



LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

From core to store

A qualitative study of how retailers translate and communicate sustainability from corporate level to physical store

by

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May 2018

Master's Programme in International Marketing & Brand Management

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Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative case study conducted in the context of the Swedish fashion retailer MQ. Due to the growing importance of sustainability the purpose of this study is to investigate how retailers' sustainability work on corporate level is translated and communicated in the retail store environment. Further, it does also aim to explore how the physical space can be used to enable, encourage and engage consumers in sustainable consumption. In order to capture a holistic understanding of the sustainability translation process, empirical material was collected through interviews with employees within different organisational layers. These were complemented by store observations, one participant observation and document studies. Existing literature within the academic field of sustainable retailing is reviewed which together form a conceptual theoretical framework. This study deepens the understanding of the case and fills a gap in the existing literature when drawing on empirical material from the particular setting of fashion retail, which had not yet been investigated sufficiently.

The findings show that retailers find it challenging to make sure that sustainability permeates the entire organisation and a filtering process is identified with the result of a knowledge asymmetry. What has been found is that there are two on-going sensemaking processes, where employees both at corporate and store level are interpreting sustainability. Here, the understanding of how they perceive their different roles in relation to the concept has been deepened through proactive and reactive approaches. Further, this study points out the store as a venue with potential for the retailer to show its unique approach to sustainability. Thus, the challenges of communicating the complexity of sustainability while at the same time relating to a broad consumer base are also highlighted. Lastly, while connecting to the changes in the retail landscape and the redefinition of the role of the physical store, this study reflects on the place sustainability can take in the interaction between consumers and store personnel as a way to restore the relevance for the physical space.

Key words: sustainability; retail store; sustainability communication, sustainable retailing; sustainable consumption; fashion retail; sensemaking

Acknowledgements

This study is the result of a degree project in Global Marketing within a one year Master's Programme in International Marketing & Brand Management at Lund University. We would like to thank everyone who has been involved and contributed to the results of this thesis. First and foremost we would like to express our gratitude to our supervisor Jens Hultman for his genuine commitment and valuable guidance throughout this process. We would also like to thank Axel Welinder for his support and inputs. Further, we would like to show our appreciation to MQ for their cooperation as they helped us gain a deeper understanding of the particular case of this study. Lastly, we would like to thank all interviewees for their participation and valuable insights.

Johanna Bergvall and Lovisa Degerskär

Lund, May 28, 2018

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1 Introduction

This chapter aims to give an initial background of the research topic sustainable retailing and of how retailers incorporate sustainability into the daily operations due to their mediating role along the value chain. The importance of specifically focusing on the fashion industry is also highlighted. We then present our purpose and research questions along with the objectives of the study including theoretical and practical contributions, followed by definitions and the outline of the thesis.

1.1 Background

”Consumers have the opportunity to influence, but companies are the ones with the power to change”
(Svensk Handel, 2017, p.33)

There has been an increased discussion about sustainability over the last decades (Strähle, 2017) and the challenges with social and environmental issues caused by unsustainable production and consumption is today inevitable (Svensk Handel, 2017). The growing focus on sustainability has led to the implementation of sustainability into the daily operations of various retailers in order to improve their environmental impact along their supply chains (Hvass, 2014; Strähle, 2017). The incentives for companies to engage in sustainability are not only driven by environmental and social concerns, but also by economic factors (Svensk Handel, 2017). Still, there is no consensus about the actual definition of sustainability and there is also a lack of knowledge about how to adopt sustainable practices with regard to different drivers and barriers (Strähle, 2017). Further, it can both be seen as a responsibility and an opportunity to not only implement, but also to communicate how retailers work with sustainability and how they consider the environmental and social values (Goworek & McGoldrick, 2015; Di Benedetto, 2017).

Retailers play an important role when it comes to the incorporation of sustainability into their value chains, as they constitute the link between primary producers and consumers (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2011a; Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2011b; Wiese, Kellner, Lietke, Toporowski & Zielke, 2012; Yang, Song & Tong, 2017). The responsibility put on companies

within the market is twofold, not only do they have to improve their own business along the whole supply chain, but also to potentially improve consumers' behaviours (Goworek, Fisher, Cooper, Woodward & Hillier, 2012; Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2011a; Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2011b). In that sense the retailer can be described as having a gatekeeper's role, a social role that could aim to encourage the culture of sustainable consumption (Lee, Choi, Youn & Lee, 2012). Hence, sustainable retailing is a complex phenomenon but also highly relevant as retail is the central point of interaction between the company and its consumers (Ytterhus, Arnestad & Lothe, 1999).

When it comes to fashion retail, sustainability has come into focus over the recent years (Yang, Song & Tong, 2017). Due to the increasing use of resources within the fashion industry and its social and environmental impacts, Hvass (2014) argues that sustainability will probably continue to gain importance. Up until now, fashion retailers have given the upstream supply chain most attention and their sustainability initiatives have mainly focused on social and environmental issues related to production (Fletcher, 2014; Yang, Song & Tong, 2017). Although there has been some progress in regards to business practices, the fashion industry has been slow to embrace sustainable retailing and marketing, in comparison to for example the food industry (Yang, Song & Tong, 2017; Di Benedetto, 2017). The contemporary fashion industry represents speed and rapid change, and consumption of fashion items is characterised by complexity, short product lifecycles and high volume of impulse purchasing (Fletcher, 2014). This kind of fast fashion can in fact be argued to be an antithesis to sustainability (Ritch, 2015) and may be one of several reasons why the fashion industry has lagged behind other industries (Di Benedetto, 2017).

Even though fashion companies to varying degrees actively work with sustainability, these actions or initiatives have not yet received full support in the marketplace (Di Benedetto, 2017). Research shows that the implementation and communication of sustainability initiatives is very complex, and although it has become a strategic matter retailers are missing the positive response of their commitments (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2011a). Some stakeholders, and in particular consumers that have become more knowledgeable and aware of sustainability issues, appear to be sceptical towards some of these actions (Di Benedetto, 2017). It seems to be the case that retailers fail to communicate about their sustainability efforts in a trustful way to enlighten their consumers about the responsibility they take and the social contributions of these actions (Elg & Hultman, 2016).

In sum, it seems to be a challenge for companies not only to implement sustainability initiatives as a response to the changing societal debate, but at the same time to achieve a high degree of fit to the company's core business and to meet the expectations of their consumers. Hence, it also entails to truly look at these initiatives as an opportunity and to use the potential advantages there might be to gain from them (Strähle, 2017). In order to succeed with sustainable retailing strategies and programs, the way sustainability is marketed is vital (Fuentes, 2015) and the retailers may use different channels for doing so. In their relationship to the retailer, consumers are influenced with regards to sustainability on different levels, varying from corporate communication to the messaging in the physical store environment (Elg & Hultman, 2016; Fuentes, 2015; Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016).

1.2 Problematisation

In the academic field of sustainable retailing focus has been put on investigating how retailers' strategic sustainability work and in-store activities influence their consumers (Anselmsson & Johansson, 2007; Elg & Hultman, 2016; Lehner, 2015a). The store environment has been identified as an important interface to use in order to increase the trustworthiness of sustainability initiatives and the perceived brand image regarding these issues, although there is no standard approach for retailers to take in successfully using the store for this particular purpose (Elg & Hultman, 2016; Fuentes, 2015). What has been concluded though, is the importance of the retailer's brand identity and version of sustainability being aligned with the perceived image and expectations of their consumers (Elg & Hultman, 2016; Fuentes, 2015; Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016; Lehner, 2015b). However, retailers sometimes find it difficult to take their sustainability work on corporate level and to successfully incorporating it in the physical store where they meet their consumers (Elg & Hultman, 2016).

Several studies have focused on how retailers in the food sector translate and communicate their sustainability work in the store environment. Lehner (2015b) has grounded his research on the role of retailers as being translators of sustainability and studied how Swedish food retailers handle the pressure of their stakeholders to engage responsibly in the sustainability discourse. According to Lehner (2015b) retailers do not always acknowledge the true potential in communicating sustainability to their consumers and they sometimes find it

challenging to allocate the responsibilities to do so between corporate and store level. Further, Jones, Comfort and Hillier (2007) explored how food retailers in the UK communicate sustainability with their consumers within stores and in a more contemporary study they studied how food retailers encourage sustainable consumption also by using the physical space (Jones, Hillier and Comfort, 2011b). In line with Lehner (2015b), both of these studies emphasised the role that retailers can take in promoting sustainable consumption. Thus, what is stressed is the need for more research on retailers in order to specify the responsibilities between corporate and store level, and to extend the understanding of how the store is used for communicating sustainability both in terms of engaging consumers and strengthening the brand image (Jones, Comfort and Hillier, 2007; Lehner, 2015b).

The number of studies which have addressed these issues with a focus on the physical store within fashion retail are limited. Fuentes (2015) has examined the marketing of sustainable retailing and explored what determines how it is organised. The study was conducted on Swedish fashion retailers but the gathered empirical material was not limited to the communication in-store (Fuentes, 2015). Further, Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016) studied how sustainability service is performed in the store and what role it has in promoting sustainable consumption. The findings in the study leans towards the need for retailers to be reflexive when it comes to what and how they communicate sustainability, as well as to improve their ability to adapt to the changing sustainability discourse to increase the performance of their sustainability service (Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016).

There seems to be a need for generating more knowledge about these aspects, as well as to deepen the understanding of how the dialogue that takes place in the store might be used to create trust, educate and convince the consumers (Elg & Hultman, 2016). The attitude-behaviour gap, that is the dissonance between a positive attitude towards sustainability and the action following remains (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Joergens, 2006; Kozar & Hiller Connell, 2013; Rahbek Pedersen & Neergard, 2006). Thus, this unresolved problem could potentially be addressed by retailers using the store. Therefore, research is needed to find ways for retailers to provide their consumers with relevant information in more customer friendly ways using their physical space, in order to increase the awareness of sustainability with the potential outcome of having an impact on their attitudes, decisions and consumption behaviours.

1.3 Purpose and research question

The purpose with this study is to investigate how retailers' sustainability work on corporate level is translated and communicated in the store environment. Further, the purpose is also to explore how the physical space can be used to enable, encourage and engage consumers in sustainable consumption. The purpose will be reached through answering the following research questions:

- How is the strategic sustainability work translated from corporate level to store level?
- What aspects allow or hinder the store environment to be used to enable, encourage and engage consumers in sustainable consumption?
- What strategies can be used in order to support the translation process of how sustainability is operationalised throughout the organisation?

1.4 The objectives

1.4.1 Theoretical objectives

In contrast to the studies mentioned earlier about retailers within the food sector (Jones, Comfort and Hillier, 2007; Jones, Hillier and Comfort, 2011b; Lehner, 2015b), the studies which have been conducted so far within fashion retail (Fuentes, 2015; Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016) have had a slightly different focus on sustainability communication in the retail store. These researchers pointed out the need for extending the understanding of how the store is used for communicating sustainability, both in terms of engaging consumers and strengthening the brand image. This study therefore aims to contribute to the academic field of sustainable retailing while exploring how retailer's sustainability work is translated and communicated with the specific focus on the store environment. Further, this will be achieved through focusing on the store's role as a venue in which different activities and marketing tools as a whole forms a strategy for the retailers to communicate their sustainability work directly to the consumers. Due to the limited research on this particular topic within fashion retail, this study will fill a gap in the existing literature when drawing on empirical material from this particular setting.

1.4.2 Practical objectives

This study aims to contribute with insights, which may be valuable for retailers' future work with the complex concept of sustainability. Thus, this entails managerial contributions of how to operationalise the sustainability work throughout the organisation and also on how to use the retail store to enable, encourage and engage consumers in sustainable consumption. Further, the increased digitalisation has put retailers in a position where they have to rethink their business model and also find ways to save physical retail (Svensk Handel, 2018). Therefore, this study also aims to contribute with insights on how sustainability may add a new dimension in order to reinvent the physical store and its related service aspects.

1.5 Definitions

1.5.1 Sustainability

Sustainability is a complex concept and there are differences of opinions among both theorists and practitioners about its definition (Wiese et al. 2012). It is therefore necessary for the purpose of this study to clarify its meaning. Common among the already existing definitions is that they range from very broad to quite detailed (Wiese et al. 2012). The term triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997) which covers three dimensions of sustainability, namely environmental, economic and social sustainability is often referred to in the literature (Wilson, 2015). Further, it is evident that the concept Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability overlap with one another, where the former is more recognised as the responsibility companies take for their business (Wilson, 2015). Hence, due to the presence of the concept of sustainability in relevant literature and its more comprehensive meaning, we find it to fit the purpose of this study with the aim of exploring sustainable consumption in the retail setting.

1.5.2 Sustainable consumption

The concept of sustainable consumption is according to Lehner (2015b) a controversial and disputed concept. Since sustainable consumption can take place in the store environment, it is therefore relevant for both retailers and for our study to understand the meaning of the concept. Jones, Hillier & Comfort (2011b) argue that a number of the existing definitions of

sustainable consumption mainly focus on living within the constraints of the planet and how responsible consumption behaviour can minimise the negative effects on future generations. Further, it has been argued that there is no clarity whether the concept of sustainable consumption means “consuming more efficiently, consuming more responsibly or quite simply consuming less” (Jackson, 2006 cited in Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2011b, p.938). However, we believe that Lehner (2015b) capture the concept of sustainable consumption in a satisfactory manner as he argues that “what constitutes sustainable consumption in the context of food retailing is whatever retailers, stakeholders and consumers understand it to be” (p.392). We believe that this understanding can be applied in the same way when it comes to sustainable consumption in the context of fashion retailing.

1.6 Outline of the thesis

In this opening chapter of the study, a background to the research was presented to give an initial understanding of sustainable retailing, which was followed by the purpose and research questions. The theoretical and practical objectives of the study, as well as relevant definitions were also presented. In the next chapter existing literature is reviewed, which together build a conceptual theoretical framework. The third chapter forms the methodology of the research, which includes a thorough presentation of the standpoint of approach, methods for collecting the empirical material and of how this material was analysed. Further, the chapter concludes with reflections of the quality of research and of ethics. The fourth chapter forms the more descriptive part of the study and contains a comprehensive description of the empirical material divided into four sections. The empirical material together with relevant theories from the literature review then forms the basis for the analysis in chapter five. In the closing chapter our conclusions are presented together with theoretical and practical contributions, followed by limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

2 Literature Review

In this chapter existing theories within our academic field is presented. The first section covers the changes in the retail landscape, which gives a theoretical background to the context in which sustainable retailing takes place. The following two chapters concentrate on how retailers engage in sustainability and how these efforts are communicated specifically focusing on the physical store, while the fourth section is about understanding sustainable consumption. Lastly, a conceptual theoretical framework based on the literature review is then presented.

2.1 Changes in the retail landscape

The retail landscape is currently characterised by rapid change, intense competition and constantly rising expectations from the consumers (Sorescu, Frambach, Singh, Rangaswamy, & Bridges, 2011). In parallel with sustainability, digitalisation continues to be one of the most obvious trends affecting the retail sector in revolutionary ways and retailers need to find ways to adapt to the technological change successfully (Grewal, Roggeveen & Nordfält, 2017; Sorescu et al. 2011). As digitalisation continuously changes the retail landscape, it has the potential to become simultaneously beneficial to both consumers and retailers. Technology makes it possible for retailers to reach and target consumers in new ways. In turn, through the use of technology the consumers may receive targeted offers, make better informed decisions and be provided with faster service (Grewal, Roggeveen & Nordfält, 2017). However, many traditional bricks-and-mortar retailers find themselves struggling due to the fact that they are faced with competition from growing e-commerce. This has led to many retailers engaging in multi- or omnichannel approaches which give them the opportunity to meet their consumers through different channels using a combination of digital and physical touchpoints (Rigby, 2011; Sorescu et al. 2011). If retailers achieve to identify the unique customer journey for each segment, solutions can be customised for the different types of consumers through these strategies.

It is argued that consumers have become empowered through digitalisation as they are able to use Internet and digital tools such as mobile devices in-store to find the information needed

especially in the evaluation phase before making a purchase (Edelman & Singer, 2015; Grewal, Roggeveen & Nordfält, 2017; Shankar, Kleijnen, Ramanathan, Rizley, Holland, & Morrissey, 2016). This has in fact resulted in a redefinition of the role division between consumers and store personnel, where the latter who typically have been considered to be experts, no longer serves the same purpose of helping consumers to make decisions while shopping (Shankar et al. 2016). However, despite the changes in this consumer-salesperson relationship, it does not mean that this interaction is not of value anymore. Instead, a study by Bäckström and Johansson (2006) points towards quite the opposite; even though consumers may appreciate innovations within retail, which has been made possible through digitalisation, they still value the interaction with store employees. Further, it is suggested that retailers should focus on employee engagement since it could lead to an enhancement of consumer engagement (Grewal, Roggeveen & Nordfält, 2017).

To conclude this section, changes are happening within the retail landscape and the role of the retailer today is not simply to buy products from suppliers, which they then make available and sell to consumers. Sorescu et al. (2011) argue that changes in the product assortment are not enough for retailers today to truly engage their consumers and to stand out from their competitors. Instead, they should focus on enhancing the customer experience through a multifaceted range of retail activities and to explore new ways of interacting with the consumers, which are built on emotional engagement (Sorescu et al. 2011). Conscious retailers will come to create deeper emotional connections with their consumers and through a strong connection they may actually come to identify with the retailer in such a way that it possibly goes beyond the point of purchase (Grewal, Roggeveen & Nordfält, 2017; Sorescu et al. 2011). Lastly, great advantage lies in creating customer experience through combining the best of both the digital and physical worlds. However, there is no doubt that many traditional retailers are under pressure as a redefinition of the physical store and the activities which takes place there is necessary (Rigby, 2011).

2.2 Retailers' engaging in sustainability

Based on a unique and powerful position between producers and consumers, retailers play an important role in promoting sustainability along their value chains (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2011a; Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2011b; Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2013; Wilson, 2015;

Wiese et al. 2012; Yang, Song & Tong, 2017; Kennedy, Kapitan & Soo, 2016; Simoes & Sebastiani, 2017). One stream of researchers, have studied how retailers engage in sustainability and how these efforts are communicated to their various stakeholders. Large leading retailers operating in a variety of formats seem to have been studied most extensively (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2011a; Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2013; Lai, Cheng & Tang, 2010), but there are also studies which have focused on specific retailers based on their thorough commitment to sustainability (Kennedy, Kapitan and Soo, 2016; Simoes and Sebastiani, 2017; Wilson, 2015).

Studies have examined the sustainability agendas being publicly reported online by some of the world's leading retailers with the aim to offer some wider reflections on the ways these retailers address and pursue their sustainability agendas (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2011a; Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2013; Lai, Cheng & Tang, 2010). Jones, Comfort and Hillier (2011a) and Jones, Hillier and Comfort (2013) studied a number of leading retailers who explicitly stress their commitment to sustainability. The results of the studies showed that despite this commitment, the retailers' sustainability agendas were predominantly driven by their own interest in making efficiency gains across their business operations and they were therefore at best adopting weaker models of sustainability. However, different results were found by Wilson (2015) when investigating the specific case of the major UK-based clothing, food and home goods retailer Marks and Spencer. Wilson (2015) identified that Marks and Spencer's environmental strategy demonstrated a more ambitious model of sustainability. While considering the triple bottom line of economic, environmental and social sustainability, Wilson (2015) found that the retailer successfully integrated the three component areas into its core business and turned it into a competitive advantage for the retail operations. In contrast, Jones, Comfort and Hillier (2011a) and Jones, Hillier and Comfort (2013) revealed that the retailers investigated by them reported separately on the environmental, social and economic dimensions, rather than integrating them.

