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Ilana Notis

Ilana.Notis@Colorado.EDU

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# Virgin Atlantic Airways: A Look Inside the Airline's Green Initiatives

By:  
Ilana Notis  
Communication  
University of Colorado at Boulder

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Thesis Advisors:  
Bryan Taylor, Communication, Primary Advisor  
Cindy White, Communication, Committee Chair  
Deserai Anderson Crow, ENVS

## **Abstract**

Greenwashing is a growing trend in the advertising of organization's green efforts as well as the relationship it holds with a corporation's public image and identity. Environmental communication is used to discuss our surroundings as well as controversial topics such as carbon emissions. Companies are seen to partake in greenwashing as a newer approach for them to achieve greater success. The importance of their image and identity is crucial to the portrayal of their organization to the general public. Image and identity also influence the corporation's sense of understanding their place in their industry and society. In this study, I analyze Virgin Atlantic Airways green initiative programs as possible culprits of greenwashing through their use of rhetoric to depict themselves as a green corporation. I found that Virgin Atlantic can be deemed guilty of partaking in these actions through their largely publicized efforts that may have little to no effect on the environment, their disregard of the programs failures or small-scale efforts, and their conflicting voice in relation to their business and environmental programs.

**Keywords:** organizational communication, greenwashing, corporate social responsibility, image and identity, Virgin Atlantic Airways

## Chapter 1

The American business dream: to grow, succeed, and become a top competitor in one's field. The industrial revolution sparked an immense growth in technological advances that are still present in current day society. According to Geng, it wasn't until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that industrialization truly boomed (1990). Once this boom occurred, with large growth comes the increased demand for resources. In order for businesses to be successful in this industrial era, the use of these resources is vital to their success. However, the overuse, depletion, and careless use of Earth's reserves by a majority of companies have resulted in negative repercussions. British Petroleum (BP) has been found to partake in actions that have destroyed the environment such as illegal disposal of hazardous waste and water contamination due to oil leaks (Kantamneni, 2014).

The current threat to our environment brings more action to protect it. According to field data collected from 2008 to 2012 by the USDA Forest Service, there were over 160 million recreational visits to National Forests (USDA, 2013). Groups in contemporary society have become increasingly more vocal than earlier times, with the exception of the spiked concern in the 1960s and 1970s, in demands for greater environmental action from each other, the government, and corporations in regards to their practices and policies. Geng's article "*Sustainable Agricultural Systems: Concepts and Definitions*," is an example of vocal demands by scholars. He states, "indirect costs and long-term effects on [the] environment and natural resources must be included in the evaluation of a production system," (1990, p. 74). Protecting "the environment" from corporate pollution and individual consumerism started becoming a social movement from the 1970s and continues today with increased activism for smarter practices to protect the Earth (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011).

I believe that people truly do love the environment. People have become more aware of the need to protect the environment for several purposes. Many cherished memories are made in nature – looking out to a vast land and experiencing the unknown.

*“The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction,” – Rachel Carson, 1954*

Our intricate society is special because of our advanced communication skills. Communication helps create an understanding of messages that construct our society as well. People speaking out about their ecological passions created a new area of focus called environmental communication. Environmental communication is known as “the vehicle for our understanding of the environment as well as our own relationships to the natural world” (Cox, 2012, p. 19). This newer branch of communication began focusing on how rhetoric is used within environmental organizations and campaigns. There has been a shift in the field with new media and the increase of environmental literature as of recently. Scholars are attempting to understand the different ways nature and the environment are portrayed in our communication. The rise of environmental awareness amongst consumers has created a demand for more eco-conscious products in the market industry. Corporations have seen this as a great way to earn profit from a growing portion in their industry. Frandsen & Johansen wrote that green consumption was a leading economic driver that some corporations honed in on (2011). Several organizations have started to promote their commitment to the environment and promises for eco-friendly initiatives. As companies recognize the economic benefits of reaching out to this market, there is also increased suspicion among consumers and environmental advocates that

many of the changes promised by these large organizations may prove to be fictitious or mundane in order to appear more environmentally conscious (Greenwashingindex.com, 2015). This phenomenon is better known as 'greenwashing.' Greenwashing is "the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service" ("TerraChoice," cited in Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 209). Corporations use advertisements and publicity to showcase their dedication to the environment by gaining consumers' trust in hopes that they will purchase the businesses' products or services. The grey area occurs when organizations do not fulfill their proposed changes and fail to inform the public and instead go about "business as usual." Greenwashing has been defined by seven characteristics also known as the sins of greenwashing. The seven sins include: the hidden trade-off, no proof, vagueness, worshiping false labels, irrelevance, lesser of two evils, and fibbing (Sinsofgreenwashing.com, 2013). The hidden trade-off focuses on a green product as a solution without attention to other environmental issues. The sin of no proof is a claim without substantial, accessible evidence. Vagueness is a claim that is broad which can be misunderstood by the consumer in hopes of them buying into their product. Worshiping false labels playing into labels being perceived as real but are actually fabricated by the organization. Irrelevance relates to the aspect in which a claim may be true but not relevant to the situation. For example, CFC-free can be advertised as a promotion yet CFCs have been banned by law for a number of years (Sinsofgreenwashing.com, 2013). The lesser of two evils focuses on distracting the customer from the larger picture of the environmental impacts of their consumption. The sin of fibbing states that the environmental claims are basically false.

*“Advertising discourses and capitalist ideology play a major role in shaping the attitudes and behavior of society” – Budinsky, 2013*

Organizations in our society influence the structured and cyclical relationship between the consumer and producer. As we further develop and grow as a society, we are constantly redefining norms and societal values. People are becoming more inclined to purchase products that are less harmful for the environment and promote more sustainable practices. The rise in eco-conscious consumers has impacted corporations' attempts of creating a particular image. Muralidharan & Shin state, “audience perception is a key factor in defining a company's identity and image” (2011, p. 227). Businesses are shifting focus on how to be perceived by consumers as an organization that cares for and about the environment. These organizations are beginning to recognize green consumerism as an upcoming major market. Budinsky & Bryant argued in their article, “major corporations and big media are deflecting our attention away from this need [for radical changes in production] and replacing it with the apparently easy solution of green consumerism” (2013). Through designated images, organizations are subsequently showcasing their commitment to green processes and the environment in order to influence consumers to purchase their product. Customers can often fall victim to greenwashing in an attempt to be more eco-conscious while shopping. In their article, Budinsky & Bryant claimed “green consumerism places responsibility on individuals to change their habits and shifts the focus away from corporations as the cause of many of the world's environmental problems...” (2013, p. 209). The issue that arises with green consumerism is that it requires the change at the consumer level rather than real corporate change (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013).

