

Respon Retoris Perusahaan Terindeks SRI-Kehati terhadap Isu Sosial dan Lingkungan yang Diekspos Media

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to examine the rhetorical responses of companies indexed by SRI-Kehati to social and environmental issues as presented in their sustainability reports. Additionally, it aims to compare these responses with those from non-indexed companies and to investigate the correlation between negative media exposure and companies' rhetorical strategies. The study encompasses 60 observations and utilizes both qualitative and quantitative analytical approaches. The findings reveal that companies employ a range of rhetorical strategies to address media exposure concerning social and environmental issues. Moreover, the analysis demonstrates a significant difference in rhetorical responses between companies indexed by SRI-Kehati and those that are not. There is also a notable negative correlation between the extent of negative media exposure and the nature of the companies' rhetorical responses, suggesting that increased negative media attention influences the strategies companies adopt in their sustainability reporting.

Keywords: Rhetorical Response; Media Exposure; SRI-Kehati Index.

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis respon retoris perusahaan yang terindeks SRI-Kehati terhadap isu sosial dan lingkungan yang terekspos dalam laporan keberlanjutannya, menganalisis perbedaan respon retoris antara perusahaan yang terindeks SRI-Kehati dan tidak terindeks, serta menganalisis hubungan antara media eksposur negatif dengan respon retoris.. Sampel penelitian terdiri dari 60 observasi. Data dianalisis melalui dua pendekatan: kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa beberapa perusahaan menggunakan berbagai strategi retorika untuk merespon paparan media terkait isu sosial dan lingkungan yang menerpa perusahaan. Selain itu, temuan penelitian menunjukkan perbedaan yang signifikan dalam respon retoris antara perusahaan yang terindeks SRI-Kehati dan yang tidak terindeks, serta terdapat hubungan negatif yang signifikan antara media eksposur negatif dan respons retoris perusahaan.

Kata Kunci: Respon Retoris; Media Eksposur; Indeks SRI-Kehati.

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INTRODUCTION

Prior research has demonstrated that companies sensitive to social and environmental issues often use rhetorical disclosures in their sustainability reports to clarify the challenges they face (Ardiana, 2019), (Arora & Lodhia, 2017), (Boiral, 2013), (Laine, 2009), (Riduwan & Andayani, 2019). Despite this, studies focusing on rhetorical responses within socially and environmentally reputable firms, such as those indexed by SRI-Kehati, remain scarce. Kusumawati & Warastuti (2020) and Sunandes (2020) have identified SRI-Kehati indexed companies as having strong social and environmental credentials, recognized by investors and stakeholders. This positive reputation raises stakeholders' expectations regarding the companies' responses to pertinent social and environmental issues.

Ardiana (2019) suggests that these companies often craft their responses to protect their reputation, carefully selecting diction and constructing narratives that mitigate potential reputational damage, particularly when these issues receive public attention through media exposure. Therefore, SRI-Kehati indexed companies are likely to employ rhetorical strategies in their sustainability reports to address social and environmental concerns.

Media exposure significantly impacts how stakeholders perceive social and environmental issues (Zakaria et al., 2023). According to (Sriningsih & Wahyuningrum, 2022), company reports by external media can serve a dual purpose: they enhance public legitimacy and create pressure on the company. Legitimacy theory suggests that disclosures about social and environmental responsibilities are driven by media influence (Permatasari & Setyastrini, 2019), based on a perceived social contract between the company and the local community (Safriani & Utomo, 2020). Sarra & Sustari (2020) argue that this theory necessitates aligning company activities with the community's values, norms, and beliefs to maintain legitimacy.

The rapid expansion of companies often exerts detrimental effects on the environment, attracting considerable attention from stakeholders (Hapsari, 2023). SRI-Kehati indexed companies are not exempt from scrutiny; for instance, BNI, a constituent of SRI-Kehati, was implicated in a scandal involving the alleged embezzlement of customer deposit funds by marketing personnel at its Makassar branch (Kompas.com, 2022). According to Shimizu et al., (2022), such incidents can diminish public trust and social acceptance of companies.