Lai, Cheng & Tang (2010) examined the role of retailers and how they integrate sustainability throughout the value chain. Based on their findings, they suggest that both internal and external retailing dimensions should be carefully shaped and given priority to by retailers in order to address the specific need of their business segments. Further, the authors propose a strategy loop that practitioners can use in order to determine what green practices they should implement depending on their current situation. This model moves the sustainability work

from identification of opportunities, through internal and external involvement and communication, to finally measuring the outcomes of the implemented strategy (Lai, Cheng & Tang, 2010). In line with this study, Wilson (2015) also highlights the importance of engaging employees and consumers in the retailers' attempts to undertake and manage their own sustainability program. He argues that for employees to be engaged in the development of policies and practices they need to be both trained and educated about sustainability. Further, a genuine sustainability strategy cannot be implemented successfully without considering consumers (Wilson, 2015). Nonetheless, it has been argued that the consideration and focus of the role of consumers in sustainable retail strategy has been delayed, which in turn demonstrate the fact that many retailers' fail in connecting their strategic initiatives with the opportunity of having an impact on sustainable consumption (Kennedy, Kapitan & Soo, 2016)

Kennedy, Kapitan & Soo (2016) also took the retailers' pivotal role as intermediaries in the supply chain as a starting point, but they set themselves apart from previous studies (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2011a; Wiese et al. 2012; Wilson, 2015) as they argue that most sustainable retail strategies focus almost exclusively on the supply chain and the effects of retail outputs on people and planet. Therefore, they suggest the need to focus on "a successful sustainable retail brand to explore the characters that make up its image" (Kennedy, Kapitan & Soo, 2016, p.125). For retailers, this study highlights the importance of an authentically sustainable retail orientation with sustainability at its core, which means that sustainable values should be at the centre of all business decisions (Kennedy, Kapitan & Soo, 2016). Simoes and Sebastiani (2016) argue that, "if properly managed, a sustainability orientation and an identity formation can align and intertwine, and can become a relevant source of competitive advantage" (p.447). Thus, at both strategic and operational levels, managers should make sustainability part of the organisation's identity (Simoes & Sebastiani, 2016). From an operational perspective it is suggested that when implementing corporate sustainability strategies at different levels within the organisation, corporate identity can be used as an instrument (Simoes & Sebastiani, 2016). Further, it is important that not only organisational members, but also other stakeholders should be considered in the strategies used for implementing corporate sustainability (Simoes & Sebastiani, 2016).

Goworek (2011) and Fuentes (2015) have both investigated retailers in the specific context of the fashion industry. By analysing the sustainability approach taken by a small-to-medium-

sized UK-based fashion retailer, Goworek (2011) addresses how companies can make sustainable principles embedded into their operations. More specifically, she provides fashion retailers with a demonstration of possible strategies that can be adopted to make improvements in terms of sustainability (Goworek, 2011). Fuentes (2015) argues that previous studies, including Goworek (2011), offer little insight regarding the marketing of sustainability, which he stresses as important for the success of sustainable retailing strategies and initiatives. Hence, instead of focusing on the description and conceptualisation of specific sustainable retail initiatives and programs, Fuentes (2015) focuses on how retailers' sustainability agendas are communicated to their stakeholders in order to explain how and why there are various ways to market sustainability.

The results of Fuentes's (2015) study showed that retailers various ideas about the responsible consumer formed the basis of how sustainability is framed and enacted. "The images of responsible consumers thus work as configuring agents around which retailing activities and devices are organised" (Fuentes, 2015, p.369), and this implies that consumers constitute a vital part of the construction of a retailer's sustainability agenda. The analysis further showed that different retailers performed and marketed sustainability in different ways, which according to Fuentes (2015) "confirms and expands on previous research that has stated that sustainability (or CSR) is defined by different retailers in various ways and adapted to fit the goals and purposes of the specific company" (p.380). In the studies mentioned earlier, it was highlighted that the world's leading retailers constructed their own definition of the concept of sustainability "driven as much by business imperatives as by a concern for sustainability" (Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2013, p.39). Having in mind that there is no standard approach on how to act or frame sustainability it is of importance for retailers to evaluate the way they construct their sustainability profile (Fuentes, 2015). Regardless whether a retailer is already involved in sustainability and needs to re-examine its sustainability approach, or if the retailer aims to develop a sustainability profile from scratch, it is suggested that both the general profile and the consumers should be taken into account (Fuentes, 2015).

2.3 Sustainability in the retail store environment

The physical store is an important interface between retailers and consumers, and can be used to exert influence on consumers within the sustainability discourse (Elg & Hultman, 2016;

Fuentes, 2015; Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016; Lehner, 2015b). Lehner (2015b) argues that “the store, as point-of-interaction between retailers and consumers fulfils an important role in the process of achieving sustainable consumption, not only as a place of physical exchange, but also as a place for exchange of information, ideas and understanding of what it means to consume sustainably” (p.389). Taking this role of the store as the starting point, there is one stream of researchers who have studied how retailers’ strategic sustainability work is translated into and communicated in the store environment. Focusing on the food sector (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2007; Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2011b; Lehner, 2015b), as well as on the fashion retail setting (Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016; Hvass, 2014), these researchers have explored how sustainable consumption may be encouraged through in-store communication and what tools that can be used for the purpose of promoting sustainability.

While emphasising the role of retailers in promoting sustainable consumption, Lehner (2015b) explored how Swedish food retailers approach sustainable consumption and how they try to cope with the pressure to engage in sustainability. Lehner (2015b) argues that, “for retailers promoting sustainable consumption is a process of finding ways to bring together the societal discourse with supply-chain and market demand” (p.398). In this sense, the role of the retail store in translating the sustainability debate into simple behavioural recommendations in the daily interaction between retailers and consumers is of great importance (Lehner, 2015b). However, the results of this research demonstrated that even though sustainability was present in the retailers’ daily operations, the potential of the store being used for communicating sustainability to their consumers was not recognised sufficiently. The incorporation of sustainability involves work on different levels within the organisation and retailers may find it difficult to divide responsibilities between corporate level and store level (Lehner, 2015b). In order to better deal with this issue, Lehner (2015b) proposed a model of an idealised sensemaking process of sustainable consumption in which sustainability is translated in a way that aligns stakeholder expectations and market demand.

In line with Lehner (2015b), the role that retailers can take in promoting sustainable consumption is also emphasised in the studies by Jones, Comfort and Hillier (2007) and Jones, Hillier and Comfort (2011b). By exploring the ways in which large retailers in the UK use sustainability to communicate with their consumers in-store the analysis conducted by Jones, Comfort and Hillier (2007) revealed that all retailers executed this to a varying extent. Most importantly, the overall use of sustainability themes among the retailers was limited

(Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2007). Furthermore, in a more contemporary study, Jones, Hillier and Comfort (2011b) studied not only how UK's top ten food retailers communicate about sustainability to their consumers in-store, but also how these retailers are making efforts to engage their consumers in sustainable consumption by using the physical space. The results showed that instead of engaging their consumers in sustainable consumption, their in-store marketing communication has actually been designed to encourage non-sustainable consumption. Hence, even though the selected retailers stressed their commitment to sustainability it is suggested that their efforts in encouraging sustainable consumption in the store has not been prioritised enough (Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2011b).

What has been shown so far is that although some retailers acknowledge the potential of the store and the role it may play in enabling, encouraging and engaging consumers in sustainable consumption, most retailers struggle to manage this sufficiently in their daily operations. Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016) specifically investigated how sustainability service is performed in the store and how it may be used to promote sustainable consumption. In their study they investigated a Swedish fashion retail chain, actively engaging in sustainable retail. Their findings showed that answering sustainability questions and promoting sustainability in the dialogue with the consumer were important practices for accomplishing sustainability service. Further, Elg and Hultman (2016) argue that employees are particularly important when there is a need to create trust in a retailer's sustainability work in-store. In addition to the two practices mentioned above, sustainability service in the store also includes the use of signage and labels, as well as the incorporation of sustainable products. Signage and labels are effective tools to use when trying to increase the visibility of sustainable fashion products in the retail store environment (Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016; Di Benedetto, 2017). This is supported by Jones, Hillier and Comfort (2011b) and Goworek et al. (2012), who propose that retailers might consider choice editing by which only sustainable options of certain product types are offered to the consumer. Nonetheless, all these practices are guided by the goal of promoting sustainable consumption (Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016).

Although the study by Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016) showed how sustainable service can be performed in-store and that it can play an important role in promoting sustainable consumption, it is clearly a complex task for retailers to achieve. Going beyond promoting sustainable products at the point-of-purchase, Hvass (2014) investigated how seven fashion retailers perceived their role in engaging in the later phases of the product lifecycle, such as

reuse and recycling practices in-store. These practices are important in order to weigh up for the fashion industry's unsustainable practices and consumers' unsustainable clothing consumption patterns. The results showed that second hand retailing and product take-back systems were two strategies of how these fashion retailers addressed post-retail responsibility of their products, although it was implemented to a varying degree (Hvass, 2014). Thus, take-back systems may be used complementary to the traditional selling act in order to collect products for reuse and recycling purposes and to potentially create value for both parties (Hvass, 2014).

Clearly, the focus throughout this stream of research has been on how the store can be used in different ways to promote sustainable consumption. However, sustainability is only one of several themes, which can be promoted in the store environment. As mentioned by Jones, Comfort and Hillier (2007) and Jones, Hillier and Comfort (2011b) the physical store often contains conflicting messages, such as messages that promote sustainable consumption versus messages that promote more unsustainable consumption. Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2010) have studied how fast fashion is translated and communicated in the retail store environment with a focus on how window display, layout, merchandising and signage could successfully promote this message. They argue that the store layout is important in order to guide the consumers to make a purchase, but it also functions as communication cues in the store where signage can provide information and reinforce a purchase decision at the point of purchase. Their research makes up an important counterbalance to the topic of our study. While previous researchers have found great potential in promoting sustainability in the retail store environment, the opportunity and reasons for using the store to fulfil this purpose need to be problematised based on the fact that there is often an on-going battle between different discourses within the same space.

2.4 Understanding sustainable consumption

Retailers often find it difficult to reach their consumers with their sustainable messages, something that might be directly linked to the complexity of the sustainability concept and its diverse nature (Lehner, 2015a). Thus, to enhance retailers' ability to develop strategies and to implement activities and communication with the aim of having a sustainable impact, they are suggested to develop an understanding of the consumers and sustainable consumption

practices. There is a stream of research, which has included a consumer perspective in their studies and they have addressed what implications these findings have for retailers. Some of these researchers have studied how a retailer's brand image, built upon their sustainability agenda, influences the consumers' understanding and their purchase intentions in relation to sustainability. The food sector seems to have been studied most extensively (Anselmsson & Johansson, 2007; Lehner, 2015a; Loussaïef, Cacho-Elizondo, Pettersen & Tobiassen, 2014) but the do-it-yourself sector (Elg & Hultman, 2016) and the fashion industry have also been investigated (Connell, 2010; Goworek et al. 2012; Ritch, 2015).

Consumers' attitude, consumption behaviour and understanding of sustainability vary across sectors, seemingly due to the consumers' relation to different types of products. While investigating a retailer within the do-it-yourself sector, Elg and Hultman (2016) identified gaps between the retailer's and consumers' view on sustainability. These are crucial to acknowledge in order to develop strategies and store activities which make the retailer become regarded as committed and credible in the eyes of the consumers. What they have found is that consumers necessarily do not themselves see a linkage between trivial products and sustainability concerns, and when buying low-involvement products on a daily basis they do not find it reasonable to spend too much time and effort on evaluating each and every one through the sustainability lens. Similar results have been shown for grocery shopping, where a great amount of the products were purchased based on routines. Lehner (2015a) found that consumers seek different kinds of decisions simplifications, such as green labels or sustainability in-store marketing. Thus, the way that consumers related to sustainability and their understanding of sustainable consumption varied. In his conclusion Lehner (2015a) highlighted the importance of retailers' ability to connect to these variations and to take the contextual nature of sustainable consumption into consideration when they aim to promote sustainability.

Retailers within the food sector have during the past decades come quite far in positioning sustainable food and some have come to value it as a source of competitive advantage. In comparison, the fashion industry has lagged behind and many fashion retailers have been slow in addressing sustainability issues. Ritch (2015) explored consumers' perceptions and their understanding of sustainability in the fashion retail context. The results of the study suggest that the raised awareness for sustainability and the growing selection of such products within the food sector have nudged consumers to move sustainability thinking into fashion

consumption. When purchasing food, the initiatives with the strongest link to conscious consumption are organic and Fair Trade. Moving beyond food to fashion, consumers tend to show preference for clothes made of organic cotton and garments produced in factories where workers rights are not being exploited. However, there is confusion about how sustainability applies to fashion and trying to directly transfer its meaning from food to fashion is not unproblematic (Ritch, 2015). This leads to a tension between consumers concerns for sustainability and their actions in terms of consumption of fashion items (Connell, 2010; Goworek et al. 2012; Joergens, 2006).

The reasons behind this prevailing situation seem to be twofold. On one hand retailers are failing to live up to the role expected from their consumers. Although the responsibility of the consumer is not overseen, it is evident that many consumers think that the responsibility for sustainable consumption lies among corporates and the government (Joergens, 2006). Ritch (2015) suggests that consumers expect the retailers to take responsibility in various ways, such as guiding them in the sustainability landscape by providing them with relevant information. Thus, from the retailer's perspective, this could be seen as an unexplored opportunity of competitive advantage (Ritch, 2015). On the other hand, consumers low engagement in sustainable purchasing behaviour proves that other aspects than sustainability seem to be more important to them when shopping, which seemingly stems from the complex nature of consuming fashion compared to for example groceries (Joergens, 2006). There are a number of barriers that can be found in the existing literature, which hinder consumers to make sustainable choices when shopping for fashion items. The most crucial barriers that have been identified are availability, price, knowledge and societal norms (Connell, 2010; Joergens, 2006; Ritch, 2015). These need to be diminished by the retailers and addressed within the retail setting in order to raise the potential for sustainable fashion consumption.

In comparison to for example food, consumption of fashion items is more complex due to the relationship the individual has to this type of belongings. The clothes that people wear are tightly linked to their identity and the style is considered to be important in the expression of the self (Joergens, 2006). There is only a limited range of sustainable alternatives available to consumers beyond the basics, and in the consumers attempt to communicate with their social surroundings through their clothing, the aesthetic characteristics seem too important to compromise (Joergens, 2006). Developing more product categories is therefore suggested in order to raise the potential for sustainable consumption (Connell, 2010; Joergens, 2006).

Together with aesthetics and brand image, price is one of the most determining factors when purchasing clothes in general (Joergens, 2006). When it comes to sustainable fashion, the prices are usually higher than the mainstream products (Connell, 2010; Joergens, 2006). Whether the consumer is accepting of the higher prices or not is argued to be directly dependent on their understanding of its benefits, which in turn is often assigned for the retailer to explain (Ritch, 2015). The growing awareness of sustainability issues in general, needs to be separated from the knowledge that consumers have which can be translated into wise decisions when purchasing specific products. A large amount of the clothes on the market are manufactured in complex supply chains in developing countries, which makes it difficult for the consumers to evaluate the products based on sustainability aspects (Joergens, 2006). The retailers are therefore suggested to become more transparent and provide their consumers with relevant information in order to help them navigate between different products based on their environmental impact (Connell, 2010; Goworek et al. 2012; Ritch, 2015). Lastly, it is important to highlight that the discussion surrounding sustainability is not limited to the relationship between the individual consumer and the specific retailer. Both of these actors are situated in a wider context where societal norms steer what to consume and how consumption takes place. However, despite the individual actor's lack of control to instantly change these understandings, the acceptance and adoption of sustainable consumption practices will change over time as the sustainable discourse evolves (Connell, 2010).

In sum, contrasting to other types of products, the barriers for sustainable consumption of fashion items are not that the products are too trivial or that it is too time-consuming to consider sustainability when purchasing many products on a daily basis. Instead, the low availability of sustainable alternatives, lack of knowledge to make sustainable choices and a pricing that is perceived as high for the clothes that are more sustainable have been identified to be the most crucial barriers for retailers to address. Together with the fact that fashion is an extension of the individual's identity and of importance as a communicative tool, it seems to be more challenging for actors within fashion retail to engage consumers in sustainable consumption. It should be emphasised that there is not an established unwillingness among consumers towards sustainable fashion consumption, but it seems to require more efforts from fashion retailers to not only encourage consumers to consider their current consumption patterns, but also to enable sustainable consumption practices to take place.

2.5 Theoretical framework

In this chapter, existing and relevant literature within our academic field have been reviewed which started with a brief presentation regarding the changes in the retail landscape. The second literature stream focused on retailers' adoption of sustainability at a strategic level and how it is communicated to their stakeholders. Thereafter, the third stream consisted of studies on how the retailers' sustainability work is translated and communicated in the physical store. Lastly the literature review also included the consumer side and these studies stressed the importance for retailers to understand sustainable consumption. Taken together these streams of research form a basis of understanding which allow us to explore the specific research questions of this study.

When bringing these streams of literature together, it has been found that several researchers land in the same reasoning regarding the importance of aligning the retailer's brand identity and version of sustainability with the perceived image and expectations of their consumers (Elg & Hultman, 2016; Fuentes, 2015; Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016; Lehner, 2015b). Fuentes (2015) emphasises that there is no standard approach for retailers to take when they develop their sustainability profile. What should be considered though is how the retailer's sustainability approach connects to the general profile and how it relates to their consumers. Designing the strategy therefore entails to critically think about what sustainability issues to focus on and the offered solutions to these problems, which in turn need to be communicated to the consumers in a satisfying way (Fuentes, 2015). This reasoning tangents the theory Hatch and Schultz's (2001) have developed for creating a strong corporate brand. According to them, there is interdependency between corporate vision, organisational culture and stakeholder image, and it is crucial to align these essential elements within the corporate strategy. If there is a misalignment between the three, gaps will occur which hinders the brand from reaching its fullest potential (Hatch and Schultz, 2001).

With the main focus of this study being on how retailers' sustainability work on corporate level is translated and communicated in the store environment, the theory by Hatch and Schultz's (2001) will be adapted to this context and together with the understanding found in the literature review build the theoretical framework depicted in Figure 1. The corporate vision is defined as the aspirations top managers at the headquarters (HQ) have for the

company (Hatch and Schultz, 2001), here focusing more specifically on the retailer’s sustainability approach. This strategic sustainability work is in one way or another operationalised and translated throughout the organisational layers into the store environment. The store becomes a physical interface where the sustainability work may be communicated and the organisational culture becomes explicit to the consumers through the behaviour of the store personnel. Four types of tools have been identified in the literature review which can be used for communicating sustainability in this meeting; products, visual merchandising, service provided by the store personnel and activities. These are in the existing literature linked to the possibility of using the physical space to enable, encourage and engage consumers in sustainable consumption. Further, how the retailer’s sustainability work is perceived by the consumer in this meeting is one dimension of the stakeholder image and is determining for the retailer’s ability to maintain trustworthiness in the promotion of sustainable consumption. A retailer’s sustainability work needs to be consistent throughout the entire organisation for it to be rewarded and found credible by their consumers (Elg & Hultman, 2016). Therefore, the three elements of corporate vision, organisational culture and stakeholder image is in this study viewed as together forming an ideal system to strive for when retailers aim to develop and communicate their sustainability work.