In a related trend, corporations are attempting to change their image to depict their concerns with the larger phenomenon of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR is “the

concept used to balance the needs of society and environment against the [corporate] need to make profit,” (Ihlen, Bartlet, & May, 2011, p. 3). Organizations are trying to incorporate CSR into their structured system by making CSR a higher priority. CSR has become an increasingly relevant theme among corporate and scholarly groups in their concern with the interrelationship between communication and organizing practices (Ihlen et al., 2011). There has been more careful thought behind actions and practices attempting to align better with being a socially responsible business. “Businesses participate in voluntary environmental initiatives to reduce costs and increase efficiency, avoid or delay regulatory action, gain a competitive advantage, and enhance a positive image in the work place as a good corporate citizen”(Lynes & Dredge, 2006, p. 120). These initiatives range from using reputable suppliers to changing procedures within their offices. Ben and Jerry’s for example, prides itself on using “Only fair trade ingredients and [having] developed a dairy farm sustainability program in its home state of Vermont,” (Fallon, 2014). This company’s dedication to care for the environment shows how businesses can make profit while choosing environmentally friendly practices. Consumers’ perception of an organization’s commitment to CSR can impact which companies they prefer to support. People tend to purchase from companies whose interests and values align with their own (Connolly & Prothero, 2008). Corporations’ image can be promoted as through their meaningful depictions of consumer lifestyle achieved through use of the product, beyond the formal features of the product itself. Conrad claims, “image reflects impressions people have of the organization in the present, given current issues and activities” (2012, p. 168). An example characterized by this quote can be seen through the 2010 British Petroleum (BP) oil spill in the Gulf. A large amount of consumers refused to support BP because of the immense devastation the corporation caused due to negligence. The Facebook site “*Boycott BP*” has the support of over 730,000 people

(*Boycott BP*). BP launched several campaigns to promote their commitment to the environment in an attempt to revamp their harsh reputation from the disaster (Muralidharan & Shin, 2011). Even though BP spent \$50 million on advertisements, people still associate them as the perpetrators of the largest accidental marine oil spill (Muralidharan & Shin, 2011).

Organizations are attempting to become more environmentally friendly, but unfortunately, many of their efforts can be categorized as greenwashing. According to Laufer, “Many Fortune 500 companies were found to partake in acts of greenwashing such as publishing false reports to create confusion, criticize valuable alternatives, and in turn promote the companies’ objectives, commitments, and accomplishments” (as cited in Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 209). Greenpeace’s Stop Greenwash campaign calls out these large organizations on several of their “baby steps” initiatives being exaggerated from their media as “giant strides” for environmental progress (2007). Honda, for example, promotes energy-efficient cars in their fleet such as hybrids, full electric, and hydrogen cars, which can be seen as a direct expression to their environmental commitment. What Honda does not promote, however, is their company’s larger production of gasoline-fueled vehicles or the use of fossil fuels for production of their ‘environmentally-friendly’ cars (Hoffman & Hoffman, 2008).

Companies use certain forms of speech to portray themselves as a green organization through their identity and image. “Commercial green discourse includes all types of texts produced by corporations to market their new green products and/or to create the corporate image of an environmentally friendly organization” (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011, p. 513). Companies cynically and hypocritically use certain forms of rhetoric to portray themselves as-if a green organization. For example, corporate communication surrounding Clorox’s Green Works line of products has been accused by the Greenwashing Index due to their promises of being

'natural' and less harmful for the environment compared to their other products. The Greenwashing Index is a website promoted by EnviroMedia Social Marketing and the University of Oregon where consumers rate organizations advertisements and the program will generate a score to be included in the ad's overall score "Thumbs Up". The campaign depicts natural settings in their advertisements as well as focusing on using the colors green and white, which are closely associated with the environment. For its critics, the issue with this campaign is that even though Clorox promises to be a more eco-efficient product, they still use harmful materials such as plastic in their manufacture (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013). Another issue is that they still produce their original line of products that are dangerous to the environment. In their study, Budinsky and Bryant (2013) examine the make-up behind this particular product line and its advertisements. They conclude that Clorox is partaking in greenwashing by promoting themselves as a "greener" organization while still participating in harmful practices. Corporate greenwashing disguises actual practices behind businesses making profit exploiting Earth's resources while justifying increased use (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013). Companies use these green campaigns to gain support of eco-conscious consumers but may not be holding true to their environmental promise. Although some organizations may have genuine motives behind their efforts, often their actions fall short due to deceptive and superficial portrayals of their initiatives. In their article, Budinsky & Bryant state, "Individuals are encouraged to believe that they can be environmentalists simply by making ostensibly thoughtful choices from within the range of consumer choices available on the market" and challenges green consumerism because they believe purchasing 'environmentally-friendly' products masks organizations true environmental impact (2013, p. 208). It can be confusing for the general public because they perceive these companies as striving to be more environmentally conscious based on mostly their word and

reputation. As a result, some consumers may come to approve of these organizations that may be culprits of greenwashing.

As consumers, we put our trust in the larger systems to provide us with truthful information. The disconnect, environmentally speaking, occurs when businesses' top concern of gaining profit triumphs eco-conscious decisions while pretending to enact greener practices. Several companies have turned a great alternative in the market into a way to garner more profit. This leaves us consumers bewildered as to which organizations are truly eco-friendly and which ones we should support. This discussion of environmental communication and greenwashing is intended to establish the basic commitments of this thesis. Specifically, my study is concerned with the analysis of rhetoric in companies' campaigns and will be examining Virgin Atlantic Airways' biofuel promotion as a case of potential greenwashing. In general, I am concerned with the question of how an industry, currently dependent on fossil fuels, promotes themselves as "green" organizations. Analyzing this specific case will also help us to understand how businesses can properly communicate their relationship with the environment and about organizational rhetoric and environmental communication in general. In the next chapter, I turn to a more specific discussion of organizational rhetoric, and its methodological commitments. I will discuss in detail the specific case examined in this thesis, and the research questions, which guide my analysis.

## Chapter 2

*“Because organizations have such a powerful influence on society and on the lives of its members, there are many interest groups that wish to influence organizational actions and/or resist organizational power” (Conrad, 2010, p. 169)*

The concept of organizational rhetoric will benefit this case study. Organizational rhetoric is a critical approach that seeks to understand the inner workings of how organizations and their stakeholders find ways to manage issues, communicate risk, and recover from crises (Boyd, 2011). These activities are critical to the functioning of an organization. The organizational rhetoric lens also centers on societies and their characteristic assumptions about the nature and implications of organizational activities. Symbolic forms such as rhetoric, myths and rituals shape these assumptions. These assumptions can establish a ‘norm’ within that society. They may create a symbolic world that we can understand.

A lot can be learned about an organization by considering what they place value on. Symbolic forms are embedded within our cultures and some of them come to be assumed as common knowledge. These assumptions are constructed and differ according to the culture they are associated with. Parental leave after childbirth, for example, has traditionally been designated as ‘maternity leave’ in the United States culture. However, Sweden has traditionally allocated time-off from work for both mothers and fathers. This is one example of a potential disconnect between different cultures and their values. Values play a large part in processes such as policymaking, which are significant to the lives of organizational employees and citizens. The majority’s values are often expressed in and through an organization’s use of social symbols. However, issues and conflicts can arise, particularly when the minority feels underrepresented in a setting they are attempting to relate to. For example, many immigrants often try to immerse

themselves into their new organizational culture but struggle due to different backgrounds or even skin color.