Additionally, internet media have highlighted environmental controversies, such as the accusations against PT. Astra Agro Lestari Tbk of causing ecological damage in Central and West Sulawesi (Mangobay.co.id, 2023). Such environmental damage is considered a violation of the community's right to a healthy environment and is categorized as environmental crime (Rochmani, 2015). Both social and environmental issues are crucial in sustaining a company's reputation and operational legitimacy (Kholmi & Nafiza, 2022).

In this context, accounting plays a pivotal role in managing corporate relationships with the environment, particularly through responsible disclosure and reporting practices (Chasbiandani et al., 2019). Sustainability reports serve as vital tools for communicating corporate responsibility to a broad array of stakeholders (Ardiana, 2019). Weda & Sudana (2021) argue that the information in these reports is essential for supporting sustainable development. However, the

publication of sustainability reports has faced criticism for lacking in accountability and transparency (Widyastuti & Endarwati, 2023). Prior research indicates that companies often disclose only favorable information to enhance their profits and reputation, neglecting true accountability to stakeholders (Kuzey & Uyar, 2017). Conversely, Wardoyo et al. (2023) suggest that transparent and accountable sustainability reporting can significantly enhance a company's public image and reputation, aligning with the principles of legitimacy theory.

In light of the social and environmental issues affecting SRI-Kehati indexed companies, employing a rhetorical strategy to analyze the content of sustainability reports published by these companies is particularly pertinent. Narrative content within sustainability reports significantly shapes readers' perceptions of a company (Nakao et al., 2019). Boiral (2013) categorizes the rhetoric in sustainability reports into three levels: accurately representing reality, distorting reality, and concealing reality.

This research introduces a novel methodological approach. Unlike most previous studies that rely on the GRI Standard to measure the disclosure in sustainability reports using the CSR Index, this approach critiques the assumption that quantity of disclosure equates to quality. It challenges the conventional view that more GRI Standard items disclosed signify a superior sustainability report. Boiral (2013) suggests that sustainability reports often reflect management rhetoric, revealing more about a company's internal decisions and perceived realities than about its actual environmental and social impacts.

Another innovation of this study is its approach to rhetorical responses. Previous research often analyzed these responses arbitrarily, without a specific trigger. In contrast, this study systematically examines how media coverage of relevant social and environmental issues influences the rhetorical strategies companies employ in their sustainability reporting. This method provides a grounded basis for analyzing how companies strategically construct their narratives in response to public scrutiny.

Wijaya (2019) outlines legitimacy theory as a framework founded on the social interactions between companies and society, wherein companies are expected to align their objectives with the values and norms of the surrounding community. In this vein, companies indexed by SRI-Kehati are often cited as exemplars due to their commitment to social and environmental responsibilities and good governance within the Indonesian capital market (Yayasan Kehati, 2023). This perspective aligns with Dewi & Oriana (2014), Kusumawati & Warastuti (2020), and Sunandes (2020), who regard the SRI-Kehati index as a benchmark for sustainable business practices, particularly in environmental stewardship (Stella et al., 2020). The adoption of the SRI framework propels companies to invest in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, which ultimately enhances their reputations (Heriyanto et al., 2019). Consequently, SRI-Kehati indexed companies demonstrate a higher level of engagement in CSR activities, particularly those that support sustainable environmental programs, compared to non-indexed companies.

The inclusion of companies in the SRI-Kehati index involves a three-stage selection process, culminating in a fundamental assessment based on six criteria focused on social, environmental, and corporate governance factors (Fikri, 2023).

This rigorous selection process indicates that SRI-Kehati indexed companies possess a heightened awareness of social and environmental issues. When faced with challenges related to these areas, these companies are likely to respond in ways that uphold and reinforce their reputations, which are predicated on positive perceptions of their social and environmental commitments, unlike their non-indexed counterparts. From this analysis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁: There is a difference in rhetorical response between companies indexed by SRI-Kehati and those that are not indexed by SRI-Kehati.

Legitimacy theory suggests that media exposure can significantly enhance a company's legitimacy in the public eye (Kholmi & Nafiza, 2022), (Sriningsih & Wahyuningrum, 2022). Transparent disclosure of corporate activities and their environmental impacts by companies can bolster public trust by demonstrating a commitment to social and environmental considerations. As the use of internet media grows, the coverage of these issues becomes more accessible and widespread, increasing public awareness (Arikarsita & Wirakusuma, 2020), (Yuliskayani & Damayanthi, 2018).