Figure 1. Conceptual theoretical framework

3 Methodology

In this chapter the methodology underlying this study is presented, starting with our standpoint of approach, including qualitative case study as the chosen research strategy, the abductive research process and context of study. Further, a comprehensive description is given of the different types of methods that were used to collect the empirical material and also how this material was analysed. Lastly, this chapter concludes with reflections of the quality of research and of ethics.

3.1 Standpoint of approach

3.1.1 Qualitative case study

There are fundamentally different ways in which we can inquiry something, depending on if we aim for a perception of knowledge that is personally constructed or of knowledge as discovery of what the world is (Stake, 1995; Stake, 2010). Going back to the literature, it became clear that there is neither a universal definition of the concept of sustainability, nor is there a common view regarding what place sustainability takes in the retailers' strategies and operations. Relating to the academic field, the standpoint taken for this study was that there is no objective truth when it comes to this topic, rather the reality is socially constructed and dependent on the perspective chosen, as well as the specific context (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Based on the unique role of the retailers being situated in between producers and consumers, their daily operations consist of operations within different areas and in relation to different actors in their field. The main focus of this study was on sustainable fashion retailing and the particular case of how the retailers' strategic sustainability work on corporate level is translated into and communicated in the store environment. Thinking about this particular case raised a number of questions. How is sustainability conceptualised by the fashion retailer and interpreted by the employees throughout the organisational hierarchy? Why is or is not the physical store found to be suitable as an interface between the company and consumers for exchanging thoughts about sustainability? How do retailers use their unique role and their physical space to construct sustainable fashion consumption?

In order to seek answers to these questions of "how" and "why" through the case study as a research strategy, the decision was made to gather qualitative data as empirical material in order to develop a deeper experiential understanding of this particular case (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Eisenhardt, 1989). Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) argue that qualitative data can be defined "by their form (non-numeric) and by the interactive and interpretative process in which they are created" (p.129). As an expression of the ontological and epistemological stance taken earlier, the process of working with this qualitative empirical material can be explained by two remarks. First, in order to gain a holistic understanding of the particular case the empirical material was gathered from multiple perspectives. Different perspectives on this case included people with various horizontal and vertical placements in the organisational hierarchy, and the strength of qualitative research to create a deeper understanding of peoples meaning (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015) was considered important in relation to the exploratory nature of the purpose and research questions. Both sustainability and fashion consumption are complex concepts and the way people within the organisation with different stakes in the case make sense and construct realities of these concepts may vary. Second, in the interpretative process in which the qualitative data was created in (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), the researchers played a subjective role in the study by making interpretations based on personal experiences (Stake, 2010).

In qualitative research the aim is to understand "the complex interrelationships among all that exists" (Stake, 1995, p.37) and for this study we were not interested in objective measurements and explanations. Instead we were interested in personal knowledge, relying on human perception and understanding (Stake, 2010). The context of studying this particular case was one chosen retailer, though it should be mentioned that for this particular case the interest was of instrumental value. That is to say that the one retailer was the context, which allowed us to study and to gain a deeper understanding of the case, and the interest was not of the one retailer per se. The difference, which should be emphasised here, is that even though this study did not seek a statistical generalisability as in quantifiable results (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson 2015), it aimed to provide insights and understanding for developing theory applicable in similar settings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A conceptual theoretical framework was developed based on existing literature, which was used as guidance for this study. While investigating the case within the fashion retail context, an area which had received less empirical attention in previous research, the abductive

approach taken for this study was to refine and extend the theoretical framework (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This abductive approach involved the process of going back and forth between the empirical material and existing theory through a combination of research activities. Hence, the focus was on theory development with the objective of discovering new things such as other variables, dimensions or relationships in relation to existing theories (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This approach was considered to square with the exploratory nature of the purpose and research questions of this study.

3.1.2 Context of study

To catch the complexity of the case that was of special interest, it was studied within the context of the Swedish fashion retailer MQ. The MQ-group was founded in 1957 and consists of the two chains MQ and Joy, hence the focus of our study was solely on MQ. With approximately 120 physical stores located in Sweden and their own online shop, MQ targets both fashion conscious men and women with the mental age of 30-40, through a mix of both internal and external brands (MQ, 2017). MQ has established itself as one of Sweden's leading fashion retailers and their vision is "to use an omnichannel strategy to create the leading brand and quality position on the Swedish market" (MQ, 2017, p.8). Based on the purpose of this study MQ was considered to be representative for the case for several reasons. First of all, accessibility was provided and the company was willing to participate in the study. Secondly, MQ is engaging in sustainable retailing, a criterion that could be said to be a prerequisite in order to fulfil the purpose of this study. Reading about MQs sustainability work in their annual report, sustainability is expressed to be an obvious component of MQs business model and the goal is to act responsible based on environmental, social and economic sustainability throughout their value chain. According to MQ, sustainability means quality in all their relationships, which is to say in relation to the planet, producers, employees and consumers (MQ, 2017).

MQ was further considered to be a suitable context of study due to its size and the scope of its range. According to Fuentes (2015) and Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016) retail chains are easier to study just because of their size; there are more stores to observe and more marketing and media materials are available. MQ is also a highly visible and well-known retailer in Sweden with a long history. Further, considering that MQ is a medium-sized retailer where stores and HQ working closer together compared to larger fashion retailers where the distance

between stores and HQ is more apparent, MQ could provide interesting insights for the purpose of this study. An established company like MQ that has been active in the industry for 60 years, also has to face the challenge of having to redirect its business to become more sustainable in a slightly different way compared to, for example smaller and younger fashion companies that build their business model on sustainable thinking already from the start (Di Benedetto, 2017). However, although MQ may not be the one who drive the change towards more sustainable retailing the company may still have a great responsibility to administer these changes, while also taking into account the interests of their various stakeholders. Hence, the specific case of this study is an on-going process at MQ as the retailer aims to successively transition itself to be more sustainable.

3.2 Collection of empirical material

3.2.1 A combination of methods

When contact was reached with MQ, an initial meeting was set up with two contact persons at the CSR department. In preparation for this meeting, a study of available material about the company was conducted. The material which was used as a background was MQs Annual Report 2016/2017 with their Sustainability Report included, their official website and visits in a couple of their stores in Lund and Malmö. During the meeting at MQs headquarters a presentation was held by their CSR & Environmental Managers with an overview of the company and their sustainability work. The design of this study in terms of their role in the research process, the time frame and the access needed to collect empirical material was presented to them and agreed upon. With the aim of gaining a holistic understanding of the case of how the retailers' strategic sustainability work on corporate level is translated into and communicated in the store environment, the research strategy entailed a combination of methods and sources of data (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Eisenhardt, 1989). The collection of empirical material was therefore conducted through interviews with employees with different stakes and perspectives in the particular case, as well as through observations and document studies. Based on the standpoint of approach the intention was to design the methods to gather information with regard to the theoretical framework, which would still allow the discovery of new things in order to potentially develop existing theories. The research process with regards to collecting the different types of empirical material is described in the following sections.

3.2.2 Interviews

Sample

In the qualitative interview, knowledge is created through the social interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee in the particular interview setting (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Based on the taken epistemological stance, the purpose with the conducted interviews was to gain insights into the lifeworld of the interviewees and the meaning they each ascribe to sustainability. As previously mentioned, access was gained to the retailer and the sampling of informants to interview took its starting point in reflecting on who in the organisation has a stake in this particular case. It was considered to be necessary to find informants within all organisational layers in order to capture the entire process of how the sustainability work is translated from corporate to store level. Further, to be able to gain a holistic understanding it was not only important to consider the vertical hierarchy, but also to cover different perspectives within the same organisational layer to the extent it was possible. The aim of the interviews conducted on corporate level was to gain insights of the first step in which the sustainability strategy is managed and concretised. For this case, the five key persons at the headquarters were identified as the Head of Design and two managers at the CSR and Marketing departments, and interviews were therefore conducted with these. It would have been useful to also conduct an interview with the person being responsible for the Smart Styling education for salespersons, but the company had a change in this position so it was not possible. Further, three Regional Managers were asked to participate, whereof two were able to schedule interviews. However, in the end only one of these two participated since the other person was not able to do the interview due to unexpected events.

The aim of conducting interviews in the stores were to gain insights of how the sustainability work is translated into the physical environment and how the store personnel understand, filter and communicate these messages to the consumers. Since MQ has approximately 120 stores divided into four regions spread out in Sweden, it was due to time constraints impossible to do interviews in as many stores needed in order to make conclusions representable for the entire country. When it came to the stores, it was therefore decided to put an emphasis on the southern parts of Sweden to gain enough empirical material in order to be able to draw conclusions about that region. This selection of stores was then complemented with one store in each of the other regions in order to identify possible geographical differences. Stores in cities of varying size was represented in the selection, as

well as a mix of stores situated both in malls and city centres. MQ works with three different categories of stores when it comes to assortment, both in terms of the number of brands available in-store and the items within each brand. Stores within each of these categories were chosen as a part of the selection. Initially 14 stores were contacted through e-mail internally by our contact persons at the company and were thereafter reached out to by us to schedule the interviews. Since a few stores declined the invitation to participate due to shortage of time, a second round of stores were contacted. The total number of stores ended up at eleven and among these the interviewees together built a heterogeneous group of informants. With the aim of capturing several different perspectives of the wide range of employees working in MQs stores, interviews were conducted with ten Store Managers, two Visual Merchandisers and seven Salespersons with varying length of work experience at the company.

The total number of informants within the organisation as a whole was 25 and the details about the interviews has been summarised in Table 1. Among the interviewees at HQ the group of informants consisted of an equal division of the sexes while in the stores only one male salesperson was interviewed. In MQs stores women are the majority of 91% (MQ, 2017) and the distribution of male and female informants were therefore considered to be representable. The interviews with employees in the stores varied between 30-40 minutes, with a few exceptions, and the ones conducted at HQ varied between 40-90 minutes.

Corporate Level

Visual Merchandise Manager (4)	Face-to-face at HQ
CRM Manager (5)	Face-to-face at HQ
Head of Design (6)	Face-to-face at HQ (not recorded)
CSR & Environmental Manager (7)	Group Interview Face-to-face at HQ
CSR & Environmental Manager (7)	Group Interview Face-to-face at HQ

Region Level

Region Manager (23)	Telephone
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Store Level

Store manager (1)	Face-to-face in the store
Store manager (3)	Telephone
Store manager (8)	Face-to-face in the store
Store manager (10)	Face-to-face in the store
Store manager (14)	Telephone
Store manager (16)	Face-to-face in the store
Store manager (18)	Face-to-face in the store
Store manager (20)	Face-to-face in the store
Store manager (22)	Telephone
Store manager (24)	Telephone
Visual Merchandiser (15)	Telephone
Visual Merchandiser (21)	Face-to-face in the store
Salesperson (2)	Face-to-face in the store
Salesperson (9)	Face-to-face in the store
Salesperson (11)	Face-to-face in the store
Salesperson (12)	Face-to-face in the store
Salesperson (13)	Face-to-face in the store
Salesperson (17)	Face-to-face in the store
Salesperson (19)	Face-to-face in the store

Table 1. Information about interviews

Interview guide

The decision was made to use semi-structured interviews and interview guides were prepared in advance to secure that the most important topics were covered. Still, this method allowed the interviewer to go beyond the predetermined questions and ask in-depth follow-up questions as the interview evolved, which should be considered one of the main advantages of choosing this method (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). As the interview guides were created using the theoretical framework as a basis, they also had to be adapted into different interview guides depending on the different perspectives of the informants. The main focus in the interview guides prepared for HQ was how they develop the sustainability work and communication tools, as well as their thoughts about how it is intended to be communicated in the stores. The interview guide for the Regional Manager focused on how the sustainability work is filtered and how this position within the company may function as a node between HQ and the stores when it comes to sustainability. Lastly, the interview guide

used for the store employees focused on their knowledge and understanding of MQs sustainability work and how they communicate it to their consumers in the store.

The interview guides, which can be found in Appendix A, overall followed the same structure of the questions. They started with introductory questions in which the interviewees were asked to talk about themselves and their role within the company, as well as how they perceive MQs sustainability work and what place it has in their daily work. Following these questions did the topic specific questions, which were complemented with scenarios for the store employees, and these were thereafter rounded off by a question if they would like to add something to the discussion of this topic. Some participants wished to have the questions in advance and these persons were provided with a few example questions in order for them to feel more comfortable. Using a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions linked to the different dimensions in the conceptual theoretical framework provided some reassurance that the topics with relevance for answering the research questions were covered. However, leaving room for the interviewee to talk relatively freely about their opinions, knowledge and experiences of MQs sustainability work from his or her point of view, as well as for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions was considered to be of high importance since it opened up the possibility to discover new themes which could potentially have academic value. The techniques of laddering up and laddering down were used, where the former entailed asking “why” questions to identify the interviewees value base and the latter to ask the respondent to give examples in order to gain more detailed descriptions of a certain situation (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Execution

The series of interviews started off with three interviews on store level in order to gain initial insights, which could be useful to have as a background when doing the following interviews at MQs HQ in Gothenburg. In turn, insights gained from the interviews at corporate level were useful to have when conducting the remaining interviews with the store personnel. The interview guide evolved throughout the process and the questions were adjusted slightly as the number of interviews successively evolved. This was due to the realisation of some questions were easier to understand by the interviewees than others, and the fact that altering the order of a couple of questions was perceived as creating a better flow of the discussion. The interviews on corporate level were conducted together by the researchers, one asking the

questions and the other taking notes, in order to secure an equal way of conducting the interviews. Due to efficiency reasons the following interviews were thereafter divided between the researchers. If all interviews had been conducted with both researchers being present, it would not have been possible to reach the number of interviews as we did in this case. The stores located in the southern region were visited and the interviews were held face to face. Several advantages were found with this way of executing the interviews. The interviewees were expected to feel more comfortable when participating in an interview in their own home environment, while it at the same time entailed that the interviewer gained insights in what that environment looked like. Additionally, it also allowed the interviewer to capture nonverbal communication such as body language and it was ensured that the interviewees were focused on the interview situation. However, due to time, convenience and resource reasons the interviews conducted with the personnel working in the stores located in the other parts of the country were conducted through remote interviewing over telephone.

Time turned out to be the main obstacle to overcome when it came to conducting the interviews. The limited time frame of our study left us with a window of just over two weeks to schedule the interviews. The interviewees were therefore contacted with the request to participate in the study in good advance. As mentioned earlier, some stores declined to participate due to lack of time to do so and in some other cases we had to remain flexible to the current circumstances of available time among the interviewees. Therefore, two interviews were cut shorter due to the fact that the store personnel were not available for longer interviews and one of the interviews at the HQ was held during a lunch meeting without the possibility to record it. In both of these instances, it was considered to be more valuable to receive answers to the most relevant questions, in comparison to no answers at all. It should also be mentioned that the interview held with the CSR & Environmental Managers was a group interview with two informants. At the company, these two persons are responsible for the entire sustainability work and they have therefore a slightly different focus within it. Based on their wishes it was therefore more fulfilling to be able to answer the questions and to give the whole picture of the sustainability work at once when doing the interview together.

All interviews, except one, were recorded so that the interviewer could focus on posing questions and listening to the interviewee giving the answers instead of taking notes throughout the interview. Though, some notes were taken in order to complement the recording in case of unexpected technical problems. Recording the interviews opened up the

possibility of listening to the interviews repeatedly and to transcribe them in full. Overall the interviews were transcribed in detail and moments of silence, laughter and sighs have also been noted since they may add to the understanding of the written word. However, in some cases expressions such as “ehm” and other small words were left out, but only limited to the instances when it made the reading too difficult and when it did not seem to affect the interpretation. The transcript documents were divided into three parts; first a short profile of the interviewee, thereafter a summary of the most important and memorable insights, as well as the impression of the interview made immediately after the session and lastly, the full transcription of the interview. The interviews were held in Swedish and the empirical material used in the report was translated into English.

3.2.3 Observations

In addition to the interviews with employees on different levels in MQs organisation, observations in the company’s stores were conducted. The purpose of the observations was to gain insights of how the retailer’s sustainability work takes its physical form, as well as to follow up if it is communicated in the store in line with the intentions expressed at corporate level. Thus, this study draws from seven store observations covering a range of MQ stores situated in the southern part of Sweden. The observations were conducted in the stores, which were visited in connection to the interviews with store personnel and lasted around 15-20 minutes each. The observations were conducted either before or after conducting the interviews with store personnel and were performed in a systematic manner. One additional brief observation was conducted in order to gain an understanding of the new brand Knowledge Cotton Apparel. This brand had not yet been found in the stores that were visited, but was brought up during some of the interviews over telephone. Furthermore, both the purpose of this study and the conceptual theoretical framework formed a basis when constructing questions to guide the store observations. In total, six questions were formulated into an observation guide (Appendix B), focusing on for example what communication material about sustainability that is visible in-store, if sustainable choices are visible as alternatives to the consumer and how the more sustainable garments are displayed compared to the other garments. Hence, by looking at the store attributes the main focus of the observations was on how the retailer through its store environment is enabling, encouraging and engaging consumers in sustainable consumption. All observations were further

documented in a field diary. These field notes were complemented by photographs taken by the observer during the observations in-store.

In addition to the store observations, one participant observation of Smart Styling was conducted. Smart Styling is an online education for MQs store personnel and its purpose is for them to acquire knowledge and sales arguments based on textile materials, care advices and a number of sustainability aspects. The observation was conducted on one occasion and lasted for four hours. As the researcher conducted the observation on her own, she was directly involved in the observation and took the place of a participant in order to gain a similar experience (Stake, 1995). The observation was further documented by the researcher through the act of simultaneously writing down field notes. The education was comprehensive and contained eleven parts of which four parts were completed during the observation. We were allowed continuous access to the education which offered the possibility to go back and complete the remaining parts as well as to reflect on and verify the material. As previously mentioned the observation of Smart Styling provided insights which were used as a background for creating interview questions. It was also considered as valuable for the researcher to experience this education herself in order to enhance the understanding of the answers given to the questions about Smart Styling by the store personnel during the interviews.

Seven store observations together with one participant observation, thus forms the descriptive part of this study. As mentioned, all observations were documented through field notes, and according to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), the process of writing detailed field notes involves an active process of interpretation by the researcher. Further, when conducting observations through field notes the researcher can document changes according to what he or she sees as significant as the interpretations develop, and in that way the study continues to reshape along the way (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003; Stake, 1995). Considering that the researcher took field notes of what had been observed it is important to take into account that the researcher's interpretations during the observations are subjective (Stake, 1995). However, these observations offered the possibility of gaining insights into different aspects of the retail store environment, which was of great importance for this study.