Organizations use rhetoric to understand the preconceived notions reflected within a corporation. They may or may not reflect certainties, yet the values are reinforced by those that believe. These preconceived notions can be a powerful form of social control (Conrad, 2010, p. 37-38). Organizational rhetoric provides us with the knowledge to recognize systems within a corporation. Learning about groups helps us understand our society better and can possibly lead to changes.

Scholars study topics that add to a continuing conversation. Analyzing situations such as workplace meetings can help establish more effective protocols. Scholars suggest that rhetoric must be studied from a vertical and horizontal view. The vertical approach focuses using an idealist perspective looking through history that highlights commonalities (Oravec and Salvador, cited in Livesey, 2002, p. 119). Looking at information from a vertical approach subjects the study to hone in on similarities. Meanwhile, the horizontal approach emphasizes difference and embraces the effects of local contexts as an influence of larger theory and practice. For example, “The dominant values of a society are articulated in social myths” (Conrad, 2010, p. 39). Corporations are known for promoting their values and interests to align with the general population. The dominant values are believed to be true regardless of what is in actuality (Conrad, 2010). Our consumer world is driven by a large majority believing certain products are necessary to achieve the lifestyles promoted through advertising. In a dog eat dog world, we are constantly trying to climb the corporate ladder in hopes to achieve success. As stated by the author, “An important myth in Anglo-US society involves economic opportunity and upward mobility” (Conrad, 2010, p. 40). Rhetoric focuses on the communication and medium used for

those attempting to portray a message. It strives to create an understanding amongst a group. Perception and perspective are two important factors that influence rhetoric.

The growing field of organizational rhetoric has started to include the different aspects involved in corporations. For example, scholars emphasize a critical stance that includes multiple interests as well as veiled assumptions (Boyd, 2011). Rhetoricians are focused on the influential aspects of language. They harness the importance of language in our society through the effects and usage seen within our communication. Research surrounding organizations has found power in verbal and non-verbal communication. Organizations are surrounded by communication principles through their interactions within the group and with outside forces. Communication occurs within the organization as well as the influences internally and externally.

Image and identity is a key theme seen in organizational rhetoric. An organization's identity emphasizes audience attributions of its fundamental nature and enduring character, achieved through symbolic representations of its actions and interactions. In order to influence an organization's identity, groups engage in rhetorical campaigns such as producing advertisements detailing their commitments and goals as a group. Companies strive to promote a certain image in order to achieve their main goal. Their image is crucial to the identity put forth to the public. The public forms an opinion about the organization, which sets their place in the industrial world. Identity is comprised of the aspects pertaining to the corporation as well as cultural and contextual scenes. Conrad (2010) claims "identity encompasses perceptions of the organization's central, enduring character, which includes expectations about how its members will act in the future" (p. 168). Organizations are often masters of creating identification with their consumers. The purpose of maintaining an image is to establish one's place in society. Image is crucial for an organization to create their space in our world. Through his research, Conrad (2010) found

image reflects the impressions people form of an organization. These impressions form the structural system in the organizational environment. Image and identity reflects a corporation's personality and seems to give them purpose beyond economics.

Alternately, a corporations' image is composed of evolving attributions of its legitimacy and authority within its scope of operations, resulting from rhetoric associated with current issues and activities surrounding the business. Reputation is another aspect relating to image and identity. In today's day and age, one must be consistently focused on how they are relevant in society, including positive and negative aspects. Companies' reputations are dependent on audience members' perceived reality. Consumers recall corporate reputations when browsing down the shopping aisle. This vital moment is critical to the consumer-producer relationship. The consumer can chose to identify and pick the organization in which they assimilate similar values and beliefs to. Reconstructed memories related to an organization are important to an organization's image and identity. For example, McDonald's is a well-known fast food chain where the food is promised to be the same, regardless of location (Conrad, 2010, p. 171). Consumers are drawn to McDonald's when they are in foreign land as a place of solitude because of the assumptions expected of the restaurant. They already know the routine when going to the establishment. In the midst of decision-making, consumers have several options to choose from. Overall, image and identity are large factors that highlight standout options or help weigh one organization over the other.

*Over the last 10 years a vast body of literature has emerged that examines influences on corporate greening and corporate environmental commitment and responsibility (Bansal & Roth, cited in Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p.120)*

Corporate green initiatives have become a new trend in organizations. Rhetoricians pay special attention to the ever-changing aspects of these sustainability efforts. According to Budinsky & Bryant (2013), during the policy-making process, issues are continuously being identified, framed, and evaluated by varying actors and agencies. Embracing change gives organizational rhetoric constant new sites to study. Corporations partake in green initiatives for reasons such as ranging from economic benefits to enhancing their industrial image. Governmental regulations are also an expanding factor as to why organizations participate in environmental practices. Businesses have had increased pressures from communities and environmental groups to become more eco-friendly. They have had to learn the balance of competing interests. The balance embraces the notion of sustainable development between the interests of the environment and economic growth (Livesey, 2002).

Scholars believe that a healthy planet balances social action and institutional relationships. Through this, we critique the current view of growth embedded into our society since the creation of modern technology. *The Brundtland Report* outlines these aspects as a matter of a movement to protect the well being of future generations (WCED, 1987). Organizational rhetoric harnesses the influence of change with respect to a multitude of variables. Rhetoricians in this field agree that action needs to occur to resolve issues starting by adjusting our current viewpoint. This is important because people may be aware of situations to an extent but do not care or feel the need to partake in action. For example, many people use plastic water bottles without thinking about the effects their consumption has on the

environment. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is a rotating area in the Pacific Ocean gyre filled with massive amounts of plastic waste. The size is said to be larger than Texas and consistently growing. The water is greatly contaminated and species are being affected such as the Albatross mother birds feeding their young bottle caps, mistaking them for food. Most people don't know about this issue or are so far away from the effects that it isn't a pressing case for them. Here, we need to focus on how we can translate the importance of sustainability to the general population. Organizational rhetoric is the means used to find new ways of understanding. It would benefit our society to criticize our current actions as a way to create a better future.

Cheney & Lair (2005) state, "Rhetorical criticism is the description, interpretation, analysis, and critique of organized persuasion – and, by extension, identification" (p. 60). Assessing organizations and their communication generates a deeper understanding of the occurrences surrounding groups engaged in green activities. Greenwashing is a practice seen in businesses in order to promote a positive, eco-friendly image. It can be very discreet yet mask their true goals. Viewing organizations through a critical lens can help us decipher when a groups' motives are largely self-driven. Rhetoric spotlights the uses and adaptations of language and other symbols including how they relate to different audiences (Cheney & Lair, 2005).

Organizational rhetoric scholars concentrate on areas in which there could be several aspects surrounding one mission. They focus on subjects that pertain to their life or those surrounding them. Having previous knowledge, passion, or past experience plays a large part in what interests a researcher. Accessibility is also a big factor in what an academic chooses to study. They analyze texts using different theories and concepts to strengthen their argument. Environmental communication scholars develop arguments about societal issues. For example,

many researchers are interested in the analysis of large corporations and their environmental impacts and initiatives.

