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Business Greening as a Promotion Tool: Between Atonement and Easy Adoption

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Abstract

Environmental sustainability initiatives by firms manifest in different approaches, forms and applications, but is expected to have at their core, the recognition of the need for ensuring the sustenance of the environment, by broadly arresting environmental degradation and/or improving environmental quality. This paper focuses on the efforts of firms that can be broadly construed as one that promotes greening by projecting by showcasing the firm's commitment to sustainability. However, concomitantly there is also a strong element of highlighting that environment sustainability has an economically beneficial aspect to it. This orientation that I label as "Champion the Business of Green", typically comprises activities such as tree-planting drives, discouraging use of plastic bags by levying a charge on consumers, visibly highlighting and promoting the benefits of going green through high energy-ratings and use of green buildings, carbon trading, and highlighting allegiance to global sustainability forums and other such variants. Overall, these initiatives may be conceived as a combination of environmental evangelism and economic opportunism. On studying the prevalence of this orientation across over 160 global companies spanning 8 years, it emerges that the firms that are aligned to this orientation strongly are likely to be those that straddle either of the extreme positions: highly environment sensitive or relatively clean industries. We suggest that in the case of the former, this may be on account of the high need to showcase a sense of atonement for the negative impact; in the case of the latter, it may be case of low-hanging fruit.

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