3.2.4 Documents

The data collection for this study further consisted of collecting and reviewing already existing data such as documents produced by the company. All documents were accessible and used throughout the process and consisted of MQs Annual Report 2016/2017 (with their Sustainability Report included), MQs official website and classified documents. The classified documents were exclusively used as a background and to gain an initial understanding of MQs sustainability strategy. MQs Annual Report 2016/2017 and MQs official website were also used as a background but also formed the secondary empirical material of this study. All documents provided information related directly to how MQ works with sustainability and thus constituted a valuable part of the collected empirical material. Documents produced by a company are according to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) high-quality material and complemented the conducted primary empirical material. It is important to mention that the reviewed documents are mainly created for the interests of other stakeholders and not for research purposes. Furthermore, when reviewing the documents it was important to allow the research question to guide and frame the material (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

3.3 Analysis

Taking into account that the empirical material was collected from multiple perspectives and created through an interactive and interpretative process where we as researchers played an important role and where knowledge was co-created, it is suggested that our research process evolved in a cyclical manner (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The research process was characterised by the course of moving back and forth between constructing the theoretical framework, collecting the empirical material and completing the analysis (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), which also coincided with the approach taken for this study. This allowed us to expand our initial understanding of both theory and the empirical material, which Dubois and Gadde (2002) argue is the vantage point of an abductive approach to case research. The raw data from interviews and observations were, as mentioned earlier, processed successively into transcribed documents and comprehensive descriptions before starting the completion of the analysis. This was done in order to make the material more readable while it at the same time allowed us to make notes and comments (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which can be seen

as an initial and preparatory part of the analysis. The material was read, discussed and analysed from the beginning, which allowed us to identify relevant factors that could extend or revise the material used when conducting the remaining interviews and observations (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) argue that the empirical material has to be organised in a way that makes the whole process of analysing easier. When beginning the analysis we therefore decided to take into account the three steps of sorting, reducing and arguing (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). First of all, having in mind the density of the empirical material, the first step of sorting and organising was of high importance in order to make the material manageable and to gain an overview of what had been collected (Easterby-Smith, 2015). Further, it made it possible to identify the parts that were of particular interest for our purpose and also to gain an initial understanding of the things that had been observed (Easterby-Smith, 2015; Miles & Huberman, 1994). When going through the material we systematically searched for patterns based on similarities, differences and frequencies, and chose to create more abstract labels to represent a larger amount of data (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015).

The next step of the analysis involved the process of reducing the empirical material. This was done in order to capture the particular pieces that mattered the most for the purpose of our study as well as to make the material more meaningful for the analysis. During this part of the analysis we searched for categories and themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003), a search that was based on both our previous knowledge about retailers' sustainability work and theories, as well as inspired directly by the material. Thus, when reducing all of the empirical material, including interviews, observations and documentation, we chose the following categories; Proactive vs. reactive approach, Managing the sustainability sensemaking process, Communicating complexity in-store and Alignment as the ideal aim. These categories allowed us to describe the content of the material more hands on, but also to compare the content in between and to interpret the meaning of it in the analysis (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Lastly, we used the processed empirical material in order to build arguments for our conclusions. As a basis for these arguments, the process of sorting and reducing was of vital importance as it made it possible to theorise the empirical findings and argue for the findings in relation to already existing theoretical concepts (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015).

3.4 Quality of research

The quality of qualitative research needs to be reflected upon based on the issues of confirmability, credibility, transferability and dependability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Whether knowledge produced in qualitative research interviews and the findings drawn from them can be considered as objective is debated based on the ambiguity of the term objectivity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). In this study the quality in terms of confirmability was considered to be enhanced through reflexivity and transparency (Alvesson, Hardy & Harley, 2008; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Miles & Huberman, 1994). That is to say that we throughout the research process reflected on our role as researchers. Based on the standpoint of approach the researcher's interpretation of the collected material had an important place in the research process. However, in order to approach the material more objectively and stay open-minded to what there was to discover, we needed to be aware of and not allow ourselves to be influenced by personal opinions or predefined assumptions about the case or the company. Further, the research methods were described in detail, transparently capturing the entire picture of how the empirical material was collected, analysed and drawn conclusions from.

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) argue that the quality of research ultimately depends on how researchers approach their research, beginning from the development of the proposal to the publication of their final work. In doing so the dependability of the research is enhanced by proving a consistency throughout the research process in terms of its stability over time and different researchers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We argue for the congruency between research questions and research design based on our ontological and epistemological standpoint of approach. As previously mentioned the researcher's role is described in the research process as well as the chosen methods. The fact that we were two researchers forced us to find systematic ways to conduct observations, interviews and transcripts in order to ensure that the material was comparable. Making these descriptions explicit also to the reader of this study allow other researchers to take on a similar role in the future as they may study the case in a different context than MQ. However, in a sense the quality of the outcome of qualitative research interviews cannot be controlled or entirely determined beforehand. Instead, the quality of the information gathered through a qualitative interview is very dependent on the quality of the interviewer's competence and craftsmanship of conducting

interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). For this study, knowledge both within the academic field as well as about MQs sustainability work was therefore acquired through document studies, the initial meeting at HQ and by taking part of the education Smart Styling, before the interview guide was created and the interviews were conducted. It also became apparent that we enhanced our proficiency in doing interviews and raised the ability to ask relevant follow-up questions as we were successively conducting and transcribing them. Further, reliability of the research may also be discussed in relation to leading questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). The interview guide was created based on a number of open-ended questions, which allowed the respondent to answer the questions freely. However, leaving room for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions may lead to different empirical findings when letting different researchers replicate an interview using the same interview guide. Despite this, we were convinced that a semi-structured interview was suitable in order to allow the researcher to be creative in the social interaction and to go in-depth into the interviewee's life world as the interview evolved.

Following the purpose of gaining a holistic understanding of the case, the research is reckoned to have reached a high degree of credibility when including multiple perspectives and thick descriptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Triangulation was used with the aim to minimise misperception and to reach more convincing and accurate conclusions (Stake, 1995). The empirical material was gathered using complementary methods as well as different sources of information in order to investigate the correspondence and to possibly discover new themes unknown to the researchers preunderstanding (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Employees in different positions and on different levels in MQs organisation were represented in the sequence of interviews, which was estimated to be ambitious but still a possible amount to conduct in relation to the given time frame. A sense of saturation was reached towards the end of the series of interviews and the empirical material was therefore concluded to be sufficient in order to come to more valid conclusions. It was apparent that some findings confirmed the theoretical framework, but in line with the abductive approach with the aim of developing existing theories, it was important to also look for negative evidence and alternative interpretations in the empirical material. This in turn should also be thought about in the light of improving the quality of research (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Lastly, generalisation has been touched upon previously in this chapter, which should also be raised as a quality factor in terms of the transferability of the findings. The findings of our case did not seek statistical generalisability, but instead analytic generalisation as in providing theory-connections applicable in similar settings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Arguments for the transferability of the conclusions were therefore presented in the final discussion in order for the reader to assess this potential.

3.5 Reflection of ethics

In connection to the request to participate in the study, the employees were provided with the purpose of the study and necessary information about the interview such as their voluntary participation, confidentiality and other needed practicalities. It was thereby concluded that the participants gave their informed consent (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014) before making a decision on whether to participate or not. Decisions regarding confidentiality in qualitative research interviews generally concern what type of information that should be available to whom (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). For this study it was decided that the interviewees were going to be anonymous both internally at the company and in the final report. Only the two researchers of this study were the ones with insight in what persons were interviewed and with access to locate whom of the informants that gave what answers. The topic and the questions asked during the interviews were not sensitive per se, but the aim with the interviews was for the informants to feel comfortable to talk freely about their opinions, knowledge and experiences with the company's sustainability work from their perspective. It is assumed that participants wish to give a good impression of themselves and/or the company they represent, and there may therefore always be a risk that they give an answer to a question which they think is expected from them (Alvesson, 2003). Thus, for the matter of them feeling comfortable to give honest answers to the questions it was regarded as important to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees. Further, ethical considerations were also made when it came to how the information collected through the interviews was used in the report so that the written word was publicised fairly to how the statement was communicated verbally by the interviewee and in what context it was expressed in during the interview. Lastly, the empirics were sent to our contact persons at MQ in order for them to give their approval for the way the material gathered from the interviews was used in the final report.

4 Empirical study

This chapter forms the more descriptive part of the study and is divided into four sections. The first section puts MQ in the larger context where retailers are challenged by sustainability and the rapidly evolving digitalisation, followed by a description of MQs strategic sustainability work. The section thereafter focuses on the operationalisation of this strategic sustainability work and its translation process. In the closing section of this chapter MQs external communication of sustainability is described.

4.1 MQ acting within Swedish fashion retail

Acting within the fashion industry, MQ together with a large number of other fashion companies have two major challenges ahead, one of which concerns sustainability (Global fashion agenda, 2018) and the other one the rapidly evolving digitalisation (Svensk Handel, 2018). Increasing digitalisation is a challenge for fashion companies as it will shape and challenge the industry in ways that are hard to predict (Global fashion agenda, 2018). In a report from Svensk Handel (2018) it is clear that companies within the fashion industry, with strong online growth, are now forced to rethink their business model and reconsider physical retail. This translation is according to MQs Head of Design tougher for those who already have an established retail network compared to those who have an initial business model based primarily on e-commerce.

Despite this, in MQ's annual report their CEO holds a positive view facing these changes, "the transformation taking place in the fashion industry presents new opportunities to reach a broader target group and secure more satisfied customers" (MQ, 2017, p.7). Hence, one way that MQ is now meeting retail's on-going transformation with increased digitalisation is to become a strong omnichannel. Through this omnichannel strategy, MQ as a company can meet their consumers regardless of where they are through a combination of stores and e-commerce. Thus, digital and physical channels are integrated and based on this omnichannel strategy the goal is a seamless shopping experience for their consumers, in which they should be met by the same message regardless of channel. In the process of developing as an omnichannel retailer, MQ argues that online shopping in-store is a key factor, and since June

2017 all of MQs stores are provided with either tablets or touchscreens (MQ, 2017). Further, MQs Visual Merchandise Manager says that MQ has planned for additional development of the digital signage in their most recent store concept.

Due to an increased focus on sustainability, companies within the fashion industry are pressured to turn their businesses into more sustainable. This transformation entails considering social as well as environmental aspects, but also to promote more sustainable consumption behaviours among consumers (Global fashion agenda, 2018). Further, this is found to be challenging due to consumers rapidly growing demands and their constantly changing consumption behaviours (Global fashion agenda, 2018). However, it has been argued that sustainability issues are now taken into account by an increased number of consumers when making shopping decisions (Sustainable Brand Index, 2018 cited in Habit, 2018). As consumers have the power to actually influence the progress within the sustainability discourse via their purchasing decisions and through the way that they care for their products, it is important for fashion companies to reach out to the end-consumer (Global fashion agenda, 2018). For instance, it has been argued that fashion companies should educate their consumers about how to increase the durability and how to prolong the lifetime of garments based on how they use and treat their garments (Global fashion agenda, 2018).

Despite the importance of reaching out to the consumer, in a report from Svensk Handel (2017) it is presented that companies within the fashion industry constitute the smallest sector in Sweden that actually states that they actively work with sustainability issues. According to the Sustainable Brand Index report from 2018, in which consumers evaluate how sustainable they think brands in Sweden are, no fashion retailer was in the top ten (Sustainable Brand Index, 2018). With MQ landing on place 233, other Swedish fashion retailers like H&M, Lindex, KappAhl and Åhléns all ended up in front of MQ where Åhléns was the only company who ended up in the top 100, at place 72. KappAhl and Lindex ended up on place 108 respectively 113, followed by H&M on place 123 which can be seen as a decline compared to the company's 86th place previous year (Sustainable Brand Index, 2018). Further, in the PULSE report published by the Global fashion agenda (2018) they mention that industry leaders often are the ones that take the lead when it comes to sustainability and open up for the rest of the industry to continuously learn from them in an on-going process. However, in the report it appears that small and medium sized companies in the mid-price segment achieved most progress during 2017, compared to other industry segments when it

comes to addressing social and environmental issues. These companies achieved this mostly through a clear strategy and increased transparency (Global fashion agenda, 2018). Still, this is something that MQs CSR & Environmental Managers argue can be a challenge for a medium sized retailer like MQ, with a relatively complex and big supply chain. It is further stated that for fashion companies to achieve or retain a more sustainable business model is to not forget to uphold their internal communication, which is the one way through which sustainability can become “an integral part of the company’s core business, values, and, ultimately, DNA” (Global fashion agenda, p.33).

However, according to the report published by the Global fashion agenda (2018), the journey towards a more sustainable fashion industry cannot be achieved by one company alone. Instead it needs to be achieved through a joint action, including other fashion companies, suppliers, investors, regulators, NGOs, academia, and consumers (Global fashion agenda, 2018). Even though many fashion companies are working towards more sustainable practices and that certain progress has been made, there is much more that can be achieved in increasing responsible practices (Global fashion agenda, 2018). For example, it has been argued that the fashion industry is in need of a deeper and more systematic change and that it can gain from competitors working closer together to form an industry-wide-commitment towards sustainability (Global fashion agenda, 2018). According to MQs CSR & Environmental Managers there are certain initiatives and objectives that actors within this industry have to relate to. Further, they believe that it is possible to do something together with other actors within the industry and to actually achieve something when it comes to sustainability. One example of where the fashion companies have successfully come together in an industry-wide-commitment is the initiative One Bag Habit, which has been initiated by three fashion retailers in Sweden; H&M, KappAhl and Lindex. The initiative aims to reduce the consumption of plastic by charging customers for bags in the store, as well as by encouraging consumers to reuse their old bags (One Bag Habit, 2018). Another collaboration among companies within the fashion industry is the Swedish Textile Water Initiative focusing on various water treatment projects in countries where they manufacture (STWI, 2018). MQ is engaged in these two initiatives, which both contribute to improvements in environmental issues.

4.2 MQs strategic sustainability work

Sustainability is an integrated part of MQs core business and through MQs Sustainability Strategy 2020, the retailer is convinced that a commitment to sustainability is crucial when it comes to long-term business development and to continuously ensure an attractive offer to their consumers. The strategy is a holistic approach, which concerns all of the retailer's operations with the aim to broaden and deepen the sustainability work throughout the organisation (MQ, 2017). According to one of MQs CSR & Environmental Managers, MQ has always worked with sustainability based on being transparent, honest and a willingness to take responsibility. Further, she says that it is about taking responsibility for the business they run and the impact they as retailers have on the planet. It is about taking responsibility for their production with regard to people, animals and the environment, while at the same time harmonising these aspects with economic sustainability. In MQs Annual Report 2016/2017 with their Sustainability Report included, the following objectives for their sustainability work are stated:

- To create competitive fashion products with regard to people, animals and the environment that will maintain their shape and quality over time
- To exceed consumer expectations and to offer consumers a sustainable wardrobe
- To proactively advocate sustainable production throughout the value chain
- That each employee feels proud, is satisfied and is committed to their daily work
- To operate within the planetary boundaries

Quality is the hallmark for the MQ brand and the strategy for the retailer's sustainability work therefore builds on a framework in which quality and design takes centre place (MQ, 2017). One of MQs CSR & Environmental Managers explains that for MQ sustainability is quality and entails quality in all of the retailer's relationships; with the planet, producers, employees and consumers. Quality in relation to the planet is about operating within the planetary boundaries from a long-term perspective. The most important focus areas are minimising emissions, energy consumption and to consider the use of natural resources so that the resources which are used do not exceed the limit of what the planet is capable of providing in a one year time period. When it comes to quality in relation to their producers, the focus is on proactively promoting social issues in terms of safe and healthy working conditions along the

supply chain. Through providing an inspiring workplace, the retailer aims to enhance the quality in relation to their employees so that they feel pride, satisfaction and commitment in their work. Lastly, quality in relation to the consumers is about meeting and exceeding their expectations (MQ, 2017).

According to one of MQs Sustainability & Environmental Managers, their consumers expect to buy products that last for long in terms of quality and shape. Taking responsibility for how these products are made, working conditions in the factories and quality controls have since early on been recognised as the main focus area for the retailer's sustainability work. Further, she says that part of the goal is that consumers should associate MQ with a brand that takes responsibility and that they can expect the retailer to work with these issues. To exceed these expectations is therefore about continuously making incremental improvements of the already existing aspects, but also to proceed in terms of including more dimensions of the sustainability work such as through product development with new sustainable materials.

Figure 2 illustrates MQs framework of how the retailer works with sustainability as quality, which is complemented with priorities in the different relationships. As this study investigates the case of how a retailer's strategic sustainability work on corporate level is translated into and communicated in the store environment in the context of MQ, some of these priorities come into more focus than others. How sustainability is integrated and promoted throughout the operations as well as sustainable leadership, training and education, is of relevance when trying to capture the sustainability translation process. Further, the main priorities when it comes to how sustainability is communicated in the store environment are those which focus on the consumers. How the retailer-consumer relationship is established and strengthened through transparency and relevance in external communication of sustainability, as well as how the in-store knowledge of textiles is increased with the aim of educating consumers and to prolong the lifespan of garments, will be related to in the following sections (MQ, 2017).

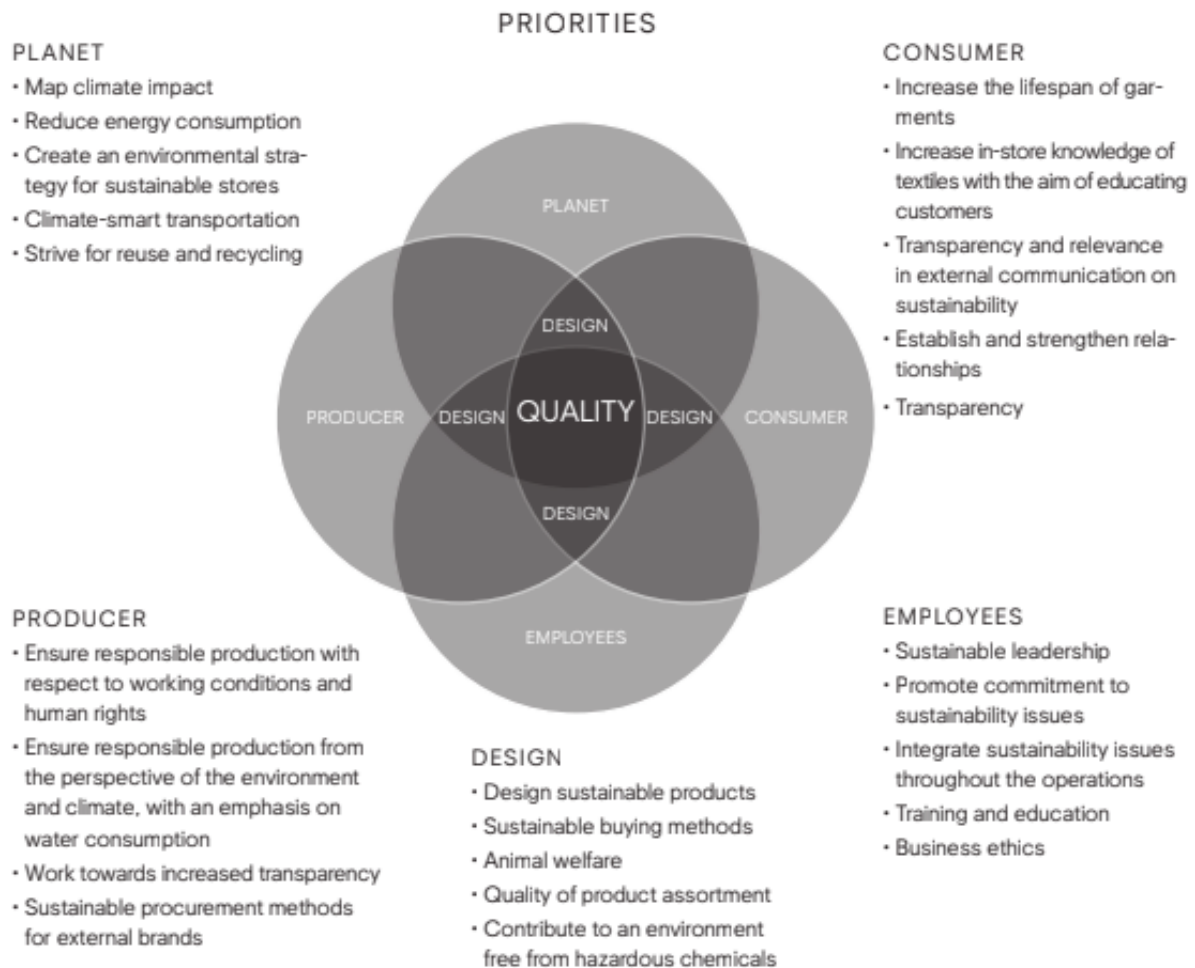


Figure 2. Quality in all relations

4.3 The translation process of sustainability

4.3.1 Vertical and horizontal collaboration

At MQ, all employees in the organisation are intended to be involved in the retailer's sustainability work in one way or another through the sharing of information and knowledge. The executive management is ultimately responsible for MQs sustainability strategy and the CSR & Environmental Managers for the production, revision and follow up. Further, the department managers are responsible for implementing the strategy and that activities which relates to the strategy are carried out within each department (MQ, 2017). The first step of operationalisation of the strategic sustainability work is identified as taking place at the CSR department, where two CSR & Environmental Managers share the responsibility, each with a special focus on different issues within the area of sustainability.