In this study, I am particularly interested in the airline industry. This industry has been attempting to incorporate sustainable initiatives in their operations, which are in turn represented in their rhetoric. They want to show they care about the environment, even though their industry depends on vast amounts of fossil fuels. These businesses are communicating green movements, which seem contradicting to their actions. In 1999, a study was done on airlines' emissions and their relation to anthropogenic climate change. The study projected that by 2050 aviation may account for 15% of the anthropogenic induced climate change (Waitz, 2004). These numbers may even be higher than originally projected due to the exponential increase in human-related emissions. To put things into retrospect, a round-trip flight from New York to San Francisco has the warming effect equal to almost 3 tons of carbon dioxide per person (Rosenthal, 2013). Airlines may broadcast their grand attempts at being more environmental but have opposed government regulation and taxation on emissions. This shows that their main concern is economic-driven decisions over the balance of sustainable development.

In this study, I ask four main questions: 1) How has Virgin Atlantic used organizational rhetoric, in particular the emphasis on image and identity, to convey their environmental goals? 2) How does the organization's use of rhetoric achieve identification? 3) Are Virgin Atlantic's green initiatives culprits of greenwashing? 4) Why is greenwashing important to identify in the corporate world? These questions will help us learn how organizations communicate their green initiatives. Understanding these aspects of a group can help organizations and people cooperate together and strive to live in a balanced world.

## Chapter 3

Virgin Atlantic Airways: a hip airline founded by Richard Branson with the promise of affordable, high quality, luxurious flights. This British-based airline, founded in 1984, has become the second largest carrier in Britain. Most famously, Virgin Atlantic values service in keeping their customers satisfied through an enjoyable flight experience. Branson created Virgin Atlantic as a breakthrough company taking on the lackluster industry. He emphasized better service and lower costs, and combined these with a reputation for quality and improvement (*Change is in the Air*, 2013). Richard Branson is well known for his quest for innovation through various aspects such as sleek designs, celebrity endorsements, and more recently his undertaking of sustainable efforts for Virgin Atlantic. In his 2011 book, *Screw Business as Usual* Branson discusses a shift, which he believes, is necessary both within the airline industry, as well as corporate-wide: from a purely economic-based view favoring efficiency and profits, to one that also prioritizes the environment (Pearse, 2012). The book's title clearly states Branson's opinion on the corporate world, which is traditionally known to favor a constant economic growth mindset regardless of repercussions or long-term effects. Here we see Branson's public opinion about the corporate mindset and how it could be translated into the Virgin Group.

Officially, Virgin Atlantic strives to be a green leader in their industry's field and has made promises accordingly in regards to reducing the environmental impact created by their operations. These promises are filled with innovations and a hope for a more sustainable future. The organization has implemented different programs such as the pioneering biofuel flight and a carbon offset plan made available to their passengers, in which they can donate to charitable organizations that focus on improving environments. These efforts have been widely publicized

but consumers and other stakeholders may remain puzzled as to how can a fossil fuel dependent industry deem themselves a 'green' corporation. This contradiction leads us to an attempt to understand Virgin Atlantic through their rhetoric used to achieve a particular identity.

Steve Ridgway, a chief executive at Virgin Atlantic stated at a press conference surrounding the topic of biofuels,

We are very much part of an industry that had created the global economy and that was critical to the global economy and we would not have the economy we have today. We would not have India and China having emerged as the superpowers they have without aviation, without the jet engine (Gadgetwear Co, Ltd., 2015).

Ridgway goes on to describe the importance of alternative fuels in relation to the projected growth in aviation travel, especially in developing countries. As a corporation, Virgin Atlantic seems to be transparent in their protocols by providing documents establishing their sustainable proposals.

The main texts I chose for this study are the sustainability reports produced by Virgin Atlantic Airways as well as press releases provided by the group. These texts are crucial to the study because they provide data straight from the source. I will see their rhetoric as a means of strategic corporate image portrayal. In addition to those documents, I will use information from the Greenpeace organization to strengthen my analysis of the group's attempted green image. These texts provide the study with a pushback to the original case we are presented with. It will give us a clearer perspective on the situation in order to come to a conclusion on this case.

*Change is in the Air* is an annual sustainability report produced by Virgin Atlantic. It highlights their goals, achievements, and reports their efforts in respect to the environment. It is a fairly new publication by the corporation that details the company's progress towards becoming a more sustainable, eco-conscious business. This text is crucial to understanding the strategies Virgin Atlantic uses to create the image they strive to promote to the public. The text gives us

specifics and examples of their corporation's green initiatives such as reducing aircraft CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 30% per Revenue Ton Kilometer (RTK) by 2020 (*Change is in the Air*, 2013). The document states that they have reduced their CO<sub>2</sub> per RTK by 8% within 6 years of their target period (*Change is in the Air*, 2014). The data in the document has clear explanations for the general public to comprehend. This text is a key piece in the case study because it gives us the direct site from which Virgin Atlantic's rhetoric is seen. The data show the publicized image that the company is attempting to promote. The 65-page document from 2013 goes into deep detail describing their commitment to greening their organization while paying minor attention to the idea that they still are an industry that is currently dependent on fossil fuel. The information is sectioned into nine parts: 1) the introduction, 2) aircraft and fuel, 3) ground energy, 4) ground transport, 5) water, 6) waste, 7) design and buying, 8) community investment, and 9) appendix. There is also a 2-page condensed version that states the main topics of the publication. The document uses a creative edge that appears to be pleasing with a balance of photographs, drawings, and paragraphs. They draw upon the senses by using certain appeal tactics to attract a large audience and gain their support.

David Cush is the CEO of the San Francisco-based company Virgin America Airlines California, a corporation licensed under the Virgin Group in which Virgin Atlantic has 25% stake in<sup>1</sup>. Crush was interviewed by the online website Greenbiz to discuss the business's commitment to a more sustainable future. In response to Virgin Atlantic's hopeful rhetoric, Crush highlighted their organization's relationship with carbon and the bleak fact that, "we operate a carbon-intensive business in a carbon-intensive industry in a world that must become carbon constrained" (GreenBiz, 2010). Whether optimistically or pragmatically, the Virgin

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<sup>1</sup> The Federal Aviation Act limits foreign investors to 25% of ownership of a U.S. airline

companies seem to focus on the future by paying attention to pressing environmental issues. Crush attributes Branson's commitment to carbon reductions as a major factor in the standard set for the organization. The standard set by Branson is critical to upholding the image promoted by the Virgin Group. Priorities set forth by the company include aircraft fuel efficiency as well as onboard recycling. The corporation recognizes larger issues yet still emphasize small changes such as using cleaning products that uphold their standards. This portion of data is important to identifying how executives respond to changes seen necessary within their organization. Executives are constantly speaking to the public about the route their business seeks to follow as well as the goals they strive to achieve. This is commonly done through press conferences, press releases, and interviews. These outlets tie into a corporation's image and identity portrayal. They provide a face to their organization and can establish a relationship with the public through these events.

