resilience Coalition.
Expert/Specialist Knowledge	To communicate the credibility of the firm's activities	AB InBev: We consult regularly with an external group of experts as environmental advisors, as well as other key NGOs, to bring in a diverse perspective and to advise on decision making. ST: Health and safety visits by external experts.
Sustainability rating/awards	To demonstrate social accreditation	Allianz: Allianz once again received a rating of AAA (on a scale of AAACCC) in the MSCI ESG Ratings assessment. ST: [...] with ST securing a CDP A list ranking and continued presence in the DJSI World index as well as in other key ESG rankings and international certifications.

Sustainability rating or awards for sustainable practices is the final type of content in ethos. AB InBev and ST received an “A” rating from CDP in 2020. Allianz posts on its website the high ESG ratings it received from many rating agencies. Companies communicate to their stakeholders that their activities are recognized by the organization and that they behave align with societal standards by exhibiting that they have achieved a high ESR rating or award. Stakeholders may have less uncertainty about the company's sustainable behavior or contribution if the findings of an authoritative organization are used, and they may have greater faith in the company's sustainable actions.

5.1.3. Pathos

Pathos appeals to emotion. Through using emotional vocabulary, the audience could empathize with the author. We summarize two possible ways of applying pathos: the first person or the second person.

Most companies disclose in the first person. When emphasizing the meaning of sustainability practices for a firm's survival, companies often employ emotional rhetoric. Highlighting Glencore's role in safeguarding the rights of its employees and contractors, the company says: “At Glencore, our people are at the heart of everything we do” (Glencore, 2021). AB InBev also says “We understand that our business thrives when our communities thrive” (AB InBev, 2021). Companies are exhibiting their strong commitment to sustainable action by using emotional language to convey to stakeholders that it understands the need to engage in sustainable behavior. Through emotional communication, the corporation seeks to instill a solid commitment to sustainability in its stakeholders and allay their anxieties.

Moreover, the company uses the rhetorical strategy of pathos to underline the value of the notion of sustainability at the individual level and the societal level. ST in its website says “we are convinced that a sustainable culture is good for the planet, for our people, for our customers, and for our investors.” (ST, 2021). Companies' signals to stakeholders that it actively wishes to create a pleasant environment for people and even society, which may lead to stakeholders forming a good impression of companies.

There is one more situation where companies prefer to use the first person. Companies sometimes voice in their own sustainability disclosures their assertiveness to certain thoughts or their absolute adherence to certain principles. Allianz in its disclosure says: “We believe in respect for human rights as a minimum standard, both within and beyond our own operations.” (Allianz, 2021) in order to underline to stakeholders its firm stance on respect for human rights. AB InBev, in communicating its attitude towards sustainability, says: “[...] sustainability isn't just part of our business, it is our business.” (AB InBev, 2021). Novartis voices in emotional terms its recognition of the integration of the concept of sustainability into the company's daily activities and its positive mindset

Table 5: Pathos---Classifications of content

Type	Purpose	Example
First-person included	To express the meaning of sustainability for a firm's survival	Glencore: our people are at the heart of everything we do. AB InBev: We understand that our business thrives when our communities thrive.
	To illustrate the value of sustainability for individual or society	ST: we are convinced that a sustainable culture is good for the planet, for our people, for our customers, and for our investors.
	To convey attitude of thoughts or principles	Allianz: We believe in respect for human rights as a minimum standard, both within and beyond our own operations. ST: We [...] have zero tolerance for any kind of discrimination. Glencore: We do not tolerate any form of racial, sexual or workplace harassment.
Second-person included	To convey the feelings more impactful	ST: Our aim is that at ST you can be the true version of yourself, meaning that we foster an inclusive culture where you can reveal your true identity. Indeed, your difference is our strength. Allianz: We secure your future.

towards taking on social responsibility: “We aspire to create a culture in which our ESG activities are deeply embedded in our daily work, reflecting both the responsibility we have to our patients around the world today as well as those who will come after us.” (Novartis, 2021). The use of first-person disclosure by a company can give stakeholders a more direct and explicit sense of the company's attitude or thoughts, making the communication of emotions more unambiguous and direct. This helps the company to portray an image of integrity in terms of sustainable behavior.