Companies that receive high levels of negative media exposure are compelled to address these issues prominently in their sustainability reports (Sandi et al., 2021). The publication of these reports serves to affirm that corporate governance, as well as environmental and social impacts, align with community expectations and ethical standards (Dhamayanti et al., 2022), (Wagiswari & Badera, 2021). Companies that are perceived as responsive and transparent in addressing social and environmental concerns highlighted in the media are often viewed more favorably and considered committed to sustainability principles.

Based on this analysis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₂: There is a significant positive relationship between negative media exposure and rhetorical responses to social and environmental issues as depicted in the media.

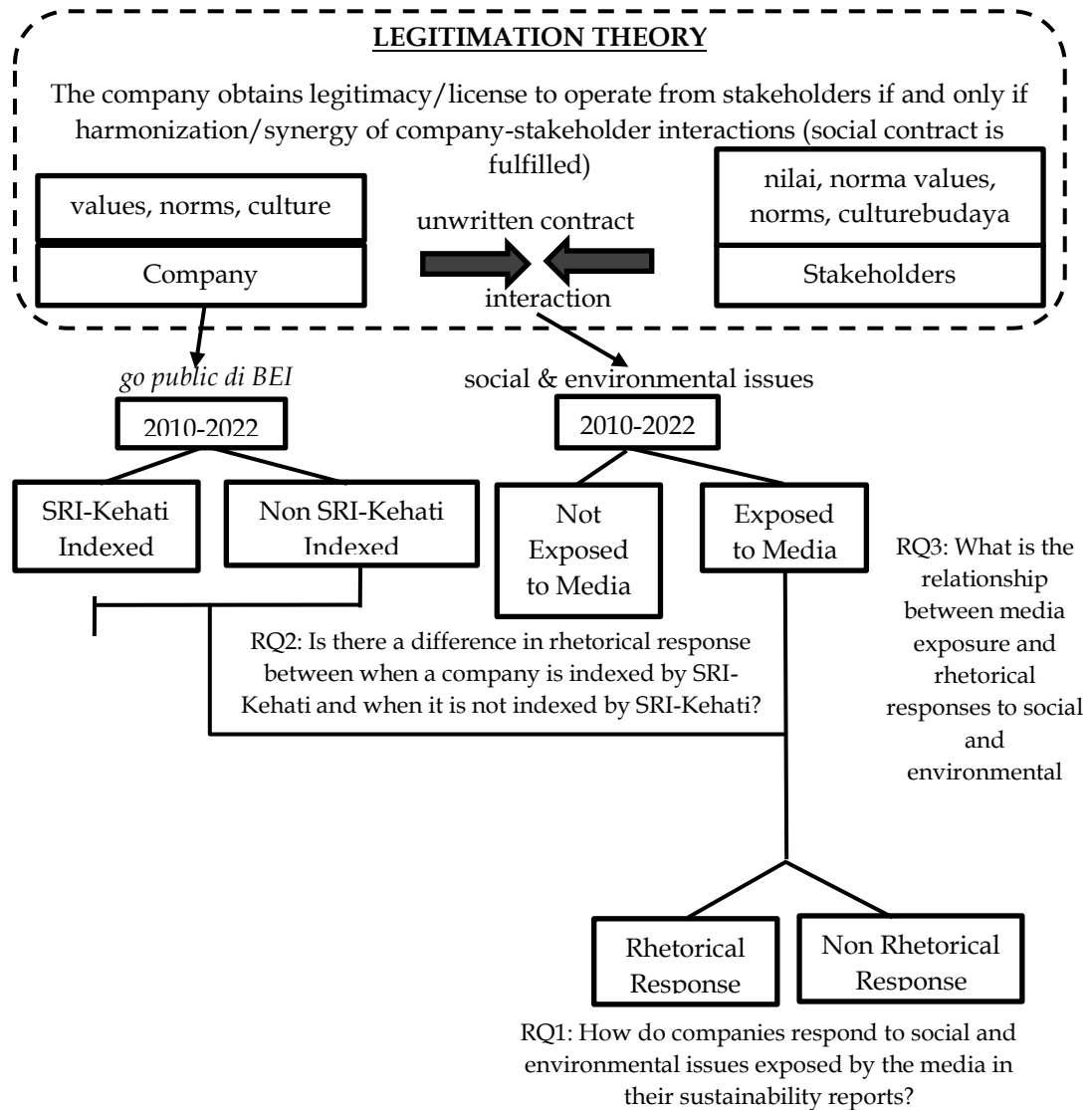


Figure 1. Research Model

Source: Research Data, 2024

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze companies' rhetorical responses to social and environmental issues as depicted in sustainability reports and media exposure. The research was conducted on SRI-Kehati indexed companies over a period from December 2022 to May 2023, covering historical data from 2010 to 2022. Data collection was achieved using documentation methods to gather necessary data, supplemented by non-participant observation.

The population for this study includes all SRI-Kehati indexed companies during the specified period. A nonprobability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, was utilized, resulting in a sample size of 60 observations.

The study defines two types of variables: independent and dependent. The independent variables are media exposure (X1) and the SRI-Kehati index (X2). Media exposure, which involves the dissemination of information related to company activities by the media (Purnomo, 2021), is measured using a dummy variable: a score of 1 is assigned if the media exposure includes details of monetary losses, and a score of 0 if it does not. The SRI-Kehati index, Indonesia's green index launched on June 8, 2009 (Yayasan Kehati, 2023), also uses a dummy variable: a score of 1 is given if a company is indexed by SRI-Kehati when faced with social and environmental issues, and a score of 0 if not.

The dependent variable, rhetorical response, refers to how companies employ rhetoric in their sustainability reports. Rhetoric, as defined by Sutrisno & Wiendijarti (2014), is the art and science of using language effectively to influence and inform. The measurement of rhetorical response is based on whether companies use one of the Rhetorical Strategies in Sustainability Disclosures index items when responding to social and environmental issues in the media (Ardiana, 2019), (Shrives & Brennan, 2017). A response matching an index item scores a 1, while no response scores a 0.