Virgin Atlantic implemented a sustainability strategy committee in 2011, citing the importance of being a company-wide sustainable organization. Employees were surveyed about the environmental programs and their status in order to understand the green consensus within the corporation. Approximately 59% of employees identified the environment as the top priority, as well as reducing aircraft fuel use and carbon emissions (*Change is in the Air*, 2013). Virgin Atlantic thus appears to create space for feedback in order to have multiple voices heard. A portion of this article focuses on the programs completed and proposals for the next stage. For example, Virgin Atlantic introduced 10 renovated aircraft into their fleet that are claimed to be 30% more fuel-efficient on a per trip basis (*Change is in the Air*, 2013). The article states that they hope to improve more of their fleet in order to achieve efficiency. Here, we see a conscious effort to reduce the need for more planes while benefiting from the materials they already own.

Beyond these improvements, Virgin Atlantic is even attempting to make changes within their ground offices to their uniforms. The organization has thus gone beyond perfunctory orientation to sustainable values, and has pursued a grander wave of green practices.

*Today's flight is a continuation of a journey we embarked on last year with Sir Richard and Virgin Atlantic to identify more sustainable forms of fuel for the aviation industry. Change begins with a vision. Following that, innovation and technologies are essential to proving the feasibility of renewable, alternative fuel sources for an environmentally progressive future of aviation. We commend Virgin Atlantic for their efforts to move that vision forward for the betterment of all of us.*

– Marlin Dailey, Boeing Commercial Airplane's VP of Sales (Europe, Russia, and Central Asia)

On February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Branson announced that the company would fly a Boeing 747 jumbo jet from the Heathrow airport to Amsterdam, which is approximately 187 miles, using organic biofuels as an exclusive source of energy. The engines were powered using a 20% biofuel/80% kerosene blend. Virgin Atlantic partnered with the airline sector of The Boeing Company and General Electric's subsidiary Aviation and Imperium Renewables to make this flight a reality. The three of these companies, according to Virgin Atlantic's public team, are striving to make renewable fuels sources for aviation a concept for the present and future.

This flight, which occurred on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008, was the first of its kind and opened the door for possible future energy sources. The biofuel was composed of oil extracted from coconuts and the babassu nut. These elements are grown naturally in areas such as the Amazon Rainforest. The babassu tree is native to Brazil and has a multitude of uses ranging from paper production to cosmetic products. Coconut oil has had a spiked increase in use and demand due to the abundance of the fruit. In their press release, Virgin Atlantic states that the oils are environmentally and socially sustainable (Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd., 2008). According to the press release from the corporation, these oils are in cosmetic products such as lip balm and the

use of these oils do not compete with vital food sources. Virgin Atlantic states the oil was farmed from an existing plantation. In addition, the organization addresses that no modifications were made to the plane for the biofuel flight.

No other flight using this certain biofuel has occurred again. Speculation arose claiming that this particular biofuel was not a sustainable option for the aviation industry. In turn, Virgin Atlantic has pledged to invest \$3 billion towards renewable fuel research and development looking into other forms of energy such as algae or kerosene. Branson boasts that the search for alternative fuel brings competition to the jet fuel industry. Currently, the corporation is interested in a recycling-like fuel using carbon monoxide gasses from steel mills and converting it into ethanol that is then turned into jet fuel (*Change is in the Air*, 2014). Research is still being done surrounding this new, potential biofuel and whether it would provide a realistic, sustainable future for biofuels.

In 2006, Virgin proposed they would tow their planes to the takeoff runway to save fuel. Keeping their engines off for this brief period was projected to save up to two tons of carbon pollution for every flight (Ethicalshopping.com, 2008). The plane would be towed to a designated starting grid from where the planes would depart. As a modification, planes are attempting to reduce their engine use when taxiing. Two years later, however, Virgin discontinued the plane-towing plan due to mechanical issues. Specifically, the planes' landing gear suffered from the friction of the towing.

Virgin has also incorporated a carbon-offset program through Myclimate, a Swiss based charity, that counterbalances their carbon emissions by giving support to organizations that promote clean energy sources, especially in developing countries (Easier.com, 2007). The carbon-offset programs can differ in implementation. Virgin Atlantic claimed they would plant

trees in order to counter the CO<sub>2</sub> produced by other, more questionable services they provide, such as complimentary limousine service for elite customers. They also give their passengers the option to donate to organizations as a way of offsetting their carbon. These organizations include a variety of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to a hydropower plant in Indonesia. The charity of this program enables customers to offset one's travel while creating an impact in local communities and the environment.

As this summary indicates, through their public commitment to becoming a more sustainable, environmentally conscious company, Virgin has created a particular image that strives to be green. They have produced documents, held press conferences, and incorporated their pledge to emphasize their industrial identity. Virgin Atlantic thus appeals to their consumers by outlining several details related to the sustainable efforts.

Nonetheless, there has been backlash against Virgin Atlantic and their promotion of a green industrial identity from environmental and consumer groups. Greenpeace UK is the leader of this opposition in alleging that Virgin Atlantic's green initiatives are greenwashing. Greenpeace is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that focuses on the vitality of the Earth. The international group brings what they believe to be environmental injustices to light. They attempt to spark change in order to rectify environmental issues. This environmental organization claims Virgin is guilty of 'high altitude greenwash' precisely due to the highly publicized biofuel flight in 2008 (Greenpeace.org.uk, 2008). The production of this particular biofuel, composed of coconut and babassu oil, they argue, could still lead to substantial greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, the massive demand of production necessary for biofuels calls for more land, taking away from the natural environment as well as potential vegetation. The production of biofuels lead to questions surrounding deforestation, indirect effects on

climate change, and the future impact that it may cause. Dr. Parr, the chief scientist at Greenpeace, claims that according to scientific evidence, biofuel production is detrimental to the poor, the environment's biodiversity, and the climate (Greenpeace.org.uk, 2008).

In addition, Greenpeace questions Virgin's attempted corporate green identity due to their support in building an additional runway in the London Heathrow airport. The proposed runway is projected to skyrocket the amount of flights going through Heathrow. Ridgeway, the CEO of Virgin America, claimed that the new runway would not prevent climate change. Greenpeace argues that Virgin Atlantic's green initiatives are cancelled out because of their blatant support of the proposed runway. This text gives us an opposing view of Virgin Atlantic's green initiatives, which highlights the unseen aspects that the company may not publicize. In criticism, it is important to hear the differing voices in order to create a judgment. This information is crucial to gain a better understanding of the situation surrounding the airline industry and its relationship with the environment. Corporations are more likely to emphasize their achievements and pay minor attention to their failures. This way of communication can create a skewed picture to the public.