The dedication among the CSR & Environmental Managers is acknowledged and since having two persons continuously working with these issues to ensure that sustainability is on the agenda has made a difference. It is not that the company has not worked with these issues before but rather, they have not talked about it to that extent before, which is now mentioned as necessary in order to spread sustainability throughout the organisation. All managers at corporate level paint the same picture of the coordination and collaboration regarding sustainability across their different departments at HQ. There have been significant improvements during the last couple of years, but there is still a long way to go to ensure that sustainability permeates the entire organisation. As it is today, the relationship between the CSR department and the other functions at HQ differs. According to the Head of Design, sustainability is of great importance in his daily work and sustainability has a natural place already from the start of the design process. One of the CSR & Environmental Managers points out the production of MQs products as being where the business has its biggest environmental impact and for that reason the main focus of making improvements has been on that particular phase since she started at the company nine years ago. The collaboration between the CSR department and employees working within design, purchasing and production is therefore well established by now. Further, part of the most recent sustainability strategy is to find and create successful ways of collaborating across all departments.

The CRM Manager thinks that with the sustainability strategy 2020 the vision for MQs sustainability work is very clear, but it is perhaps not as concretised in a course of action within all departments. He agrees that much focus has been put on production and that the place sustainability has within the departments differs. One Bag Habit is one example mentioned of how the marketing department has been involved with sustainability as the initiative had to be communicated to their consumers through MQs different channels. However, the CRM Manager can also see that the sustainability work could be operationalised into guidelines in his daily work other than what is visible. Digitalisation has had an impact on their communication, but still information and letters are sent out to their members by traditional mail and one may consider stricter guidelines of what paper to use for these seen from a sustainability perspective. A similar example of where this has been considered is the use of digital signage in the retailer's latest store concept and how it is successively replacing printed material due to the environmental impact it has in terms of paper and plastic waste, as well as logistics.

The CSR & Environmental Managers both agree that it is easier to operationalise the strategic sustainability work within some departments than others and they make a comparison between logistics and marketing. When it comes to transports it is mainly about mapping and measuring the environmental impact in order to find solutions that are possible to implement while at the same time enhancing the performance in sustainability terms. However, when it comes to for example marketing it is different. One of them says:

If you take marketing as an example, it is also linked to where we should stand as a company and where we are also undergoing a drastic change on the market as consumers no longer act as they used to, and we see competition from e-commerce, and a fashion industry that is shaking [...] therefore we are generally considering how to communicate. And before it is set it is difficult to talk about how we should communicate sustainability. Because we cannot communicate sustainability as a side-track.

Further, MQ is also a publicly listed company, which implies stakeholders who expect the company to deliver profits in order to justify its existence to move forward. As a consequence, it is therefore easier to make decisions in those issues that are not associated with any major costs. In other words, when it comes to some actions in relation to which several interests need to be balanced, it turns into a longer and a more complex process to accomplish change.

The CSR & Environmental Managers also point out the importance of not only working horizontally, but also to involve the entire organisation all the way out to the salespersons in MQs stores. The pages on MQs official website about the retailer's sustainability work was renewed earlier this year. In this process, the CSR department reached out to the Regional Managers who thereafter contacted the Store Managers in order to collect the most frequently asked questions about sustainability that the store personnel receive from their consumers. This information was then used by the CSR & Environmental Managers to create a section of questions and answers on the updated sustainability page. When it was launched, the intended recipient of this information was not only the end consumer, but it was also promoted as a tool for the salespersons to use. The CSR & Environmental Manager says:

We hear from them that in the case of an inquisitive consumer they have quite high demands that they should be able to provide an answer, which perhaps do not always feel completely fair. Because there are staff in circulation, and you can be new and you cannot know everything in all areas and all of its parts.

However, even though the CSR & Environmental Managers are experts on sustainability, they both emphasise the importance for the store personnel having knowledge as well.

I think they should be able to answer about textile materials [...] Maybe why organic cotton is better than traditional cotton. How the different types (of textiles) behave and how the materials need to be taken care of. When it comes to chemicals they can pass it on to us since it is something that is much more difficult. But they should know how we work with the chemical issue. [...] They should know that we work with sustainability and within which areas we work. Then you cannot learn everything and be able to answer about everything. But they should know where to find the information.

The Regional Manager acknowledges the role of the salespersons as valuable since “they can have an impact and a direct influence on the consumers”. She shares the same vision as she thinks textile materials, working conditions and logistics are part of MQs sustainability work that the store personnel are supposed to have an overall knowledge about. She states that “[...] with that type of knowledge the store personnel have the potential to sell on a completely different level”. If for example a salesperson can inform a consumer about the fact that MQ has replaced a material with another for sustainability reasons or that the company completely avoids some materials, the Regional Manager is of the opinion that they can please the consumers’ conscience in case they are informed about the fact that they make a more conscious choice.

4.3.2 Internal communication channels

The store personnel are provided with information about MQs sustainability work through several different channels. At MQs intranet IQ, employees working at the company can find the retailer’s sustainability strategy, questions and answers, as well as information about chemicals. In addition to this material at IQ, there is also information available to them on MQs official website. A general impression among the store personnel is that the material is so rich that it is impossible to remember it all and many employees confess that they do not read this information very often. Some feel that it is difficult to find time to read all the information, but it also seems to be a matter of interest. A quotation from a Store Manager captures these differences quite well as she expresses that “[...] some of them (her staff) loves the intranet so much that they sit at home and study. But then there are those who read occasionally. A little every day, so to say. But it is also a matter of time. We are here to sell”. Seemingly, reading about sustainability on the intranet is not considered as highly prioritised

as other duties, especially not in relation to how seldom they feel they actually need the information in order to answer questions from their consumers. Further, they feel safe about the fact that they know where they can find the information in case they need to.

Through the conducted interviews, an enormous trust for the CSR & Environmental Managers is identified among the store personnel. There are mainly three reasons for that. Firstly, as previously mentioned they make detailed information available to the employees through MQs intranet. Secondly, they are a valuable backup for the store personnel if any questions arise. One Store Manager tells us about her experience:

When we joined this One Bag Habit we received quite a lot of questions from consumers about why we have plastic bags and no papers bags. And then I sent that question to the headquarters. It is easy to find out who is responsible on the intranet and they are quick to respond about what answer we are supposed to give to the consumer. So if one has a question I think they are good at giving us support and answers.

Lastly, the CSR & Environmental Managers are perceived as quick to react in case of occurring events in media or such. Among the store personnel there is a common view that they feel safe that they always receive information on the intranet about negative incidents that have spread via media. A Salesperson explains how the information reaches them through the intranet:

Occasionally, some incidents are being reported in the media. It may be big things, like child labour for example. When things like that come up we always get...before we even...well, you read about it in the newspaper and then immediately after the information is on our intranet. There MQ has written about our standpoint and how we work. So that we directly have an answer to give to the consumer.

Due to the heavy information on the intranet, some respondents say they consider the sustainability pages on MQs official website to be more user-friendly. However, others say they do not use this channel for this particular purpose. Further, the fact that sustainability has been a topic on the agenda at the latest Store Manager meetings, which are held twice a year, has been widely appreciated by the Store Managers. At these meetings they are provided with information directly from the CSR & Environmental Managers without having to read a lot of information in text form. Some Store Managers also have the impression that the sustainability work is constantly progressing and it is therefore of interest for them to continuously find out about the development. It also becomes a forum in which they can pose questions and exchange thoughts about the topic. The CSR & Environmental Managers also

value these meetings since it is an opportunity for them to gather insights from different perspectives. When returning to their respective stores the Store Managers in turn present the information to their staff in the best way they can. However, it is acknowledged that it is not the same for the salespersons as being on the meetings and receiving the information directly from the ones who are responsible. In addition to these meetings some of the external brands invite the store personnel to clinics about their collections. A Store Manager explains:

We have for example clinics with some other brands when they come and speak; both about how they work with their qualities and what is new for this season, but where they also touch upon the topic sustainability. Filippa K for example works a lot with it. And that is interesting for us working in the stores to know about. Because then we can inform the consumer about the added value of buying these specific items.

4.3.3 Knowledge about sustainability among store employees

Considering the amount of available material, the knowledge among the store personnel is generally low. The most common answer to the question “Can you tell me about MQs sustainability work?” is that they know MQ works with sustainability within different areas such as production, social issues and sustainable materials. Some of them mention an example, but mostly they are not able to give more detailed descriptions about the sustainability work. A Visual Merchandiser says:

It is important for MQ to work with sustainability. I know that along the way from production out to the stores, so to speak, it is very strict how everything is taken care of. And there are rules and people who make sure that it is made in the best possible way. And if I would have liked to know about it more in detail, there is an opportunity to do so.

Some of the Store Managers with a longer history at MQ have noticed a change over the past few years. One of them explains that sustainability is more apparent to the store personnel today, but finds it difficult to pinpoint what has been the driving force behind these changes. The Store Manager says:

I think I have noticed changes over the last four or five years. But I sometimes find it difficult to trace where the changes take its start. Whether it is among the consumers that I have heard and noticed things, questions etc. Or if it is MQ who has initiated the changes. But it is definitely the case that it is more talk about sustainability. And one is more aware about it in the stores today and about how important it is to appear as a more sustainable company.

Another Store Manager says, “I know that we work with it more now, or perhaps we have done it all the time. But it is more recognised by us in the stores now, that is how I feel. It has been on the agenda during our Store Manager meetings and especially since One Bag Habit came”. Therefore, it is perhaps not strange that one of the most commonly used examples that the store personnel give about MQs sustainability work is One Bag Habit. It is the most visible initiative that MQ is engaging in, and involves both store personnel and consumers.

One of the Store Managers is self-critical about how little she thinks she knows about MQs sustainability work. Still, this one Store Manager gives one of the most detailed descriptions about it in comparison to all of the other store personnel that we have interviewed. Her self-critical reasoning connects very well to the vision that the store personnel have for how much they themselves think they should know about sustainability. Here, the results show that there are differences of opinion. However, if we should try to discern some patterns among the store employees’ views, they think they should know that MQ works with sustainability and what stance the company takes in some issues for example child labour and the use of fur. The general opinion is that the details about the retailer’s sustainability work are the CSR & Environmental Managers’ responsibility, at least when it comes to giving complex answers which the store personnel are afraid to give wrong to the consumers. The level of commitment and interest the individual store employee has when it comes to sustainability seems to be reflected in how they value this type of knowledge in their daily work. Some of them also directly put the level of knowledge needed in relation to how frequently they are asked such question from consumers. A Visual Merchandiser says:

For me to start reasoning about things that the consumer does not even care about or thinks of, feels unnecessary to me. In that case, I should perhaps work elsewhere if I would have been passionate about the environment and wanted to start a debate and so on. But in our store and with our customers there are not that many who asks, so that’s probably why I don’t...if the customers would have been more questioning and wondering, then I would probably have known more about it too.

There are differences between the stores in how frequently the personnel are asked questions about sustainability. Despite this, some store employees give examples of how their lack of knowledge has led to embarrassing meetings with a consumer. A salesperson says:

Now and then, there have been consumers who have asked about something and “No we don't have it”. But then the consumer says “I’m holding the garment”. That is made of just that material. And then it’s like ouch! It is a little embarrassing. Some awkward situations like that may occur. So okay, I work in a store, why don’t I know this? But you can only see it as a learning lesson and it may then be interesting to study a bit. But it is in fact a lot to read, just because then I may not get that question again until a few months later and at that point I have already had time to forget about it just because it is not that often.

When it comes to textile materials the majority sees it as being part of their role as salespersons to have general knowledge about. However, there is a difference when it comes to how some store employees say they use this type of information such as to answer questions from consumers, and how others imagine themselves to use it. In other words, even if the responsibility lies at HQ, a salesperson who knows about production, textile materials and how the garments should be taken care of to last for long can actively inform the consumer about these aspects and highlight the advantages. Adding to the discussion of the division of knowledge between HQ and the stores, one Store Manager talks about it in terms of knowing what is related to buying signals:

I actually had a customer yesterday who asked ”Do you have any jeans in the store or online that is made of organic cotton?”. And then I just...well, I stood there like a question mark and could not think of a single pair even though we probably have some. But there is no like system for me to search after it in and there is no label or so that I can run around and look for. And it feels like in that situation, if I would have been able to pick out three pairs, then I could have sold them in an instant. And in that case one cannot refer to the headquarters because it is not a question, but a buying signal. And everything that has to do with buying signals one should be able to access more easily in the store.

Part of the problem of not knowing everything when it comes to sustainability leads back to the time aspect. Currently, the information about sustainability is limited in the introduction programme when starting at MQ and the responsibility is mostly up to the individual to take the time to gain more knowledge about it. Since just over a year back in time the retailer implemented Smart Styling about textile materials for their store personnel. According to the CSR & Environmental Managers the aim was that this education would also cover some sustainability aspects.

On the basis of our conducted observation of doing Smart Styling, its content can be said to be a thorough presentation of textile materials in order to educate store personnel about how to recommend the right garments to the consumers, as well as to give them the right care advices. Smart Styling starts with an introduction to textiles and thereafter consists of eleven sections in which the different materials are presented. The education is not primarily focusing on sustainability, but it does cover some environmental aspects of each textile material as well as care instructions in order to make the clothes last for long. Each section is composed of a number of different parts; text and a film of the specific material and its advantages respectively disadvantages, followed by another film about how to use this knowledge in the meeting with the consumers and lastly a short test with questions that needs to be answered correctly before moving on to the next section. One of the sections has been added more recently and has a slightly different setup since it is composed of more material in film. It should also be mentioned that Smart Styling gives a general overview of textile materials, and does not focus specifically on MQs products.

The general impression among the store employees is that Smart Styling was informative and highly appreciated. They feel that it was easy to learn from it because of its setup with a combination of text and film, and the test in the end was considered to be a receipt of their learning outcomes. Among MQs workforce there are differences in experience and therefore some of those who have worked in stores for decades have already received similar training in the past. Smart Styling was for that reason thought of as mostly valuable for those store employees who are younger as well as those who perhaps have not worked with selling clothes before starting at MQ. By them it was expressed as longed-for due to the reason that they several times have felt that the consumers have more knowledge than they have. When Smart Styling was launched, the Store Managers were responsible for setting time aside for their staff to complete the education, which has been done in all stores except one. Most of them conducted the education during a shorter period of time and due to its complexity in consisting of many different parts, most of the store employees admit that they have forgotten some of its content. However, some of the Store Managers have printed out parts of the material in order to make it easier for their employees to repeat in case they feel the need to. Further, Smart Styling is also said to have had an impact on their spirit as they talk, help and remind each other to use the knowledge gained from the education when they meet the consumers. Since there has not been any central follow up on how many of the store personnel that have taken the education or of which knowledge they have gained from it, the

level between the stores seems to vary and being dependent on the Store Managers' ambitions.

4.4 External communication of sustainability

4.4.1 The visibility of the approach

Throughout our interviews, the MQ store has been identified as an interface with valuable potential for communicating sustainability. Despite increasing e-commerce this is where MQ meets the majority of its consumers and both the CSR & Environmental Managers and the Visual Merchandise Manager believe that the personal meeting MQ can offer in-store is one of the company's strengths. Further, this meeting is where the company has one possibility to offer consumers knowledge into how MQ works with sustainability. MQs CRM Manager believes that it is important to communicate about sustainability in-store, partly to help the consumer make a better choice, but also to actually create awareness among them. He says "I think if you, in the store, communicate about it, yes, then we can guide the customer to make a better choice. And also create some form of awareness around it". Furthermore, MQs Head of Design believes that communication can be crucial, especially in making the consumer aware of the value of paying a higher price for a more sustainable garment. One of MQs Regional Managers further argues that communicating about sustainability in a professional way in the store can be a way of distinguishing oneself from competitors and a survival factor within retail today.

However, based on the conducted observations, sustainability was not visibly present in MQs stores and it was therefore difficult to interpret such a message. Instead other competing messages such as saving offers and sales were more present. This observation was in line with the opinion shared by the interviewees within all organisational layers, namely that MQ is very anonymous about the company's sustainability work in the store today. Nonetheless, in interviews with persons at HQ it was found that the overall message that the retailer intends to communicate in the stores is quality and that MQ offers a sustainable wardrobe, containing garments that can be worn for a long time. MQs Visual Merchandise Manager says:

We are in fact a chain with stores where you build your sustainable wardrobe. By that I mean you should not buy a garment that you have to throw away next season, [...] you should be able to extend your wardrobe with an item you have bought now, but that it can complement your other products you have purchased. That is really what the brand is based on.

Furthermore, it was also demonstrated that the amount of general information about sustainability offered to MQs consumers in the store was limited. The only communication material visible in the store were sustainability labels attached to a relatively small number of garments, as well as information about the initiative One Bag Habit in the form of a sign close to the cashier. Other types of communication material or tools promoting sustainability could not be identified, such as window display, other types of signage or decorative items. The same picture was given throughout our interviews at store level, and the CSR & Environmental Managers explain that product specific communication such as labels is something that has been prioritised due to the importance of clarifying what the garment contains. Hence, if you walk in to a MQ store today you can come across for example a big green Eco-finish label and a variation of smaller white labels communicating about some of their materials. Some of these are directly linked to a sustainable message, for example “made from tencel”, “made from organic cotton” and “made from recycled material” (Appendix C and Appendix D). According to the CSR & Environmental Managers, some of these labels have been in place for several years but they have been in the same colour and with the same design as their additional hang tags. This means that all labels, regardless of whether they communicate about sustainable materials, about premium materials or about extra attention to inform the consumer, have similar appearances in the store today. Furthermore, since MQ offers both external and internal brands it is important to mention that MQs own sustainability labels are only attached to internal brands while some of their external brands have their respective labels. Examples of the latter are Filippa K’s label for “organic cotton a more sustainable choice” and Knowledge Cotton Apparel’s label for “organic cotton/linen”. The external brand Brixtol also carries its own label, however this label is not about sustainability per se, but about quality in the manufacturing.

The response given from the store personnel about MQs sustainability labels was mainly positive, partly because these labels make it easier for store personnel themselves to find information about a garment. Further, they also constitute a valuable tool for consumers in the

mechanical sales process, as it makes it easier for them to identify sustainable garments on their own. Despite this, a Visual Merchandiser says:

[...] For the customers for whom this is important, they probably have the knowledge and they move around looking at the labels. That is what I think. Because it is very seldom that someone comes up to me and asks: "Hello, I want to buy a sustainable garment, which do you recommend?" I do not think that has ever happened to me.