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis for the qualitative component and the Mann-Whitney test and Phi correlation test for the quantitative analysis, employing SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) 26 software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Content analysis of sustainability reports revealed several rhetorical strategies as defined by the Rhetorical Strategies in Sustainability Disclosure index. For instance, the 2021 sustainability report of PT Bank Rakyat Indonesia (Persero) Tbk, referenced as sample number 38, illustrates a simple denial by stating, "In 2021, one type of customer complaint is the availability of information totaling 2,488,589 customer complaints and 100% resolved [p.187]." This statement suggests that all customer complaints were resolved without detailing the nature of the issues or the resolution process, effectively obscuring the real challenges faced by the company. This lack of disclosure may be an attempt to avoid sharing details about social issues impacting the company, aligning with Oliveira et al. (2021), who noted that companies often use impression management strategies to conceal negative information while highlighting positive outcomes.

Similarly, the 2020 sustainability report of PT Jasa Marga (Persero) Tbk, identified as sample number 18, demonstrates a rhetorical strategy of shifting blame in response to social issues. The report states, "If during the land acquisition process there is displacement or resettlement, this is entirely within the authority of the Government. Therefore, this report does not reveal the number of people displaced or resettled under the project. However, this does not mean that Jasa Marga does not care at all if these excesses occur. Through the Corporate Social Responsibility Program as well as the Partnership and Community Development Program, the Company provides assistance in the form of infrastructure, support for local economic activities and empowerment to communities affected by the process of building and operating toll roads [p.134]." This statement deflects responsibility to the government and emphasizes the company's efforts to assist

affected communities, thereby mitigating potential reputational damage, particularly in the face of widespread media coverage (Ardiana, 2019).

This study identified a bolstering rhetorical response in the 2020 sustainability report of PT Bank Rakyat Indonesia (Persero) Tbk, cited as sample number 28. The report states, "There is an increase in the number of complaints in line with the increase in the number of services, business complexity, and customer transactions," followed by, "On the other hand, the level of complaint resolution shows good performance, where every year the number of resolved complaints increases." This approach aims to counterbalance negative perceptions by presenting positive outcomes alongside challenges, suggesting a balanced view that helps mitigate negative sentiment toward the company (Ardiana, 2019).