Dealing with economic success and environmental integrity has proved to be an issue for Virgin, which must deal with varying sides and opinions. As discussed earlier in Chapters 1 and 2, greenwashing is a practice used by organizations that play on consumers' fallacies based on the image and identity portrayed by the corporation. In today's vast marketplace, it can be very difficult to identify a green product versus a greenwashed product. Companies see the value in partaking in the practice of promoting themselves as green to appeal to those eco-conscious consumers. In order to work cohesively and establish change for our climate, we must be able to trust the word given to us by corporations when attempting to use our consumer purchasing

power. Establishing this condition guides us to the next chapter, which studies Virgin Atlantic's green initiatives as potential examples of greenwashing with respect to the advertising of their green corporate image to the public. We, as consumers, need to become more critical of a corporation's image and identity in order to gain a larger perspective to understand their true motives. Using this power provides us the opportunity to make decisions that truly align with our beliefs and values.

My analysis of Virgin Atlantic's attempted green image aims to uncover the patterns seen in sustainability rhetoric as well as the characteristics of greenwashing. The texts described in this chapter permit a critique of the organization's green initiatives and their commitment to the environment. The analysis will pay attention to the sustainability efforts as possible examples of greenwashing. Through the examination of the texts detailing Virgin Atlantic's greener organization attempts as well as the pushback from eco-groups such as Greenpeace, I plan to look for certain features that can be classified as greenwashing. I will focus on image and identity as factors that contribute to Virgin Atlantic's possible greenwashing. Their publicized image is crucial to understanding the consumer-producer relationship and how an unequal balance can attribute to issues such as skewed views. In my analysis, I will determine what aspects can be labeled as greenwashing through the perception of image and identity. It is critical to understand how the organization uses certain strategies in order to achieve their goal of creating a green identity that is relatable to the public. Virgin creates their image and identity through what they present to the public and focus on the positives of their industry, even though they are currently dependent on fossil fuel production. Characteristics that could deem Virgin Atlantic's initiatives as greenwashing include creating hype around small efforts, lack of communication in regards to programs' progress, and the inconsistent voice of the group. Virgin

has highly boasted about their commitment to the environment, even though their efforts can be seen as small-scale solutions to large-scale problems. I will go into further detail highlighting these three aspects within the corporation's rhetoric as possible factors that may contribute to greenwashing. Greenwashing plays upon the public's attempt to use their consumer power to harness change. Consumers fall victim to mislead information, which can result in uninformed decisions. Understanding how greenwashing is dormant in organization's rhetoric, particularly in image and identity, will give the public a greater view of organizations and their actual commitment to their promised green programs. The upcoming chapter will provide my analysis of the features seen in Virgin Atlantic's green initiatives through their corporate image and identity façade in relation to their environmental efforts.

## Chapter 4

This study of Virgin Atlantic's green initiatives will provide us with a deeper sense of how corporate image and identity are created through organizational rhetoric. Specifically, I will investigate rhetoric depicting this corporation's sustainable efforts as a possible case of greenwashing. In critiquing the texts produced by Virgin Atlantic, as well as by its critics, I will highlight characteristics of potential greenwashing such as hype around small-scale efforts, lack of communication surrounding programs' progresses, and inconsistency between promises and actions.

As discussed in the previous chapter, executives in the Virgin Group have voiced their concerns, efforts, and promises concerning environmental topics. Richard Branson has led his company to follow a greener route citing the importance of corporate social responsibility. The *Change is in the Air* document is plastered with photos of Branson at events such as 'We Day', which is a program for students who have committed to taking social action involving local and global change (2013). In one of the photos in the document, Branson is seen with his daughter, who co-chaired the event, speaking to the crowd about the program that strives to empower young people and teachers to change the curriculum and instill passion within the education system. This program aims to have students make actions supporting their passions. Branson is also seen in promotional shots showcasing the company's environmental efforts. For example, he is posed at right with a well-known designer in a photo detailing their changes to staffs' uniforms such as using recycled material and more durable



fabrics to reduce waste. It is apparent that these photos are chosen to associate Richard Branson's roguish persona with the corporate identity. These images create a visual reference to consumers. In the document, Branson uses transformational leadership techniques to create a relationship with the company's customers. A large aspect of Virgin Atlantic's green identity is tied to Branson's stance on the environment. This puts shoppers in a mindset in which they can identify with Branson and his opinions. These techniques can convince shoppers to choose their airline versus their competitors based solely on the image they portray to the public.

There has been an outcry against Virgin claiming that the publicized practices are a form of promoting their corporate eco-conscious identity. Virgin Atlantic and Richard Branson are known for their exuberant aspects in the business world from futuristic designs to extravagant events such as the highly promoted biofuel flight on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Branson has branded himself as a billionaire who isn't afraid to defy the business odds with antics. For example, Branson and Virgin have been attempting to pioneer a commercial space flight in the near future. This bold move shows their desire for innovation. Unfortunately, the promotion of this program leads creates inconsistency in the company's their green identity. Branson has spoken publicly about the importance of the environment and has urged others in the industry to follow his company's lead. In a letter to other industry leaders, Branson states, "we need to accelerate the pace at which we reduce aviation's impact on the environment. We cannot ignore that aviation does create environmental problems, although equally it produces significant economic and social benefits," (Airways, 2006). Here we see Branson's opinion concerning the environment and business. But do these publicized promises have meaning? And if so, what is their purpose or intention? In the upcoming paragraphs, I will critique the rhetoric associated with three controversial green initiatives promised by Virgin Atlantic Airways in order to determine their

relationship with greenwashing. This will provide the public with a better grasp as to how greenwashing can operate in organizational rhetoric, specifically in its production of corporate image.

In 2006, Virgin Atlantic implemented a program that would decrease fuel use by towing aircrafts on the runway to their takeoff start. This program silently disappeared due to negative effects on the landing gear. Virgin discreetly ended the fuel-saving initiative yet never stated anything to the public in regards to the termination. The plane-towing program boasted hope for energy efficiency through changing their procedures. It made large promises to the public about this new initiative and how the decreased use of fuel would add up for every flight. Virgin stated that this new program would save up to 2 gallons of fuel each time. The implementation of this new program was the only literature documented in the public sphere from Virgin Atlantic. They produced a press release detailing their new effort claiming that these changes would burn less fuel, emit less carbon dioxide, and dramatically improve air quality both on the ground and in the air (Airways, 2006). These were large promises made by the corporation that hyped up their new green program. Stating that this change would create drastic effects seems a bit farfetched. The press release provides data detailing other smaller initiatives such as using lighter paint for their planes or reducing the weight of the aircraft by swapping out heavy materials for lighter materials. Indeed, these are changes Virgin Atlantic is attempting to make but unfortunately, it is reasonable to argue that larger change needs to be addressed, due to the pressing issue of climate change. These minimal changes only provide a Band-Aid for the situation without unveiling the changes necessary to create an impact on the industry and environment. Virgin continues to preach these efforts as a promotion of their green image but more recently the group has gone quiet in regards to the plane-towing program. The corporation brags about this program when it

was first implemented. This seems as though the publicity was used to enhance their public image in the positive perspective while staying silent later on. An important theme seen here is that Virgin steers clear from shedding light on the negative aspects of their industry. This could be seen an indicator showcasing the importance of their corporate image due to the attempts to protect their identity from being tarnished through negative press. The silence in this situation showcases Virgin Atlantic's immediate attention to positive press versus realistic reports relating to the environment. Virgin benefits from the skewed image they promote to the public, yet they do not state their actual intentions clearly to consumers. Their main intention as a corporation is to succeed in the business world. In the business sphere, companies strive to be the top dog in their field. To be a top leader, we see it as having a product or service become a household name. This is the overall concern businesses are faced with in order to prove they are the best in their area. Virgin may detail and publicize their green initiatives but that does not take away from their anti-environmental decisions such as the promise of biofuels, which would be an unsustainable source of fuel. These other efforts they promote are all lower priorities and concerns because the organization must earn funds in order to thrive. Even though Virgin Atlantic seems to have great care and concern for the environment, they do not focus on the depth of the issue their industry causes to our Earth.