Even if the sustainability labels offers the possibility to distinguish the more sustainable garments from those that are not, these items are hardly a very visible choice to the consumer. While conducting the observations in the stores it was in some cases necessary to actively search for the labels in order to actually find them. This was something that was also brought up by store employees, who describe that they sometimes struggle in order to find a garment with a sustainability label in-store. However, it became obvious during our observations that the arrangement of garments in the store is of importance for whether or not it was possible to recognise which garment was marked with a sustainability label. When garments were placed on a table it was easier to distinguish the sustainability label compared to when it was hanging together with other garments. However, the response given from consumers to the store personnel regarding these labels varies. If they receive any response at all, the response is positive. Yet, among those who had not received any response holds the belief that consumers do not care that much about labels, that the label itself does not sell, or that other attributes are more important, such as design or price. One of the Store Managers says:

[...] I think it is like this, the customer thinks that it is very positive that we consider the environmental aspect. But I do not know, it does not feel like they choose to buy the jacket because we have this, this green label on. That is not why they buy the jacket, but it is of course a positive aspect when informing about it. So they think it is a bonus, absolutely.

Furthermore, it was clear throughout our interviews that service is an important part of MQs offering and at HQ the store employees are acknowledged to be important in communicating about sustainability in their interaction with consumers. MQs Visual Merchandise Manager argues that it is in this meeting that MQ can communicate to its consumers about the sustainable wardrobe, which is a tradition within the company. She further says:

Because, I think a little bit about what we stand for out there. What we stand for is for the meeting with the consumer to be credible. We do not sell a shirt that does not fit. And then, maybe it is the information that goes from the seller to the consumer that makes you trust us, because we are a company that thinks.

Among the store personnel there are those who mention that they as well, see themselves as important in answering questions about sustainability in the store and that it is what characterises a professional way of working. However, throughout the interviews the store personnel found it difficult to recall what type of questions they receive from consumers in the store regarding sustainability, and also how often they receive these questions. Further, with regards to these aspects there were also some variations between stores. Questions about different materials, the quality of the garment and its origin were mentioned as questions most frequently asked by the consumers together with questions about why MQ now charge their consumers for a bag, due to the initiative One Bag Habit. Depending on the level of difficulty of the questions, the store personnel describe that they either have the knowledge to give an answer directly, or that they need to search for the right answer. In case they do not know the answer to a question they can search for the requested information through MQs intranet IQ, MQs website, customer service or contacts at HQ, and then return to the consumer.

When it comes to the initiative One Bag Habit, store personnel mention that they now feel comfortable in answering questions about this initiative and also in explaining why MQ has joined this initiative since it is for a good cause. At the moment, this initiative is communicated in two different ways in-store, as described by one of the Store Managers:

We have an information sign at the checkout about One Bag Habit; why it is important that we reduce our plastic consumption and where the money that comes in to MQ when paying for the bags, where they go. And then we also inform the customer verbally about that as well.

The importance of explaining the purpose of and directive behind the initiative to the consumer, as well as about the fact that the money earned from sales goes to the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, and not directly to MQ, is something that is being emphasised among store personnel. It was also mentioned that they sometimes inform their consumers about how much plastic this initiative has helped saving from the environment, which consumers are perceived to appreciate. Hence, the initiative One Bag Habit is one of the more visible ways of communicating about sustainability in MQs stores today and an

initiative that engages the consumer in sustainable consumption as they are confronted with this every time they make a purchase in the store. The interviewees agreed upon that the overall response to the initiative has been mainly positive from the consumers, with a few exceptions. Further, one of MQs Store Managers says that it was, and still is, a challenge not to take it personally when consumers become upset, and describes one way to think in that situation:

So it is a challenge as well, not to take it personally. You feel that now I am just the representative for our company and... And I must try in the best possible way to calm this customer and to make the customer become aware about that they are contributing to a good cause and that we as well are trying to achieve something great.

However, now that almost one year has passed since One Bag Habit was implemented, many among the store personnel can see a difference in how consumers behave. Consumers have started to bring their own bags to the store instead of purchasing a new one while others purchase the bag without complaining, in the same way as when visiting a grocery store. The store employees believe that the main reason for why the implementation has been so successful is mainly because it was easier for the consumer to accept this change when a number of different retailers joined forces, doing the same thing at the same time. The CSR & Environmental Managers also believe that the involvement of media has had an impact:

[...] it has been overwhelmingly positive. We have also received a lot of positive feedback from our collaboration with the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, where the money goes, and where you actually have seen... They have written about it, and then they have received a lot of positive feedback from their members. And the media has also given it a lot of attention, why One Bag Habit as such also has received positive attention. So I feel that it has become something that we have achieved together with our customers for the first time. A sustainability work that you do together.

4.4.2 Sustainability service

The education Smart Styling has previously been mentioned as valuable as it gives the store personnel useful knowledge in being able to answer consumers' inquiries, but also to be able to communicate about different textile materials and garment care covering some sustainability aspects. Hence, they inform their consumers when it comes to the production of garments, what the garment is made of and how to care for and wash the garment. One of the

Store Managers argues that this education provides the store personnel with the prerequisites to communicate about these aspects in a better, more professional and trustworthy way. The Store Manager says:

Except for the most essential it is clear that you feel like a very trustworthy seller when you know things about the product. Because it is a sales tool as well. Sometimes it is not sure that the customer even listens to what you actually have to say, but you can see on their look that they like that you are being credible. And customers even come in and ask questions about washing advice and advice about how to care for the garment because they think that we in the store are experts.

The store employees give care and washing advice to their consumers on a routine basis, something they call “to put green words in the bag”, partly with the aim of reducing the number of complaints. Additionally, MQs CRM Manager believes that the store personnel are the ones who can communicate to consumers about for example how to wash their clothes, in the most appropriate and natural way, and that such care advices are a way of providing service to the consumer. However, he continues arguing that consumers may not always perceive it primary as connected to sustainability and in that case signage may be more hands on. In line with what the Store Manager said about the knowledge gained from Smart Styling being used as sales arguments, the CRM Manager believes that care and washing advices are “actually pretty basic sales tricks really”, as long as the store personnel have knowledge about the garments. One of the Store Managers further explains why she appreciates the education Smart Styling, but also in what way she puts it in practice in the meeting with the consumer. She explains how it can be used as sales arguments:

It is useful in so many ways. Also... Both having the knowledge about how different materials behave and how they affect the environment. But also sales techniques, sales arguments in other words. It really helps to know how different materials behave. [...] To talk in different ways about the benefits of each piece of clothing, based on what it is for material.

Even though the knowledge gained from Smart Styling gives the store personnel the prerequisites to talk about sustainability in a more trustworthy way, some of them mention that this is mainly executed when they feel they have the time or when they notice an interested consumer who asks questions about it before making a purchase. The store employees argue that the time spent in the store is important and they only initiate such a dialogue about sustainability when they feel that it adds something. The difficulty of initiating

a dialogue about sustainability with consumers, before having received a question about it, was also brought up during interviews with store personnel. They believe that sustainability is not a determining factor among MQs consumers for whether to buy a piece of clothing or not, instead its price and design are perceived to be more important. Hence, one Store Manager explains that a dialogue with a consumer often involves a discussion about the price:

“Why should I buy this more expensive garment?” [...] And generally, we have good quality on everything. But I usually explain to the consumer the importance of... Yes, it may cost a little bit more here and now but in the long term, it is much more sustainable to pay more for a garment if you can wear it much longer.

As mentioned above, it is clear that the store employees attempt to prevent complaints by providing their consumers with care and washing advices. However, if it comes down to a complaint from a consumer, MQ always try to repair the garment if possible through their tailoring service that they offer in the store, otherwise it is given away to the organisation Myrorna. Instead of consumers discarding their clothes and ending up buying new ones, this is a way of acting sustainable. MQs CRM Manager describes this service as an activity, which in the long term supports more sustainable consumption behaviours. However, even though this service is appreciated by MQs employees and most of their consumers, this is not something that is communicated other than in the interaction with store personnel. In order to gain an overview of the amount of complaints handled by MQ, they have developed a new system where all complaints are registered which makes it possible to see how many garments that are being repaired.

5 Analysis

In this chapter the empirical material together with theories from the literature review forms the basis for our analysis constituting of four parts. In the first section, the focus is on how the retailer relates to sustainability through a reactive and proactive approach. The focus of the second section is on managing the internal sensemaking process of sustainability and in the following section the focus is on the challenges of communicating the complexity of sustainability in the store environment. Lastly, the final section deals with the alignment of the retailer's brand identity and version of sustainability on both corporate and store level, with the perceived image and expectations of their consumer.

5.1 Proactive vs. reactive approaches

Retailers with their intermediary position between manufacturers and consumers have the ability to influence the physical exchange occurring in-store as well as the understanding of sustainable consumption (Lehner, 2015b). However, while doing so the retailers are at the same time facing enormous pressure from numerous stakeholders, why Lehner (2015b) argues that it is important for retailers to understand their role within their respective field. Based on the collected empirical material, two approaches are discerned for retailers to take when engaging in sustainability. The first one is a reactive approach, which involves the development of the retailer's sustainability activities and communication based on the stakeholder pressure and expectations from their consumers. Further, the second approach is more proactive and the retailer is seen as being the actor responsible for initiating and driving sustainable consumption.

Recognising the opportunities of engaging in sustainability and integrating it into the core business constitutes according to Kennedy, Kapitan and Soo (2016) an important part of an authentically sustainability retail orientation, where sustainable values should be at the centre of all business decisions. The importance of taking responsibility for its business by integrating economic, environmental and social sustainability into the company's core has also been recognised by MQ, which according to Wilson (2015) can be turned into a competitive advantage if managed properly. However, the CSR & Environmental Managers

argue that one consequence of MQ being a publicly listed company is the difficulty of making decisions regarding those questions associated with major costs. The absence of a communication strategy is also evident, due to other interests within the company being more prioritised. Despite the strong commitment from the CSR department this may imply that sustainability is not at the core of every decision within the company. In line with the results from Jones, Hillier & Comfort (2013), it can be questioned whether or not the commitment to sustainability is more driven by other business imperatives. Even though sustainability is on the agenda and that progress has been made, it could be fruitful for MQ as a company to prioritise this to a greater extent so that it becomes more central when making decisions, as well as a source of competitive advantage.

Regardless of whether the commitment to sustainability is driven by business imperatives or not, another dimension is how the strategic and operationalised sustainability work is initiated and guided by the company itself or as a response to media, supplier pressure, the industry or consumer demand (Fuentes, 2015). The CSR & Environmental Managers describe that the company's sustainability work was initiated first when it became a listed company in 2010. This was also when they for the first time published their Sustainability Report, which according to the CSR & Environmental Managers supports MQ in being transparent regarding how they work with sustainability. However, based on our interviews at HQ, MQs sustainability work is today partly driven and guided by market trends, competitors within the industry, stakeholders and the company's consumers. An example that may be given is that the implementation of labels was a response to insights gained from the store personnel who found it difficult to distinguish more sustainable garments, as well as a recognised need to communicate this more explicitly to the consumers in-store. Further, MQs future thoughts on implementing more signage in the store is according to the Visual Merchandise Manager an answer to how the company's competitors are working with communicating sustainability in-store, which today is more visible compared to MQs own communication.

When it comes to the perceived consumer pressure, the CSR & Environmental Managers argue that the company's consumers expect that MQ actively works with social and environmental aspects and they expect durable products in terms of both quality and shape. This is something that MQ takes into consideration when outlining their sustainability strategy. These findings are in line with Wilson (2015) and Kennedy, Kapitan & Soo (2016) who argue that a genuine sustainability strategy cannot be implemented successfully without

considering consumers in order to have an impact on sustainable consumption. However, consumers should not only be taken into consideration by the retailer when outlining a strategy, but also when outlining the company's marketing of sustainability (Fuentes, 2015). This leads us to consider the study by Fuentes (2015) who argues that the marketing of sustainability can be arranged around a specific notion of the responsible consumer, which is a consumer that can represent the company's customer base. Based on our findings, the employees were not able to provide a clear picture of MQs sustainable consumer. In line with Fuentes (2015) there may therefore be a need to critically reflect on who the responsible consumer is that guides, or should guide, the company's sustainability work in order to direct its marketing efforts in a more effective way towards its consumers in the store.

In the second more proactive approach the retailer could be seen as being the actor responsible for initiating and driving sustainable consumption. According to Jones, Hillier & Comfort (2013) retailers have the opportunity "to drive its sustainability work in three ways, namely through their own actions, through partnerships with suppliers and through their daily interactions with consumers" (p.33). As it is today, MQ is driving its sustainability work partly through their own actions, by for example the company's own tailoring service, as well as through collaborations with other actors in the industry such as by the initiative One Bag Habit. Hence, all practices include the interaction with consumers and are mainly communicated through store personnel. According to Fuentes & Fredriksson (2016), answering sustainability questions and promoting sustainability in the dialogue with the consumer are important practices for accomplishing sustainability service, why store personnel is a valuable resource in order to enable, encourage and engage consumers in sustainable consumption. In order to develop this theory, we have identified that there are also reactive and proactive approaches on store level, where the majority of the employees see their role as reactive. The store personnel view themselves as important in answering questions about sustainability in-store, but when it comes to initiating a dialogue about sustainability they do not perceive it to be as natural or important as the act of selling. In line with Elg & Hultman (2016), sustainability is not valued as highly compared to other contradictory activities in the store, why the store personnel do not simply take own initiatives to promote sustainability as often as one may wish. However, MQ has great potential in driving the company's sustainability work through its store personnel. Though, for this to become a natural part of the daily work routine and for store personnel to become more proactive in the sense of promoting sustainability, Elg and Hultman (2016) argue that store

personnel need proper training and education in order for them to feel that this act is expected from them.

Even though MQ does not aim to be frontrunners driving the change in the fashion industry, transparency that is expressed as the key in MQs sustainability work can still be assumed to be one important factor for driving sustainable consumption. The CSR & Environmental Managers argue that the company has always worked actively with sustainability based on being transparent and honest, by for example providing as much information as possible to their stakeholders. This is why MQ for example has designed and implemented some labels on garments from their internal brands in-store. Despite this they still stress that it is difficult to be transparent on product level and backwards in the supply chain. However, part of their goal is that they wish consumers to associate MQ with a brand that takes responsibility and to help consumers to make more sustainable choices. Connell (2010), Goworek et al. (2011) and Ritch (2015) argue that it is important for retailers to be transparent and provide consumers with relevant information. However, MQs CRM Manager argues that going out too strong when communicating about sustainability may be dangerous as the company may be more criticised and then need to answer for all of their activities. Hence, even though MQ has the right prerequisites for talking about sustainability to a greater extent through activities and communication, it is of great importance that the company shows transparency and a genuine commitment to sustainability through these actions.

5.2 Managing the sustainability sensemaking process

Internal sensemaking of sustainability refers to how individual employees understand the concept, followed by how this understanding is translated into concrete actions in their daily operations (Lehner, 2015b). As previously illustrated, sensemaking processes are on-going within MQ both at corporate and store level. In line with Lehner's (2015b) findings in his research of Swedish food retailers, these processes take different forms depending on the level in the organisational hierarchy it takes place, due to the fact that different interests are dealt with on each level. The unspecific nature of the concept of sustainability leaves room for the individual retailer to interpret sustainability in a way that is profitable while at the same time assumed to be socially acceptable (Lehner, 2015b). MQs CSR & Environmental Managers emphasise the importance for the retailer to adapt to the developing societal discourse of

sustainability and that it is an essential dimension for MQ as a brand to show a long-term commitment. At the same time a challenge lies in having to cope with various expectations and interests from their different stakeholders, where driving sustainability turns into a larger process when it is associated with costs.

At store level, the perceived conflict of interest is expressed differently as the store employees are faced with the market reality from a different perspective. The time aspect and focus on sales are identified as factors, which hinder them from prioritising sustainability to a higher degree. While relating to these two aspects, two points need to be made. First, the responsibility to gain more knowledge about sustainability is perceived to be on the individual and since the topic is so complex, the salespersons do not perceive themselves as having enough time to read all the information available on the intranet. As mentioned above, the fact that sustainability has been a topic on the agenda at the latest Store Manager meetings has been thought of as a more convenient channel for receiving this type information. However, a challenge lies in reaching the salespersons as sufficiently. Even though the aim is for the Store Managers to communicate this information to their staff, a filtering process is identified which can be illustrated by the following example. When interviewing a salesperson who has worked within the organisation for many years about MQs sustainability work, she told us that it involves working with social issues. In the interview with her boss, the Store Manager was able to go much more into detail of how the retailer works with this issue. She mentioned that MQ has regulations and follow-ups on the conditions of workers in their factories, for example to ensure that they are able to wash their hands and that they can put a fire out in case of an emergency. Although this may serve an illustrative example, it should be highlighted that the knowledge asymmetry is not only existent between HQ and stores, but also mentioned by interviewees to be between Store Managers and their staff. Thus, internal involvement through communication is suggested to be an important dimension to continuously improve the implementation of sustainable retailing (Lai, Cheng & Tang, 2010), where a managerial implication seemingly lies in considering both its reach and relevance throughout the organisation.

The second point has to do with how the store personnel understand their role and the interpretation of how they are supposed to transfer the information about sustainability to the consumer, which touches upon both the time and sales aspect. An organisation is build up by people and in the same way as the general societal debate consists of differences of attitudes,

interest and interpretation of sustainability, these differences are also reflected within MQ. While some of the store employees think that sustainability is of growing importance, appreciated by consumers and could be usable to them as sales arguments, others seem to interpret that for a salesperson to initiate sustainability in the dialogue with a consumer means having a lecture or debate about the topic. The different views indicate that even though sustainability is successively spreading, there is still a spectrum of interpretation varying from something normalised to something political or controversial. As emphasised in the existing literature, retailers need to relate to sustainability, but there is not one ideal way of doing so (Fuentes, 2015; Wilson, 2015). It is highlighted by the CSR & Environmental Managers that the retailer does not aim to be activist driven or a frontrunner when it comes to driving the changes in the fashion industry. Rather, sustainability is very important for MQ and the sustainability strategy is based on quality in their relations and being transparent to their stakeholders. The CRM Manager does not think that the retailer has managed to integrate their unique sustainability strategy as a natural part of the daily operations throughout the organisation yet. He says:

I do not think we have reached that point yet where we have turned it into being a natural part. Or in what way should it be a natural part? And I think that is the risk within almost all projects, that it is most obvious and clear to the persons or the department who is driving it. But then when it needs to spread throughout the organisation it becomes much more difficult. Because then it is perhaps someone else who should take the ball and run with it, and communicate and anchor it, and...and perhaps also think about how? So that it does not stop at: Okay so now we have put this sign in the store that says something about sustainability or whatever that it may be. It is not, maybe not all the way there. And yes, the store employees are very important in that.

In an idealised sensemaking model Lehner (2015b) argues that the two sensemaking processes within the different organisational layers need to be related to one another through guidance from corporate level, and ideas and innovation from the bottom and up. When it comes to the former, change agents that are at the forefront of the sensemaking process are the ones with the greatest potential of having an impact on the collective understanding of sustainability and on how it becomes incorporated in the retailer's daily operations (Lehner, 2015b). While exploring this case in the context of MQ, the two CSR and Environmental Managers are identified as having both the commitment and official responsibility to drive the sustainability agenda within the organisation. It is mentioned by them that it is sometimes a challenge to find ways to engage the entire organisation in sustainability and especially

figuring out how to package the information so that it appeals to the store personnel while at the same time is of relevance to their consumers. One example of how this has been done is through the education Smart Styling, with the aim of raising the knowledge among store employees, as well as to provide them with guidance on how to communicate it in their daily interactions with consumers. Internal training and education is mentioned in the literature as important in the process of implementing sustainability throughout the organisation. Further, it is also suggested that measuring the outcomes of such activities is crucial in order to continuously improve the implementation of sustainability strategies (Lai, Cheng & Tang, 2010; Wilson, 2015).