Another rhetorical strategy, minimization, is evident in the 2021 sustainability report of PT Bank Negara Indonesia (Persero) Tbk, listed as sample number 30. The report claims, "BNI is open and accepts complaints from the public regarding the operational impacts it causes, and in 2021 there were no significant complaints received." This statement acknowledges issues while simultaneously downplaying their severity, positioning them as non-significant to manage reputational risk (Shrives & Brennan, 2017). This aligns with findings by (Ardiana, 2019) that incidents reported were not deemed significant.

A different approach, transcendence, is used in the 2018 sustainability report of PT Unilever Indonesia Tbk, sample number 11. It states, "We (the company) continue to strive to ensure that the palm oil and derivatives we obtain for our core volume are 100% certified by 2019," acknowledging that the goal was not yet met in 2018. Furthermore, it adds, "Unilever aims to support and empower 150,000 small farmers by 2030 with three work streams to achieve the target, and in December 2018 Unilever collaborated with Aid environment to create a palm oil database." These statements highlight the company's commitment to long-term environmental and social objectives, using them to justify current shortcomings. This rhetorical strategy shifts the focus to broader, more significant goals, framing the actions as necessary steps toward these objectives (Shrives & Brennan, 2017).

The rhetorical response of PT Aneka Tambang (Persero) Tbk, as noted in its 2021 sustainability report (sample number 31), exemplifies corrective action. The report states, "ANTAM responded quickly to the environmental challenge by implementing Geotube technology from the Netherlands, which has a sludge suction capacity of about 22,000 m³. ANTAM has acquired seven containers of Geotube equipment to prevent sedimentation from reaching the sea. We are committed to ongoing improvements to restore the environment around the Monoropo site to its original condition." This response aligns with Ardiana (2019), illustrating that the company has addressed environmental concerns promptly and effectively. According to Anggraeni & Djakman (2018), failing to meet community expectations can result in a loss of legitimacy, hence the emphasis on corrective actions that suggest compliance has been or will be achieved (Shrives & Brennan, 2017).

Another rhetorical strategy employed is self-promotion, as seen in PT PP (Persero) Tbk's 2021 sustainability report (sample number 35), which states, "received one environmental problem complaint which was resolved successfully" and "received an award for the Lolak Dam project in North Sulawesi." These

statements not only acknowledge the resolution of an environmental complaint but also highlight the company's achievements, promoting its operational success as exemplary (Ardiana, 2019), (Shrives & Brennan, 2017).

Content analysis of 60 samples indicates that companies utilize various rhetorical strategies to respond to media exposure concerning social and environmental issues. The strategies include 13.33% simple denial, 1.67% shifting the blame, 30% bolstering, 6.67% minimization, 1.67% transcendence, 13.33% corrective action, and 1.67% self-promotion, while 31.67% did not respond. Despite this, no evidence suggests that SRI-Kehati indexed companies ignored their corporate social and environmental responsibilities during the period of December 2022 to May 2023. Notably, this study did not identify any instances of mortification, a response strategy where companies acknowledge and seek forgiveness for wrongdoing (Lauzen, 2016). Ardiana (2019) argued that without mortification, corrective actions might be perceived as merely symbolic. The findings indicate that companies tend to use rhetorical responses in their sustainability reports primarily as strategic tools for managing reputation risks rather than for genuine accountability to stakeholders.

Table 1. Average Rating

	SRI-Kehati Index	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Rhetorical Response	Non SRI-Kehati Indexed	18	23.33	420.00
	SRI-Kehati Indexed	42	33.57	1410.00
	Total	60		

Source: Research Data, 2024

Table 2 shows the mean rank for each group. The sample group of companies not indexed by SRI-Kehati, namely 23.33, is smaller than the sample group of companies indexed by SRI-Kehati, namely 33.57. This shows that there are differences in the average ranking of each group.