Other literature has emerged detailing how this eco-effort was no longer a part of the Virgin Atlantic taxiing procedure. Backlash from environmental groups argues that this program may have had good intentions but was not well thought out (Greenbiz, 2008). In retrospect, we may consider that creating immense friction between the tires and tarmac seems like an issue that might have arisen in the planning process. Another controversial aspect of this program was that in order to participate in the plane-towing procedure, airports would have to renovate their

runways. For this program to be effective, several airports would have to partake and, realistically it wouldn't be feasible or even possible, from their perspective. Environmental groups have also criticized Virgin Atlantic's efforts as an example of greenwashing due to their unrealistic promises concerning the reduction of their environmental impact. These critics are skeptical of the buzzwords used by Virgin such as "the importance of technology advances as solutions to our current climate situation" (Airways, 2006). Critics view these terms and phrases as merely a calculated projection of a positive public image. For example, Jeff Gazard, an Aviation Environment Federation board member, stated that Virgin's green initiatives are tools used to decrease passengers' guilt about air travel, and to convince legislators of their green efforts, in order to placate resistance to the company's continued growth at its present unsustainable rate (Greenbiz, 2010). In the press release provided by Virgin Atlantic, it states that the plane-towing program is a sustainable change to the current aviation industry. The organization stated, "as a first step towards sustainable aviation, Virgin Atlantic today set out its global vision for radically more efficient aircraft movements around the world's busiest airports" (Airways, 2006). This directly showcases their goal image of being an innovator in the industry because of the way they portray their identity as embracing change and moving towards a more sustainable future through their programs. Their use of words encourages hope that desired change will result from these small-scale solutions, even when it is large-scale change that is needed. It is understandable for a corporation to start with smaller steps but in the case of Virgin Atlantic it seems as though these small steps are being promoted as industry-changing programs.

In a related case, several groups also called Virgin Atlantic's 2008 biofuel flight a culprit of greenwashing. These groups, such as Greenpeace, claimed that this was another ploy by Virgin Atlantic to promote their green identity. Again, this was an initiative that did not seem too

promising from the beginning, especially due to the immense amount of crops needed to produce the biofuel, which could jeopardize large amounts of land such as the Amazon Rainforest. Virgin Atlantic created a large hype about the flight but failed to incorporate the realistic demand necessary for today's air travel. Virgin stated "sustainable biofuel must be environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable" (Airways, *Biofuel flight*, 2006). Here, we see a verbalized statement that encompasses several aspects seen throughout many of their public documents. Virgin stated, yet did not widely promote, that the demo flight's fuel was not realistic as a long-term or grand solution. The organization claimed, "we wanted to make a visible demonstration of our commitment to find a sustainable alternative to traditional crude-oil based kerosene" (Airways, *Biofuel flight*, 2006). Directly from this quote, we gain a better understanding of Virgin's stance on the biofuel program. The corporation themselves briefly included this in their press release as a minimal portion of their program's downfalls. This quote was only found in an archived press release online yet not publicized in the media surrounding the group's efforts. This aspect was not nearly as detailed as the flight itself. Virgin focused on promoting positive media in order to fulfill their goal of portraying themselves as a green organization. They promised change that would "burn considerably less fuel and emit much lower levels of CO<sub>2</sub>, dramatically improving air quality on the ground and in the air" (Airways, 2006). These were big undertakings for the corporation to state to the public. This smaller program was boasted in a way that one could believe that it would have a drastic effect on their emissions. The media produced surrounding the flight molded consumers' perception of Virgin Atlantic and possibly even the airline industry. It provided the people with a glimpse of the future for aviation yet did not discuss the limitations of this particular initiative. The ways in which this effort was promoted, the public could have thought this biofuel was the answer to the

industry's dilemma of dependency on fossil fuels. It made it seem as though this solution was possible in a very distant future by their large advertising of this corporate effort. Not only was the mass production of this biofuel impractical, but it also misrepresented the actual requirements of travel in today's global economy.

These two programs do seem great in theory but when faced with reality, they seem to miss the mark. Virgin Atlantic has been known to support the expansion of London Heathrow Airport, claiming that it will not cause an impact on the environment yet are constantly promoting their green efforts in order to be perceived as a green corporation. This leads us to the concept of contradiction. How can this group attempt to maintain a green image while violating their promises to the environment? This makes it seem as though Virgin Atlantic is participating in these green efforts in order to persuade the public that they are a green organization.

Lastly, Virgin Atlantic has made a carbon-offsetting program available to their passengers. This displays their supposed commitment to the environment while involving their consumers in the process. Unfortunately, paying for these deeds does not solve the issue of emissions. Carbon offsetting is a controversial topic for several environmental activists because of the uncertainty related to the situation. For example, a passenger can donate to protect a forest but does not know if the forest was under threat in the first place. This puts passengers mind at ease in regards to their eco-conscious beliefs but does not get at the deeper issues at hand such as increased air travel resulting in higher carbon emissions. Branson commented, "We hope our passengers will be keen to become members of our Gold Standard Mile High Offset Club" (Easier.com, 2007). This quote emphasizes the consumer's support in their green initiatives, making them a part of their green efforts. This program harnesses consumers' efforts and in turn fulfills Virgin Atlantic's portrayal of their green image through their consumers.

Environmentally savvy passengers are more inclined to travel with Virgin because of the promised green programs but can fall victim to greenwashing. These consumers want to make an impact through their purchasing power but can be unaware of corporation's honest procedures.

A study by the Times of London found "that most of the green policies adopted by Virgin are having little, if no, positive effect on the environment" (ForceChange, n.d.). In the case of Virgin Atlantic Airways, we have analyzed the company's green initiatives are possible perpetrators of greenwashing through their promotion of a greener image using particular aspects of environmental communication. To gain a clearer understanding of the organization, we as a society respect their attempts at proposed solutions with their successes and failures but do not condone falsifying efforts in order to gain an advantage.

## Chapter 5

In this study, we have explored the rhetoric seen within Virgin Atlantic's green campaign. The analysis of these efforts proved to have striking characteristics that condone greenwashing. Virgin harnesses their image and identity as main points to achieve a desired perception amongst the general population. As partakers of greenwashing practices, it is important for the public to comprehend when efforts are used for portrayal purposes or if they are in fact substantial efforts.