Companies sometimes adopt the statements that include the second person to convey feelings. In the context of disclosing actions related to equity, diversity and inclusion, ST says: “Our aim is that at ST you can be the true version of yourself, meaning that we foster an inclusive culture where you can reveal your true identity. Indeed, your difference is our strength” (ST, 2021). These words are uttered as if spoken during a face-to-face conversation with an employee. When the second person is used, the emotional delivery of the business is more straightforward, impactful and trusting. Expressing its commitment to collaborate for a sustainable future, Allianz says: “We secure your future” (Allianz, 2021). The advantage of this approach is that it creates the illusion that the user, or stakeholder, is communicating with the firm, and the stakeholder may get more engrossed in the company's description.

5.2. Discussion on companies’ rhetorical strategy preferences

5.2.1. Rhetorical strategy preferences at five dimensions

Based on the results of coding, we calculated the percentage of three rhetorical strategies companies use in five dimensions. The following Table 6 presents our results.

Table 6. The percentage of the three rhetorical strategies used in the five dimensions

	Environment	Social Capital	Human Capital	Business Model & Innovation	Leadership & Governance	CEO Letter
Logos	23(39%)	25(60%)	18(27.7%)	19(43%)	2(15.4%)	10(31%)
Ethos	34(57%)	8(20%)	21(32.3%)	23(52%)	9(69.2%)	8(25%)
Pathos	2(4%)	8(20%)	26(40%)	2(5%)	2(15.4%)	14(44%)
Total	59(100%)	41(100%)	65(100%)	44(100%)	13(100%)	32(100%)

Companies have a trend to use logos and ethos in disclosures of the Environment and Business Model & Innovation dimensions, with very low levels of use of pathos. The rhetoric strategy of logos (rhetoric of science) is utilized by many commercial organizations in the battle over their environmental impact in order to convince

stakeholders of the legitimacy and validity of their views (Brennan & Merkl-Davies, 2014). Within the Social Capital dimension, logos are the most common rhetoric strategy for companies to exhibit their actions, while ethos and pathos are used with exactly the same degree of frequency. Five companies prefer to tell their stakeholders about specific social actions and some quantifiable social achievements in their Social Capital dimension disclosures. The opposite outcome lies in the Leadership & Governance dimension. Companies are very keen on the rhetorical strategy of ethos, while logos and pathos are used in equal quantities. Ethos can be used to prove that a company is in compliance with laws and regulations to support stricter regulation it receives (Brennan & Merkl-Davies, 2014). The company's inclination to adopt rhetorical strategies on the Human Capital dimension is less pronounced than the other four dimensions, however, it can still be noted that the company prefers to use pathos, followed by ethos and logos. Pathos has the capacity to inspire strong ethical and moral resonance and perhaps could enable stakeholders to be less defensive and motivate them to be more identifiable with the company (Liu et al., 2019).

5.2.2. Rhetorical strategies preferences on CEO Letters

CEO statements reflect the strategic direction of the company (Castelló & Lozano, 2011; Abrahamson & Amir, 1996; Edward Arrington & Puxty, 1991). CEOs, as main representatives of companies, make statements reflecting the rhetoric of organizations rather than the rhetoric of the individual (Castelló & Lozano, 2011). In the CEO letters of companies we selected, we also calculated and summarized the number and percentage of the three rhetorical strategies used by the CEOs.

CEOs prefer to use a pathos-based rhetorical strategy. Emotions may make it easier to empathize with others, and empathy makes it more acceptable for others to behave. By employing pathos strategies, CEOs can lead to changes in employees' attitudes towards corporate social responsibility activities (Liu et al., 2019). According to Liu et al. (2019), when the CEO speaks about corporate social responsibility, he or she employs logical reasoning to express the business strategy, to explain to stakeholders why the firm engages in corporate social responsibility activities and the particular advantages those activities would bring in stakeholders, in order to influence workers' corporate social responsibility cognition. Employees would be more devoted to corporate social responsibility activities if they have a firm grasp of the significance and requirements of corporate social responsibility activities.

6. Conclusion

Previous research has argued that sustainability disclosure is a way of communicating with and satisfying the stakeholders and shows companies' accountability and legitimacy (Sörensson & Jansson, 2016; Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008). We use rhetorical analysis as our research method and select three of Aristotle's rhetorical appeal strategies, logos, ethos and pathos, for further research. This study takes the five dimensions of sustainability issues classified by the SASB Materiality Map as a starting point, and we take the sustainability disclosures on the websites of five large companies in different industries as the subject of this study. The aim of this study is to identify the use and preferences of rhetorical strategies in the sustainability disclosures of five companies. By employing a more comprehensive dimension of sustainability as an entry point to the study, we provide additional insights into an under-researched area of rhetorical strategies in the domain of sustainability disclosure.