Apart from the CSR & Environmental Managers, we have also identified change agents at store level. Among the store employees there are those who are interested in sustainability, work with sustainability to the extent that it is possible with the tools they are given and see future possibilities in it. If considering the latter dimension of Lehner's (2015b) model, one should aim to find forums within which ideas can be exchanged of how sustainability is understood and acted in the retail store setting by those who work there on an everyday basis. Here, the relatively short distance between HQ and stores with only one organisational level in between, may be seen as one of the retailer's advantages in comparison to larger organisations. Thinking about the differences in how the store personnel perceive their role of communicating sustainability and the potential that lies in doing so, one could also reflect on how the sensemaking processes within different organisational layers may cross-fertilise when balancing between more guidance from HQ and up-stream ideas in order to drive innovation. From a managerial point of view, the findings of this study point towards that it is not the case that all employees need to be converted into a sustainability mind-set. Although the level of knowledge and interest in sustainability was limited, the proactive involvement of the change agents at store level may make the continuous transformation process to sustainable retailing easier since it focuses on involvement rather than exclusively a top-down pressure to change.

5.3 Communicating complexity in-store

Lehner (2015b) argues that “the store, as point-of-interaction between retailers and consumers fulfils an important role in the process of achieving sustainable consumption, not only as a place of physical exchange, but also as a place for exchange of information, ideas and understanding of what it means to consume sustainably” (p.389). However, in line with the results presented by Jones, Hillier and Comfort (2011b), our observations showed a lack of sustainability messages in-store, as the venue itself focused more at encouraging consumption. Lehner (2015a) argues that due to the complexity of the sustainability concept and its diverse nature, retailers sometimes find it difficult to reach their consumers via sustainable messages. It is therefore important to find ways to translate sustainability into simple behavioural recommendations in such way that it would enable, encourage and engage consumers in sustainable consumption (Lehner, 2015a).

Further, our findings showed that it was an overall theme that sustainability should be more visible and more promoted in MQs stores. However, some difficulties in doing so were brought up during the interviews. The CSR & Environmental Managers believe that it is challenging to have both internal and external brands with regards to communicating sustainability in-store. An example that was mentioned was regarding what a retailer is allowed to communicate or not when it comes to sustainability of the external brands in comparison to the internal ones. MQs Visual Merchandise Manager further argues that it is difficult to talk about sustainability in the store, not only due to the fact that there are other competing messages that distract, but also because of the limited amount of time you have in reaching the consumer. However, Simoes and Sebastiani (2017) argue that visual aspects, such as store layout and communication material, are valuable in generating a sustainability message. Further, a parallel may be drawn to an example used by Grewal, Roggeveen and Nordfält (2017) taken from the context of food retailing. When explaining how the in-store environment can be used to promote healthier eating habits, they also point out signage, layout and product placement as major components in making a certain type of goods more attractive and convenient to purchase (Grewal, Roggeveen & Nordfält, 2017). This is in line with Di Benedetto (2017) who argues that it is crucial for a sustainable option to be available in the store for consumers to act sustainable, despite their various level of engagement in sustainability.

MQs main priorities for the future when it comes to how sustainability can be communicated in the store focus on the consumer, both through more visible labels and signage. Further, it also includes an increased visibility and promotion of activities in store, such as care advices and MQs own tailoring service. The CSR & Environmental Managers suggest that their tailoring service and care advices can be promoted through the help of folders with information provided to the consumer or through complementary products such as laundry bags and laundry detergent. This is something they believe will make it easier for the store personnel to communicate about sustainability in-store more freely, but also a way to actually increase the knowledge among consumers in order to change their habits when it comes to how to take care of a garment during the usage phase. Goworek et al. (2012) argue that retailers have great potential to influence consumers through these types of activities and that it is crucial that they do in order to achieve a change in consumers' consumption behaviour. Even though MQ is working to prevent textile waste in case of complaints, the retailer is not engaging with the issue of post-consumer textile waste through take-back-systems, which according to Hvass (2014) provides possibilities for value creation.

When it comes to labels on garments in-store the CSR department has now decided to have separate labels; one label for sustainable material, one label for premium material and one that provides the consumer with other types of relevant information. These three different categories of labels are designed to be in different colours, which aim to make it easier for both store personnel and consumers to come across this information. This could be seen as a step in the right direction since according to Di Benedetto (2017) better labelling on sustainable products are effective in promoting the benefits which these types of products can be associated with. However, one may also consider consumers trust in the type of labels that retailers themselves invent in comparison to those that are third party independent labels (Rahbek Pedersen & Neergard, 2006), and also the possible difficulty for the consumer to navigate between different labels from both internal and external brands. To make the benefits even more visible and concrete for the consumer, as well as for the store personnel, MQ is in the progress of designing signage for their basic assortment from the internal brands 365 and Bläck. The idea is that signage will replace labels for those products that are being sold in larger volumes, such as socks, and that one should be able to see the same thing on the sign as when reading the label. Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2010) argue that signage can be used to guide consumers and to support their purchase decision, hence working as a silent salesperson. This is closely related to the function that Fuentes & Fredriksson (2016) ascribe

to these, namely as self-service tools that enable consumers to make informed sustainable choices. Di Benedetto (2017) argues that signage not only raises the awareness among consumers about sustainable options in-store, but also how these more sustainable options may differ from each other. However, MQs Visual Merchandise Manager argues that the message then needs to be short and concise, something that can be somewhat problematic:

[...] When you aim to talk about something that is sustainable, it always turns out to be a very long explanation. Somewhere, you want to be informative and not just say that it is sustainable. Because I think that simply saying that something is sustainable, is not something that the customer buys anymore. They want to know what makes it sustainable. Eh, and then you have to have a comprehensive text below, which makes you somewhat unclear in your communication.

MQs Visual Merchandise Manager further argues that it is easier to be informative on the web and on social media compared to the communication in-store, where it has to be much more direct in order to keep the customer. Hence, consumers' varying interest in sustainability is one of the challenges when communicating in the store, together with their varying knowledge about sustainability (Di Benedetto, 2017). Lehner (2015a) argues that consumers have different views of the meaning of sustainability and to what extent they value sustainability. This was demonstrated during our interviews, since it was mentioned that other attributes might be more important, such as design or price. This finding is in line with Connel (2010), Joergens (2006) and Ritch (2015) who argue that these two latter aspects are valued to a greater extent among consumers in comparison to sustainability. Joergens (2006) argues that this is particularly evident when it comes to fashion and its complex nature. Furthermore, consumers may not always understand the value of paying a higher price, why it is up to the retailer to illuminate the benefits (Ritch, 2010). It is therefore of importance for MQ to understand how their consumers think and act when it comes to sustainability within the retail store environment in order to actually be able to change their mind-set. MQ has proven their ability to accomplish this, which can be illustrated by their commitment to the initiative One Bag Habit as it has contributed to changes of consumption behaviours of plastic bags.

Lehner (2015a) further argues that the fact that consumers relate to sustainability and understand sustainable consumption in different ways, in turn make them value and appreciate different types of in-store communication. It is therefore of importance for retailers, to take these variations into account among consumers in order to communicate about sustainability in the most appropriate way in-store. Further, technology offers new

opportunities for doing so (Grewal, Roggeveen & Nordfält, 2017). MQs Head of Design mentions digital labels with information reached by the use of QR-codes as an example, but says that it is also a question of resources. In addition to the use of signage and labels, one of MQs CSR & Environmental Managers believes that another way to communicate about their different brands offered in the store would be through storytelling for example connected to the launch of a certain collection. She believes that this could engage the consumer and that it will be a more integrated approach and a more natural way of communicating about sustainability. Using MQs loyalty club to combine this type of communication with activities in the store is also being mentioned among persons at HQ as a way of communicating more integrated. This is in line with Simoes & Sebastiani (2017) who argue that it is important to “go beyond the traditional one-way approaches and purely rational contents, for example by using in-store demonstrations and storytelling about products and production” (p.441).

MQs CRM Manager further points out the importance of not getting caught in solely using the physical attributes to communicate about sustainability in store, instead the store personnel needs to continue the conversation. He further says: “it would be possible to boost the store personnel in how to communicate sustainability. But how should we do that?”. The store personnel at MQ constitute an important part in encouraging consumers to engage in sustainable consumption. Hence, even though MQ is now striving for an omnichannel strategy where digital values are more incorporated, the service dimension is furthermore what distinguishes the store from the e-commerce platform. This would be worth focusing on since communicating about sustainability is not a natural part of the store personnel’s daily work routine as it is now, but could form as a new way to restore the relevance of the physical space. Fuentes & Fredriksson (2016) argue that the service dimension within the retail store can be seen as a way to gain a competitive advantage that could enable and shape sustainable consumption, but also a way to maintain the company’s relation to its consumers. For this to happen it is important to provide the personnel with for example training programmes and a supporting infrastructure. Even though MQ today offers their store personnel the education Smart Styling, improvements can still be made to gather and translate relevant information from HQ to store level, in such a way so that the store employees feel the relevance of communicating the information to the consumer as a next step. According to Fuentes & Fredriksson (2016) it is also important to always stay updated about to the changing sustainability discourse when it comes to providing relevant service in-store, but also to be willing to adapt to these changes.

5.4 Alignment as the ideal aim

The importance of aligning the retailer's brand identity and version of sustainability on both corporate and store level, with the perceived image and expectations of their consumers is emphasised in the existing literature (Elg & Hultman, 2016; Fuentes, 2015; Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016; Lehner, 2015b). Fuentes (2015) argues that there is no standard approach for retailers to take when they aim to develop their sustainability profile. Thus, what should be considered is how the retailer's sustainability approach connects to the general profile and how it relates to their consumers (Fuentes, 2015). A symbiotic relationship between the general brand identity and sustainability orientation, and to leverage the interconnection may be a way to enhance the retailer's uniqueness as well as a source of competitive advantage (Simoes & Sebastiani, 2016). Further, what is required though is to make sustainability a natural and integrated part at both strategic and operational levels so that it becomes established within the organisational culture (Simoes & Sebastiani, 2016). In case the store involvement is low and the employees are not reached with these messages, the market impact of the retailer's sustainability efforts may be reduced (Elg & Hultman, 2016).

In line with previous research (Elg & Hultman, 2016; Lehner, 2015b), the empirical findings of this study also point towards the fact that retailers may find it difficult to move their strategic sustainability work into the identity of the store. Developing and implementing a sustainability strategy entails making a cognitive change of the employees mind-sets (Simoes & Sebastiani, 2016), and in this study we have aimed to gain insights of the organisational culture as in how the employees understand sustainability and how they incorporate it into their daily work activities. As previously mentioned, the knowledge among the employees and their engagement in the retailer's sustainability work becomes filtered throughout the organisational layers. Here, we would like to make a connection between how the retailer's employees "live" MQs sustainability work and what conditions they are given to do so. Misalignments between corporate vision and culture may occur when senior managers have set up a vision that the employees find to be difficult to understand, accept or too ambitious to implement into their daily operations (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Simoes & Sebastiani, 2016). Today, information about sustainability is provided to MQs store personnel through different channels. However, instead of focusing on how ambitious the strategy is to achieve, we see

that there may be a discrepancy between the available information and guidelines for how this information may be operationalised in the stores.

Since quality is the hallmark for MQs brand identity, there is a perceived fit with the fact that the sustainability strategy is built on the quality concept. Although this should be seen as a strength, there seem to be an unexplored potential in how this is used both in the internal and external communication. All managers that we interviewed at HQ talked about MQs sustainability work in terms of the retailer's sustainability strategy. However, at store level quality was a topic that was touched upon by the majority of the store employees as being part of MQs DNA, but without making an explicit connection to sustainability. Only a couple out of all store employees that were interviewed answered that for MQ sustainability means quality, when being asked the question "Can you tell us about MQs sustainability work?". Whether that is necessary or not can of course be discussed, since the salesperson may use quality as a sales argument to the consumer without having to reason in terms of it being sustainable per se. However, the way sustainability is packaged and communicated may be important to consider in order to enhance the understanding, anchor the sustainability work and a way to get around the differences of interpretation that seem to exist in some parts of the organisation. Further, it is also suggested that how sustainability is reflected in the store environment is also important in order to support the establishment of sustainability into the organisational culture (Simoes & Sebastiani, 2016), where one may need to rethink the relatively limited place it has in the stores as it is now. Lastly, in order to continuously improve the implementation of sustainability strategies it is crucial for managers to follow up how the sustainability strategy is operationalised throughout the organisation (Simoes & Sebastiani, 2016).

Since the consumers may meet MQ both through communication directly from HQ and through the interaction with the retailer's employees when visiting the store, there needs to be congruence between these perceived brand images. Hence, this reasoning should also include the sustainability work. Elg and Hultman (2016) argue that whether the sustainability work is rewarded by consumers or not, is dependent on the retailer's capability to successfully integrate this work throughout the entire organisation. Building on this theory, the employees' ability to interact and communicate sustainability to the consumers in a credible way needs to be understood in relation to how the employees throughout the organisation perceive the retailer's sustainability work in terms of credibility. Linking this discussion to a possible

breach between rhetoric and reality (Hatch and Schultz, 2001), the operationalisation of the sustainability work is seen as consisting of two dimensions. First, one dimension includes how the organisation works with sustainability behind the scenes and how the different departments become affected by the sustainability strategy in their daily operations. Second, the frontstage dimension refers to the visibility and to the actions taken within the different parts of the organisation to communicate sustainability to their consumers. What we have found out through the interviews is that the employees within different organisational levels themselves not only focus on how MQs sustainability work is perceived by their consumers. Furthermore, they do also reflect on how sustainability pervades their daily actions beyond what is visible to the consumers, which seems to be a bridge in order to increase the credibility that they are then aimed to transmit in their relation to the consumers. One example that was mentioned earlier which illustrates the two dimensions was the marketing department's involvement in sustainability communication to consumers, in relation to the fact that there are no guidelines when it comes to what paper to use for the information sent to members. Other examples taken from the store context are the possibility to recycle and the use of plastic bags when the clothes are delivered to the stores. This is something that the store personnel reflect on as not sustainable in their daily work, although it should be mentioned that MQ has reduced their use of plastic for this purpose significantly over the past couple of years. A quotation from an interview with a Store Manager illustrates her view of what happens when these two dimensions of the operationalisation of sustainability collide. She says:

[...] I think that it is important to not only say things and show it on the webpage. That one can show it on different places in the theory, while I am at the same time standing at the cash desk mixing paper and plastic into the same bin right in front of the eyes of the consumer. [...] Because there are no space and there is no such...bins and spaces for that. And the consumer sees that. And sometimes it feels like: "Asch! There everything collapsed". Here I stand talking about the plastic bag and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, and then next to me is a bin with mixed garbage.

Further, a sustainability strategy will not be implemented successfully unless the internal sensemaking process is aligned with how consumers in turn make sense of the concept (Lehner, 2015b; Wilson, 2015). In order to make use of the potential that lies in a corporate branding strategy, Hatch and Schultz (2001) argue that the company's strategic aims need to be aligned with the expectations of its consumers and the vision needs to be effectively communicate to them. In Fuentes (2015) study of three Swedish fashion retailers, it was found

that there is no standard approach for retailers to take when it comes to sustainability and also that their marketing efforts were each guided by an image of the responsible consumer. In MQs own surveys, quality has shown to be what their consumers value the most. Based on what Fuentes (2015) says about the fit between the retailer's sustainability approach with the goals and purposes of the specific retailer, there seems to be a natural such for MQs sustainability strategy as their consumers value quality.

In this study we have not mapped the expectations focusing on sustainability of MQs consumers by asking them, nor has the retailer. What has been found though is that there is no clear image of a sustainable consumer that is commonly shared among MQs employees. While some claim that there is no such thing as a sustainable consumer, others refer to more stereotypically guided perceptions of who that is and that it may not be MQs typical consumer. However, based on the empirical material most support is found for the view that the majority of consumers today are more or less conscious, but those that act in line with being sustainable is still relatively few. The CSR & Environmental Managers say that they see different types of sustainable consumers; there are those who see it in terms of quality and clothes that lasts for long, others care about where the garments are made, while another group of consumers follow media and the development of the general societal debate about sustainability. Further, they believe that sustainability thinking is growing among their consumers and that some may have started that journey within food, and are now moving beyond groceries to include for example clothes and skincare. The perceived differences of consumers' attitudes and behaviours, and their varying relation to sustainability are in line with research on sustainable consumption (Connell, 2010; Goworek et al. 2012; Joergens, 2006; Lehner 2015a; Ritch 2015). Fuentes (2015) claims that in order to avoid failures in speaking to the consumers, retailers need to critically reflect on what consumer models that guide their sustainability work and how it relates to their customer base. Therefore, to segment and map the consumers based on sustainability seems to be crucial in order to align the sustainability strategy with the expectations of the consumers, and perhaps above all to be able to customise the marketing efforts with information that will be found as relevant for them. Seemingly, for a retailer with a broader target group like MQ, this is assumed to be of greater importance.

6 Concluding chapter

In this chapter the research questions are answered and the conclusions based on the analysis are presented, followed by theoretical and practical contributions. The chapter ends with a presentation of the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

6.1 Conclusion

This study took its point of departure in the growing societal debate about sustainability and retailers' efforts of adapting to these changes based on their unique role. It had been argued that retailers find it challenging to integrate sustainability with a high degree of fit to the company's core business, while at the same time meeting the expectations of their various stakeholders. Further, it was suggested that they might not see the potential opportunities there are to gain from implementing and communicating about sustainability initiatives. With a special focus on the store environment as an important interface between the retailer and its consumers, this study has now come to conclusions on the following research questions:

- How is the strategic sustainability work translated from corporate level to store level?
- What aspects allow or hinder the store environment to be used to enable, encourage and engage consumers in sustainable consumption?
- What strategies can be used in order to support the translation process of how sustainability is operationalised throughout the organisation?

The results of the study show that the retailer has not fully achieved to integrate sustainability throughout the entire organisation. When it comes to the way in which sustainability takes its physical presence in the store environment, the visibility of the approach is limited. Instead, more reliance is put on labels on a selection of sustainable products and also the service dimension in terms of the interaction between the consumer and store personnel. Thus, this is considered to be problematic due to the filtering process that has been identified, resulting in sales persons being the ones who possess least knowledge about sustainability and find it least comfortable to talk about sustainability.

MQs sustainability work is quite anonymous in their stores as it is today, thus one may acknowledge the potential there lays in defining and communicating the retailer's own version of sustainability as a part of their brand. Because of the growing societal debate about sustainability it is of value for the company to show its consumers that you actually work with these issues, but also in order to not be forgotten in relation to competitors. The most crucial barriers hindering sustainable consumption from taking place are availability, price, knowledge and societal norms (Connell, 2010; Joergens, 2006; Ritch, 2015), and this study has illuminated ways in which these aspects can be addressed by affecting consumers in the store environment through different types of communication. However, despite the potential of using the physical space for this purpose instead of relying on information on the web, it also involves challenges that need to be overcome.