I began the study asking 4 main questions: 1) How has Virgin Atlantic used organizational rhetoric, in particular the emphasis on image and identity, to convey their environmental goals? 2) How does the organization's use of rhetoric achieve identification? 3) Are Virgin Atlantic's green initiatives culprits of greenwashing? 4) Why is greenwashing important to identify in the corporate world? Using these questions to guide the paper provided us with the rich opportunity to dissect and understand the key factors that contribute to greenwashing practices. It was found that Virgin strives to promote their green identity through their public image produced by their texts and interactions with the public. The use of image and identity was crucial to honing in on a large corporation's organizational rhetoric. Virgin Atlantic strives to be the leader for environmental change in their industry so in turn they emphasize their large dedication efforts. Unfortunately, these efforts are highly publicized as a means to give consumers a promise that these solutions are a large attempt at reducing the group's impact on the environment. Virgin tries to use these green initiatives as a basis for showing their commitment to the environment yet falls short of the grand promises made to the public. These promises promote large-scale change but do not pay attention to the reality and severity of the situation. However, Virgin still gains respect from the public due to their vocalized commitment

to their green initiatives. As a business, it is important to keep corporate social responsibility (CSR) in mind when making decisions. This concept helps keep the balance of maintaining a successful business while making sound choices in regards to their impact on society and the environment. Virgin is seen to make decisions with CSR in mind. They value the importance of the Earth and their consumers, yet the business aspect seems to outweigh their initiatives and efforts.

I reviewed several of the publications produced by the Virgin group detailing their green efforts that provides documents to the public about their viewpoints and programs in relation to the environment. This aspect of communication focuses on the field of environmental communication as a way of portraying their green efforts to the public. Environmental communication is a relatively new field of communication that embraces the forms of speech surrounding the environment. Virgin uses environmental communication as grounds for promoting their green efforts. They see the value in voicing their sustainable green commitments as a way to strengthen their corporate identity. Virgin uses a hopeful voice in order to gain consumers' trust and create a perception of their image within the public eye. The organization uses tactics such as 'being understanding' to construct a bond between them and their passengers. From a business perspective, it is critical for consumers to view the organization in a positive light. This is why groups, such as Virgin Atlantic, are constantly striving to upkeep their image in order to succeed as a business. They use their voice, particularly in the public sphere, as means to obtain their perceived identity to form their position within society.

Virgin Atlantic depends on their consumer's perception of their corporation in order to gain support. Image and identity is crucial to their business so they strive to embrace a positive image, whatever it may entail. Virgin has constantly promoted their green efforts as a way for

them to shed light on their commitment to the Earth's well-being. These programs have given minimal change to the industry while boasting large strides for a sustainable future. Critics have argued that Virgin Atlantic is partaking in greenwashing because of their inconsistent voice. For example, Virgin Atlantic preaches their green efforts such as the biofuel flight yet still supports the expansion of the London Heathrow airport while remaining silent on carbon taxing policies. Virgin boasted about the great initiative of the bio-fuels flight without really honing in on the realistic factors that influence air travel. The rhetoric of silence has been found to be a large aspect communication. The silence can be crucial to understanding what a group may be deterring their audience from as well as keeping information under wraps for particular reasons. When it comes to environmental topics, Virgin is the first to make statements about their efforts such as the carbon offset tax. The corporation swears by their green programs and classifies themselves as a leader in their industry for the environment. Although the group promotes themselves to the public as a green corporation, they are still in support of practices that may be determined as anti-green such as the expansion of the London Heathrow airport. Virgin seems to be the forerunner to the public in regards to industry change but the programs fall short of the large promises made.

Regardless of what the company's efforts are, the main idea is that they're winning over consumers with the advertising of their green initiatives. In organization rhetoric, it is common for groups to succumb to pressures as well as make decisions that may not be agreed upon. In groups, it is necessary to find the balance between positive and negative impacts in relation to the environment, economy, and other aspects that may be affected by an industry. Organizations can fall into these two categories and it is up to the consumers to educate themselves in order to pick an appropriate side. In the case of greenwashing, a consumer has to decide if they believe

the companies' green efforts or considers them to be promotional aspects for their image and identity. This is critical to the relationship between the consumer and producer because we as a society place trust and value in large groups, believing they have the public's best interest at heart. Unfortunately, several corporations lag in genuine acts of CSR and use green image promotion as a way to garner the trust of their consumers.

Understanding how and why a corporation would partake in greenwashing is critical to finding the aspects in which greenwashing may appear in a company's rhetoric. Organizations communicate specifically what they want the consumer population to take away from their efforts. Corporations are masters of communication, environmental communication in this case to be exact. Virgin has experts in several areas whom determine the steps and procedures the business should take in order to achieve their desired goal. The image that the group promotes can be partial to how they want the public to perceive their organization. This ties back to the importance of determining whether a view is skewed or not that is provided to the public. A skewed view can create an imbalance and force decision makers to choose in favor of the corporation, regardless of the consumer's knowing ability. This can be seen as a method of persuasion by discreetly convincing passengers to select their airline versus others due to their proposed green efforts.

Through the critique of this particular study, we have found Virgin Atlantic as a culprit of greenwashing through the use of their portrayal of a green corporate identity. My analysis highlighted the characteristics that could possibly prove a group's green efforts as a perpetrator of greenwashing. Virgin has been found guilty under the aspects of their emphasis on publicizing their small-scale efforts as possible, grand solutions to climate change, as well as their silence surrounding programs progress and failures, and their contradicting economic versus

environmental voice. Organizations embrace the rhetoric they put forth to the public as a way of promoting their image, which creates a preferred view in the mind of the consumers. Virgin Atlantic is well known for their involvement with the media citing the importance of public knowledge. Unfortunately, this knowledge can emphasize the positives while downplaying the realistic evaluation of their green programs. Greenwashing is harmful to the economic trust between consumers and producers. It plays upon a consumer's weakness by providing them with an unequal view, resulting in decisions that benefit their corporation. This imbalance leads to a distrust of large groups that preach having the consumers' best interest at heart. As a public, we must use examples such as Virgin Atlantic's green initiatives as a way to understand the characteristics that could point to potential greenwashing. The repercussions of greenwashing hinder our growth into a sustainable future by using dubious claims as real change. To succeed as a population, we must figure out how to implement genuine change and communicate it properly to the public in order to create a transparent society. Transparency can be a positive attempt to have consumers and producers understand each other's intentions and move forward to progress. As for Virgin Atlantic Airways, they may have partaken in certain aspects of greenwashing but they do attempt to make a change for their industry in order to better their image as well as the environment. Their success will be limited until they strive to make waves in the sustainable initiatives promised to the public by their corporate identity.

In conclusion, greenwashing can be seen on several different levels ranging from small efforts to large promises such as in the case of Virgin Atlantic and their three initiatives detailed in this study. It is important to determine when a corporation is partaking in greenwashing in order to understand their intentions as well as their practices. The benefit of this study will help provide a clearer lens in relation to greenwashing and environmental communication for the

public as well as organizations in their attempt to convey messages to the public detailing their authentic efforts.

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