This paper makes some contributions to the options and practices of rhetorical strategies in the field of sustainable disclosure. First, we outline the use of the three rhetorical strategies and summarize the possible implications of each for the company in gaining stakeholder recognition and therefore achieving legitimacy. Management may achieve the desired results through the judicious use of a combination of three rhetorical strategies.

Secondly, some previous research on the application of rhetorical strategies in the domain of sustainability disclosure has focused on one single aspect (Gauthier & Kappen, 2017) or environmental and social aspects (Brennan & Merkl-Davies, 2014; Higgins & Walker, 2012). In this study, we found the most prevalent rhetorical strategy in each dimension and discovered that there may be a similar preference to use rhetoric at certain levels. This result extends the scope of the research in the sustainability disclosures domain. Companies primarily communicate with the stakeholders through the use of pathos at the Human Capital dimension. And companies are most preferred to use ethos at three of five dimensions, Environmental, Business model & Innovation, Leadership & Governance dimensions. And logos is the most prevalent rhetorical strategy applied in the Social Capital dimension.

Lately, given that all five firms are large-scale publicly traded corporations in their respective sectors, their rhetorical strategy choices and preferences may reflect the preferences and use of rhetorical strategies within their respective industries. Our results might serve as a straightforward reference for other business managers trying to obtain legitimacy.

We recognize that this study includes some limitations. First, we only focused on large firms. Small and medium companies may have a different approach and preference to adopt rhetorical strategies. Second, our sample size of companies within each industry is too

narrow, which causes our results to lack generalizability and to be unrepresentative of all companies in that industry. Third, the selection of rhetorical strategies affects our results to some extent. The number of texts coded in the Leadership & Governance dimension has a significant gap compared to the other four dimensions because most of the company disclosures do not fit the three definitions of rhetoric strategies we used, which affects our findings to some extent. Lastly, there may be an interpretative bias in this study (Ahrens & Chapman, 2006). Our motivation for this study may, to some extent, influence our interpretation of the text and results.

Rhetorical strategies in the sustainability disclosures domain still have many research areas to be explored. In addition to the disclosures on websites, many official sustainability disclosures could be included in future research, such as standalone reports, corporate press, interviews and other forms of stakeholder communications. Analyzing more of the companies' publicly available sustainability disclosures could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the companies' use of rhetorical strategies and give management a more comprehensive recommendation on the adoption of rhetoric. Another interesting direction for future research could be to look at the two-way communication between companies and stakeholders. The study of the content of interactive communication between the two parties may provide a clear understanding of the process by which companies achieve legitimacy.

7. Reference

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8. Appendix

Appendix A: SASB Material Map

		Consumer Goods	Extractives & Minerals Processing	Financials	Food & Beverage	Health Care	Infrastructure	Renewable Resources & Alternative Energy	Resource Transformation	Services	Technology & Communications	Transportation
Dimension	General Issue Category ⁽¹⁾	Click to expand	Click to expand	Click to expand	Click to expand	Click to expand	Click to expand	Click to expand	Click to expand	Click to expand	Click to expand	Click to expand
Environment	GHG Emissions											
	Air Quality											
	Energy Management											
	Water & Wastewater Management											
	Waste & Hazardous Materials Management											
Social Capital	Ecological Impacts											
	Human Rights & Community Relations											
	Customer Privacy											
	Data Security											
	Access & Affordability											
Human Capital	Product Quality & Safety											
	Customer Welfare											
	Selling Practices & Product Labeling											
	Labor Practices											
	Employee Health & Safety											
Business Model & Innovation	Employee Engagement, Diversity & Inclusion											
	Product Design & Lifecycle Management											
	Business Model Resilience											
	Supply Chain Management											
	Materials Sourcing & Efficiency											
Leadership & Governance	Physical Impacts of Climate Change											
	Business Ethics											
	Competitive Behavior											
	Management of the Legal & Regulatory Environment											
	Critical Incident Risk Management											
	Systemic Risk Management											

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Appendix B: Summary of company websites

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Novartis. <https://www.novartis.com/>

ST Approach to Sustainability. Retrieved from https://www.st.com/content/st_com/en/about/st_approach_to_sustainability/st_approach_to_sustainability.html

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