Table 2. Statistic test

	Rhetorical Response
Mann-Whitney U	249.000
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.010

Source: Research Data, 2024

The results of hypothesis testing using the Mann-Whitney test, as presented in Table 3, indicate that the asymptotic significance (2-tailed) value of 0.010 is less than the significance level of 0.05. This finding suggests a significant difference in the rhetorical responses between companies indexed by SRI-Kehati and those that are not. This result supports the assertion by Putri et al. (2023) that SRI-Kehati indexed companies possess a superior social and environmental reputation relative to other companies. Additionally, Sunandes (2020) notes that companies indexed by SRI-Kehati demonstrate robust performance in promoting sustainable business practices and exhibit a strong commitment to environmental and social issues, serving as benchmarks in these areas (Djaya Atmadja et al., 2019), (Stella et al., 2020).

Furthermore, this study aligns with the findings of Pástor et al. (2021), which highlight that SRI-Kehati, as a sustainable investment index, integrates

financial goals with environmental and social criteria in its investment decisions. Companies perceived as having a strong social and environmental reputation are more likely to engage in sustainability reporting as a means to uphold and enhance their legitimacy compared to their counterparts.

Table 3. Symmetrical Measurement

		<i>Value</i>	<i>Approximate Significance</i>
<i>Nominal by nominal</i>	Phi	-0.274	0.034
<i>N of Valid Cases</i>		60	

Source: Research Data, 2024

Hypothesis testing using Phi correlation test analysis, as shown in Table 4, reveals a significance (Sig.) value of 0.034, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates a significant negative relationship between negative media exposure and rhetorical responses in sustainability reports. Specifically, when the media more intensely exposes social and environmental issues, companies tend to reduce the intensity of their rhetorical responses.

This finding contributes to the legitimacy theory. Typically, in response to a reputational crisis caused by publicized issues, companies might react aggressively or defensively to preserve their legitimacy. However, this study observes that companies often decrease their rhetorical intensity while strategically analyzing and addressing the highlighted problems. (Solihin, 2021) suggests that inappropriate responses to a reputational crisis can exacerbate the situation. According to Safitri et al. (2019), managing a reputation crisis requires careful consideration of several factors including crisis identification, analysis, isolation, and the selection of an appropriate response strategy.

In line with Dewi & Oriana (2014), the SRI-Kehati indexed companies involved in this study adhere to the principles of sustainable responsible investment (SRI), necessitating cautious actions and statements to align with these principles. Interestingly, companies faced with intense media scrutiny tend to delay their responses to manage their reputations effectively. Safitri et al. (2019) found that one strategy for managing reputation crises involves postponing public hearings to isolate the issue, thus preventing legislative involvement that could impact other stakeholders.

SRI-Kehati indexed companies typically clarify their positions in their sustainability reports only after they have taken actual social and environmental responsibilities and achieved tangible outcomes. This approach is strategic to garner stakeholder support and maintain legitimacy as a socially and environmentally responsible entity. The emphasis on sustainability reports underscores a company's commitment to fulfilling its ethical responsibilities to both the environment and the social fabric of its operational context (Hapsari, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research reveal that companies employ various rhetorical strategies in their sustainability reports to manage reputation risks associated with media exposure to social and environmental issues, rather than to enhance accountability to stakeholders. Additionally, the study identifies a significant

difference in rhetorical responses between companies indexed by SRI-Kehati and those that are not. Specifically, indexed companies are more cautious in their diction and narrative construction when addressing media-exposed social and environmental issues, aiming to preserve their reputation and legitimacy. Furthermore, there is a notable negative correlation between the intensity of negative media exposure and the extent of companies' rhetorical responses in sustainability reports, suggesting that more intense media scrutiny leads to less aggressive rhetorical strategies in these reports.

This study has several limitations. The unit of analysis was confined to the sustainability reports of companies, excluding potential responses disseminated through other channels such as company websites, social media, or other reporting media. Future research could expand the scope to include these platforms. Additionally, the research was conducted without direct observations of the companies' operational conditions, relying solely on information provided in sustainability reports. Subsequent studies might benefit from interviews with personnel responsible for sustainability reporting to gain deeper insights into the decisions regarding issue inclusion in the reports. Lastly, the research was limited to companies listed in the SRI-Kehati Index during the period December 2022 to May 2023, with observations from 2010 to 2022. Different findings might emerge from studies covering different time frames or additional indices.

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