Making sustainable products available for the consumer, as well as to provide information about them through for example labels or signage, enable sustainable consumption to take place. However, what has been found is that it is more difficult for a retailer to achieve successfully when selling a mix of internal and external brands, both regarding what is allowed to be communicated and how to be transparent on product level. Further, due to the complexity of the sustainability concept it is challenging to dense the information down to a message that is informative, while at the same time possible for the consumer to apprehend in a store environment. Since consumers have varying interests, attitudes and knowledge about sustainability, it implies that one size fits all does not go when it comes to sustainability communication, service and activities in-store. Having a broad target group like MQ, calls for the need to map these variations in order to customise and reach the different consumers. Going into the future one may go beyond the analogue mediums used today such as print and labels, and instead integrate sustainability into the omnichannel strategy while using the advantages that digital tools have to offer.

Despite the benefits of having a more visible approach, we would still like to emphasise the importance of using the store personnel as a source for communicating about sustainability as a way of encouraging sustainable consumption. The service dimension is a central part of MQs offering and linking back to the changes in the retail landscape and the redefinition of the store, one may think of the place sustainability can take in the interaction between consumers and store personnel as a way to restore the relevance for the physical space. In the sustainability translation process from corporate to store level the major challenge that has

been identified is how to package and communicate the information about sustainability to the employees. Hence, it needs to be understandable and in turn found relevant to communicate when interacting with the consumers in order to encourage sustainable consumption.

Although MQ does not see their role in the fashion industry as a frontrunner for driving the changes of sustainability, the accomplishment of the retailer taking part of the initiative One Bag Habit should be highlighted. This initiative illustrates that sustainability, when becoming packaged or scripted in a more proactive approach, can bring about a change of mind-set among employees, as well as changes of norms and shopping behaviour among consumers with a measurable reduced environmental footprint.

What has been found is that there are two on-going sensemaking processes, where employees both at corporate and store level are interpreting sustainability. Here, the understanding of how they perceive their different roles in relation to the concept has been deepened through proactive and reactive approaches. Further, in an idealised model of a multi-layered sensemaking process Lehner (2015b) argues that such processes need to be connected between the organisational layers. In line with his reasoning, we see potential for retailers to find an infrastructure that supports their employees with guidance top-down, while at the same time gathering ideas and innovation from bottom and up. Firstly, for sustainability to pervade the entire organisation it is suggested to be concretised into different activities, which entails working with both the backstage and frontstage dimension. Secondly, change agents at store level could, if being involved, become valuable sources in order to achieve employee engagement and to make the transformation process to sustainable retailing easier. In line with Fuentes (2015) and Wilson (2015) we would like to end this conclusion by emphasising that the transformation of becoming a more sustainable retailer is not a shift, but rather a process. That seems to be particularly true for already established retailers with a longer history, thus on their journey towards this goal it is of uttermost importance to find transparent ways of working and to show genuine commitment to all of its stakeholders.

6.2 Theoretical contributions

This study has contributed to the academic field of sustainable retailing, through exploring the case of how retailers' strategic sustainability work on corporate level is translated into and communicated in the store environment. Due to the limited research on this particular topic

within fashion retail in comparison to other sectors, this study has filled a gap in the existing literature when drawing on empirical material from this particular setting. In previous research the need for extending the understanding of how the store is used for communicating sustainability, both in terms of engaging consumers and strengthening the brand image, had been pointed out. The purpose of this study was twofold, as it was both of a descriptive and exploratory nature. In order to fulfil the first part of the purpose, the study has captured an extensive description of the case based on a holistic view when gathering multiple perspectives from different positions within a retail organisation. Further, through qualitative research a deeper understanding of the complexity of the sustainability translation process in the retail setting has been reached, and following the second part of the purpose new dimensions have been identified which extends the theoretical understanding.

6.3 Practical contributions

The practical contributions of this study take their departure in the complexity of the sustainability concept as well as of sustainable fashion consumption. Hence, this study has contributed to insights of challenges and opportunities which are assumed to be valuable for fashion retailers' future work with sustainability so that it becomes a natural and integrated part of the business. Due to major changes occurring within retail at the moment, where e-commerce is growing and the role of the physical store is being redefined, the customer experience and the service dimension has taken on a different meaning. Hence, the place that sustainability can take in order to restore the relevance for the physical space has been emphasised in this study. In this sense the retailer may create and communicate its own version of sustainability through a combination of physical attributes and digital tools, which need be in accordance with the consumer base. However, the store personnel may be of even greater importance taking on a more proactive role in communicating sustainability and for example storytelling would have the potential to engage both consumers and employees. For store personnel to embrace this role it is important for managers at corporate level to provide them with the right means for communicating sustainability, such as the right education and different supporting attributes in-store. Further, identifying change agents at store level and to involve these would strengthen employee engagement and facilitate the transformation process to sustainable retailing. Lastly, we would like to stress the importance of continuously adapt and follow up on the journey of becoming a more sustainable retailer.

6.4 Limitations

This study has explored the particular case of how retailers' strategic sustainability work on corporate level is translated into and communicated in the store environment. Further, the case has been studied within the Swedish fashion retail context why the findings from this study can be applied primarily in similar settings. In order to deepen the understanding of the case one may consider exploring the case within other empirical contexts. Due to the time constraints of this study a selection among MQs stores and their respective employees had to be made. The total number of 25 interviewees within different positions, including 19 employees from eleven stores, was considered to be an ambitious number to interview and sufficient in order to strengthen the findings of this study. However a limitation is that it was not possible to capture the context in full due to the high number of approximately 120 stores that MQ has.

6.5 Future research

The particular case of this study has been explored in the context of the medium-sized retailer MQ where observations and interviews have been carried out in stores of varying size and geographical locations with an emphasis on the southern parts of Sweden. Future research could study the case through a retailer with a different scope or geographical location, with the aim to identify such potential variations and in turn explore how retailers may adapt to their local contexts. Further, the development of sustainability and how retailers work with sustainability vary between different sectors. Studying the particular case of this study in another context, for example through a retailer in a different industry, may provide interesting insights regarding the sustainability sensemaking process and how it is communicated in the store environment. Lastly, since this study only provides a snapshot in time of this process it could also be of interest to study this case over a longer period of time to potentially capture how the translation process evolves. It may provide further insights into how companies can work with their reactive versus proactive approaches, how to find the right balance for managing guidance and how to involve change agents within different organisational layers.

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Appendix A Interview guides

Introductory questions to all interviewees

What is your current position at MQ?

For how long have you worked at MQ?

How would you describe your role and responsibilities with regards to your position?

General questions to interviewees at HQ

What does sustainability mean for you in your work?

What is the goal of MQs sustainability work based on your position within the company?

Who is MQs sustainable consumer?

How would you describe the visibility of MQ's approach to sustainability in the store?

How do you see that MQ could communicate sustainability using the physical store in a more satisfying way?

What advantages and/or difficulties do you see in communicating sustainability in the store?

How does the collaboration between the different departments at the headquarters look like regarding sustainability?

Position specific Questions to MQs CSR & Environmental Managers

How do you enable consumers to make sustainable choices in the store?

How is the store environment used to encourage your consumers to a sustainable lifestyle?

How can the store personnel communicate sustainability in the store?

What questions regarding sustainability asked by consumers should the store personnel be able to answer compared to CSR Managers at HQ?

How do you relate to your competitors' sustainability work and the development that is occurring in the industry?

What feedback do you receive from your consumers when it comes to sustainability?

Having in mind that MQ has a mix of external and internal brands, what do you need to think about in terms of the sustainability communication in store?

What consequences have the initiative One Bag Habit had for MQ?

Questions to MQs CRM Manager

How do you gather information about how your consumers relate to sustainability?

What response have you received from your consumers so far in terms of sustainability?

Why do consumer choose MQ and for what reasons may they choose to leave?

What factors are most important for MQ in order to create good and long-term relationships with its consumers?

How does MQ's sustainability work and communication affect the company's relationship with its consumers?

Do you have any specific activities or campaigns about sustainability targeting your loyalty club?

Questions to MQs Visual Merchandise Manager

How do you enable consumers to make sustainable choices in the store?
How is the store environment used to encourage your consumers to a sustainable lifestyle?
What do you need to consider when creating visual merchandising material for the store in terms of sustainability?
Having in mind that MQ has a mix of external and internal brands, what do you need to think about in terms of the sustainability communication in store?
How do you relate to your competitors' sustainability communication and the development that is occurring in the industry?
How do you communicate with the stores regarding MQs sustainability communication?

Questions to MQs Regional Manager

What information do you think it is reasonable for the store personnel to communicate to consumers in comparison to the CSR Managers?
What goal do you perceive that MQ has with its sustainability work targeting consumers?
Based on your role, what kind of information or thoughts about sustainability do you receive in your dialogue with the stores?
How does the implementation and monitoring of the sustainability communication in-store work?
How does the education Smart styling work?
What advantages and/or difficulties do you see in communicating sustainability in the store?
How do you see that MQ could communicate sustainability in-store in a more satisfying way?

Questions to MQs Store Managers and Store personnel

Can you tell us about MQs sustainability work?
How does HQ support you in how to communicate sustainability to consumers in the store?
What tools are there which can help you to communicate sustainability to consumers?
What is your impression of the education Smart Styling?
In what ways do you find the education useful in your daily work?
What kind of response have you received from your consumers since MQ joined the initiative One Bag Habit?
What type of questions do you receive from your consumers regarding sustainability?
Who is MQs sustainable consumer?
What difficulties do you see in communicating sustainability while interacting with a consumer in-store?
What do you do if a consumer asks you if MQ has any sustainable clothes?
What do you do if a consumer asks you what chemicals a certain piece of clothing contains?
In what ways could you initiate a dialogue with a consumer about sustainability?

Appendix B Observation guide

Is sustainability present in the store and how is the message interpreted?

What communication material exists about sustainability?

Are sustainable choices visible as alternatives to the consumer?

What sustainability labels can be found on the garments?

How are the more sustainable garments displayed compared to the other garments?

Are there any sustainable activities that consumers can engage in?

Appendix C Field diary from observations

	1	2	3
General impression of the store	A city centre store located in the city of Lund, Skåne. It is a small store in one of their more simple concepts and the general impression is that it is nice and clean.	A city centre store located on the shoppingstreet of Kristianstad, Skåne in a building that used to be the local bank office. The impression of the store is nice and tidy with the sun shining in from the windows in the ceiling. Final mid-season sale is on when visiting the store	A store located in a popular shopping mall called Nova Lund in the western part of the city Lund, Skåne. The general impression of the store is positive, with a nice and clean layout. Final mid-season sale is on when visiting the store.
Is sustainability present in the store and how is the message interpreted?	No. Not possible to identify a message when it comes to sustainability.	No. Not possible to identify a message when it comes to sustainability.	No. Not possible to identify a message when it comes to sustainability.
What communication material exists about sustainability?	Sustainability labels attached to some of the garments. Otherwise, sustainability is not promoted in the store.	Sustainability labels attached to some of the garments. Do not feel that sustainability is promoted.	Sustainability labels attached to some of the garments and information about the initiative One Bag Habit. Otherwise, sustainability is not promoted in the store.
Are sustainable choices visible as alternatives to the consumer?	Sustainable choices are available at different locations around the store but they are not promoted as such, except through different labels which can be considered to enable consumption. However, they are not possible to come across without actively searching for them.	Only a small number of items are marked with sustainability labels, which can be considered to enable sustainable consumption. Some items such as jackets hanging fronted and T-shirts laying on a table were more visible as sustainable alternatives, but most items were hardly a visible choice to the consumer since I had to scan the store in order to find them.	A number of items are marked with sustainability labels and the impression is that some of these labels are deliberately exposed to the customer, especially on items placed on a table. However, for the majority of items with labels attached I had to scan the store in order to find them.
What sustainability labels can be found on the garments?	Jackets from MQs Visual Clothing Project labeled with a green Eco-finish label, T-shirts from MQs own brand Dobber labeled with made from organic cotton and items labeled with made from tencel. Tops from Filippa K labeled with organic cotton a more sustainable choice, other items from Filippa K labeled with tencel a more sustainable choice. In addition to these labels there were also those that were for care or extra attention such as jeans from MQs own brand Dobber labeled with made from denim, blouses from MQs own brand Dobber labeled with made from linen, items from Stockholm labeled with made from delicate material and some with the label this item is garment dyed.	Green Eco-finish label on jackets from MQs own brands Bläck and Bondelid and tops from MQs own brand Stockholm labeled with made from tencel. T-shirts from MQs own brand Dobber labeled with made from organic cotton and the packaging of Björn Borg underwear says that they are recyclable but do not say anything about the product itself. In addition to these labels there were also those that were for care or extra attention such as blouses from MQs own brand Stockholm labeled with made from delicate material and made from silk.	Jackets from MQs Visual Clothing Project labeled with a green Eco-finish label, T-shirts from MQs own brand Dobber labeled with made from organic cotton and items labeled with made from tencel. Tops from Filippa K labeled with organic cotton a more sustainable choice, and other items from Filippa K labeled with tencel a more sustainable choice. In addition to these labels there were also those that were for care or extra attention such as jeans from MQs own brand Dobber labeled with made from denim, blouses from MQs own brand Dobber labeled with made from linen and some items labeled with made from delicate material and this item is garment dyed.
How are the more sustainable garments displayed compared to the other garments?	Difficult to distinguish more sustainable garments from other less sustainable garments (only through labels). Jackets with large green eco-finished labels are thus slightly more visible.	The jackets with green eco-finished labels were visible due to the fact that they hanged fronted and the label is quite big and green. The T-shirts with organic cotton label laid on a table and were therefore also easier to identify in comparison to the other labeled items which hanged together with the other clothes.	T-shirts with organic cotton from Dobber are more visible having a sustainability label attached. Overall items are more visible when placed on a table or a shelf with labels deliberately highlighted.
Are there any sustainable activities that consumers can engage in?	Yes. One Bag Habit and tailoring service. However, these are not communicated through visual material.	Yes. One Bag Habit and tailoring service. However, these are not communicated through visual material.	Yes. One Bag Habit and tailoring service. Information about One Bag Habit is displayed by a sign at the cash desk.

	4	5	6	7
General impression of the store	A store located in the rebuilt mall Center Syd in Löddeköpinge. A relatively small store which has recently been renovated into light furnishing. Nice and tidy impression.	A city centre store located in a shopping mall called Triangeln in the city of Malmö. The store is nice and clean with a thoughtful layout	A city centre store located on the shopping street of Ystad, Skåne. Big windows facing the street welcoming you to the store. The store layout makes the store perceived as larger than its actual size. It is decorated with a number of green plants which give it a nice impression	A city centre store located at the shopping street of Helsingborg, Skåne. The impression of the store is cosy and attention has been paid to all details of how the clothes are displayed.
Is sustainability present in the store and how is the message interpreted?	No. Not possible to identify a message when it comes to sustainability	No. Not possible to identify a message when it comes to sustainability.	No. Although the store is perceived as "greener" with their green plants it is not possible to identify a message when it comes to sustainability.	No. Not possible to identify a message when it comes to sustainability
What communication material exists about sustainability?	Sustainability labels attached to some of the garments. Otherwise, sustainability is not promoted in the store.	Sustainability labels attached to some of the garments. Otherwise, sustainability is not promoted in the store.	Sustainability labels on some garments and information about the initiative One Bag Habit. The impression is that sustainability is not promoted.	Sustainability labels attached to some of the garments. Otherwise, sustainability is not promoted in the store.
Are sustainable choices visible as alternatives to the consumer?	Only a small number of items are marked with sustainability labels, which can be considered to enable sustainable consumption. However, these items are hardly a visible choice to the consumer since I had to scan the store in order to find them.	Sustainability is only visible through sustainability labels attached to some garments. Apart from items placed on a table, I had to actively search for other sustainable alternatives in the store.	Sustainable choices are available at different locations around the store but they are not promoted as such, except through different labels which can be considered to enable consumption. However, they are not possible to come across without actively searching for them.	Only a small number of items are marked with sustainability labels, which can be considered to enable sustainable consumption. However, these items are hardly a visible choice to the consumer since I had to scan the store in order to find them.
What sustainability labels can be found on the garments?	Green Eco-finish label on jackets from MQs own brands Bläck and Bondelid, tops from MQs own brand Stockhlm labeled with made from tencel and T-shirts from MQs own brand Dobber labeled with made from organic cotton. In addition to these labels there were also those that were for care or extra attention such as blouses from MQs own brand Stockhlm labeled with made from delicate material and made from silk.	Jackets from MQs own brand Dobber labeled with a green Eco-finish label, T-shirts from MQs own brand Dobber labeled with made from organic cotton, items from MQs own brand Stockhlm labeled with made from recycled material, tops from MQs own brand Stockhlm labeled with made from tencel and tops from Filippa K labeled with organic cotton a more sustainable choice. In addition to these labels there were also those that were for care or extra attention such as pants from MQs Visual Clothing Project and from their own brand Bondelid labeled with made from linen, jeans from MQs own brand Dobber labeled with made from denim, blouses from MQs own brand Bondelid labeled with made from silk and other blouses from MQs	T-shirts from MQs own brand Dobber labeled with made from organic cotton, jackets labeled with a green Eco-finish label and other garments labeled with made of recycled material. In addition to these labels there were also those that were for care or extra attention such as blouses from MQs own brand Stockhlm labeled with made from delicate material, scarfs from MQs own brand Bondelid labeled with made from silk, shirts from MQs Visual Clothing Project labeled with made from denim and other shirts labeled with made from linen.	T-shirts from MQs own brands 365 and Dobber labeled with made from organic cotton (same price for these as the ones in traditional cotton), jackets from MQs own brand with green Eco-finish labels, blouses and tops from Stockhlm labeled with made from tencel and made from recycled material. Items from the external brand Filippa K labeled with tencel a more sustainable choice and organic cotton a more sustainable choice. In addition to these labels there were also those that were for care or extra attention such as made from delicate material, made from silk, made from linen and please note for jeans. This store had the external brand Brixol and jackets from this brand carry their own label which is not about sustainability per se,
How are the more sustainable garments displayed compared to the other garments?	Difficult to distinguish more sustainable garments from less sustainable garments, since they hang mixed together. An interesting observation is how the T-shirts from Dobber are exposed on a table in the middle of the store. It is a mix of items made from organic cotton and traditional cotton, but they are priced the same 2 for 299SEK, so in this case a higher price is not an obvious determining factor.	Difficult to distinguish more sustainable garments from less sustainable garments. However, jackets from Dobber with the green eco-finish label are more visible along with a number of clothes lying on a table, including a pair of Bondelid trousers and organic cotton t-shirts from Dobber.	Difficult to distinguish more sustainable garments from other less sustainable garments (only through labels). Sustainable items are more visible when placed on a table. Filippa K which is considered to be a more sustainable brand has a section of their own clothes with their own sustainability labels which makes it stand out a bit more.	Difficult to distinguish more sustainable garments from less sustainable garments, since they hang mixed together. Filippa K which is considered to be a more sustainable brand has a section of their own clothes with their own sustainability labels which makes it stand out a bit more.
Are there any sustainable activities that consumers can engage in?	Yes. One Bag Habit and tailoring service. However, these are not communicated through visual material.	Yes. One Bag Habit and tailoring service. However, these are not communicated through visual material.	Yes. One Bag Habit and tailoring service. Information about One Bag Habit is displayed by a sign at the cash desk.	Yes. One Bag Habit and tailoring service. However, these are not communicated through visual material.

Appendix D Photographs from observations



